



Across a Bridge of Dreams

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Today when the summer thrush
Came to sing at Heron's Nest
I crossed the Bridge of Dreams.

Have decided on the title for my new book: *Across a Bridge of Dreams*. The 'bridge of dreams' is an incredibly resonant concept in Japanese culture – it's our short human lives, a bit like the Anglo-Saxon concept of human life being like a sparrow flying out of the darkness outside into the Great Hall with its warmth and comfort and almost immediately flying out the other side. In the same way the image of the 'floating bridge of dreams' is an image of human life, as insubstantial as a bridge over which we pass from one state of existence to another. In Japanese culture it's a very famous image. The *Floating Bridge of Dreams* is the title of the last chapter, Chapter 54, of *The Tale of Genji* (the world's first novel, written by a Japanese court lady around 1000AD), though the words are never actually used in the text. To Japanese of that time the words would have immediately evoked the transience of human life.

The phrase was echoed in a wonderful poem by Fujiwara Teika (1162 – 1241):

On a spring night
The floating bridge of dreams
Breaks off:
Swirling round the mountaintop
A cloud drifts into the open sky

And in the sonorous opening lines of *The Tale of the Heike*, the great 14th century Japanese epic:

The proud ones last but a little while; they vanish like a spring night's dream.

And it's the title of a short story by Tanizaki Junichiro, *The Bridge of Dreams*, which begins with the lines I quoted at the beginning of this blog. Just to say ever since I came across these words and this image I've been haunted by them – and wanted to write a book evoking that frailty and sense of transience. In fact my new book is a love story, a tale of hopeless love set at the time of the Satsuma rebellion, sort of *Romeo and Juliet* crossed with *The Last Samurai* ...

Across a Bridge of Dreams Details

Date : Published June 7th 2012 by Across a Bridge of Dreams (first published 2012)

ISBN : 9780593066836

Author : Lesley Downer

Format : Paperback 436 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, Cultural, Japan, Romance, Fiction, Literature, Asian Literature, Asia

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Liebes Buch says

"Die Tochter des Samurai" ist ein Buch von zurückhaltendem Charme und faszinierender Melancholie. Ich habe dieses Jahr schon ein Buch von Lesley Downer gelesen, das mir jedoch nicht so gefallen hat. Nur weil ich mich für Japan interessiere, habe ich der Autorin noch eine Chance gegeben- und es nicht bereut! Downer greift historische Motive auf und erinnert an den Samurai Saigo, den es wirklich gab. Wie Romeo und Julia verlieben sich die Teenager Nobu und Taka, die aus verfeindeten Lagern stammen. Downer beschreibt nun, wie es den beiden von 1873 bis 1877 ergeht. Ich habe mitgehofft und gebangt, ob die beiden ihre Liebe retten können. Die Darstellung des sozialen Niederganges einer Familie und der Ausrottung durch den Krieg hat mir gefallen. Immer wieder flackert eine Prise Humor auf. Downer führt keinen überschäumenden Schreibstil, vermag jedoch zu faszinieren. Als Leser hatte ich das Gefühl, ein bisschen der japanischen Seele zu begegnen. Ein anmutiges und romantisches Buch!

Pun Otakufrenzy says

Personally, this book is going to be one of the greatest book I ever read, and would be in my top favorite list of all time (similar to A Tale of the Time Being by Ruth Ozeki). Never thought this book can be this fantastic, it took me fully by surprise.

One of the best book I ever read, a tale of melancholy between two unlikely lover torn apart by conflicted honor, war-torn clans, and impossible love that will challenged their samurai's code of honor to the limit. The author recalled the Meiji Era of samurai with vivid and colorful image, creating the ancient kingdom back to reality within those pages. The description was precise, not too rich in exquisite word, but a short one that went straight to the heart. I read the love of the two clans--one a fallen samurai's clan that lost everything and became a servant, an on a lovely girl from the winning samurai's clan who reached the peak of luxuries, yet humble with life all the same. As the tales travel on, the two most strangest souls intertwined with one another, creating the tale of impossibility. The story was fast-paced, the thrilling ride in this extraordinary journey, which leaves behind so many mixed feeling inside. There were time I closed the book completely, immense in the misfortune that the fate that those two encounter. There were time I was afraid to turn the page, scare of what I would discovered. There were time I questioned myself of what I would do if I were them. This book gives me the full emotional ride, the best of the best, and somehow I yearned for more.

Sheu Quen says

I started the book, I read the book, I finished the book. I did it all consecutively that I didn't even have the opportunity to update my status here. It was such a good book that I just continued reading; it was a nonstop activity.

I was able to see the Japanese this time in a different light compared to the books that I read about the brutality of the Japanese invasion and occupation of Malaya. In Downer's story of The Samurai's Daughter, it shows the endless events of how the rich and the poor live side by side in the same place yet unable to live in peace with each other. It only shows what reality is all about. Where the rich gets richer, and the poor remains poor. There is no chance for regression in the lifestyles of the poor as they already do not get much,

let alone losing what little they already have. Things only start getting messy when someone from the poor community falls in love with someone from the rich and the famous. That's when both parties start to show their ugly sides. Then again, it didn't really matter as both parties were from different clans and both clans were going head-to-head to war to overturn governments and topple political hierarchies.

It was amazing of the author Lesley Downer tell the story of how two lovers, each from a clan opposite the other, strive to survive in vastly different backgrounds. How they tried so hard to forget one another as both clans have no obvious similarities and one is more superior than the other. How as times changed, when they have that one moment to meet and face each other, how did they react to that situation and play it accordingly. A well-written book, as proven that whenever I picked it up to read, it was hard to put it down and I felt each emotion the characters experienced course through my veins. I might just actually read it again one day.

Jodie "Bookish" Cook says

Book review

Title: Across the bridge of dreams

Author: Lesley Downer

Genre: historical/ romance/ cultural

Rating: ****

Review: Japan in the 1870s is on the cusp of change.

The flower and willow time of the Geisha and the Samurai is passing; the forward-thinking are adopting Western dress and more, educating their daughters, working in banks and eating beef. It is also a time of unrest where the ruling Satsuma clan are threatened by corruption within and the long memories and simmering revenge of the resentful and defeated Aiku. Against this background Nobu and Taka fall in love defying barriers of class and clan.

A Romeo and Juliet story set amongst the cherry trees, Taka's mother is a renowned Geisha and her father a respected general; Nobu is a servant from the despised Aizu class. Their love is doomed and Taka is promised in an arranged marriage. However when civil war breaks out, positions are reversed and Taka flees south near her father's mountain eyrie and Nobu is part of the opposing national forces. War is not a tea ceremony and Taka must forget her dancing and calligraphy and take up the halberd as a samurai woman.

This is an absorbing love story set in a turbulent and interesting period of history. Lesley Downer has written extensively on the Geisha culture and she draws on this knowledge and the true story of the Last Samurai to create a period-perfect romance with likeable and engaging characters. Love and revenge are powerful emotions, the plot line is strong and the setting fascinating making this a great summer read.

Eileen Thornton says

Taka and Nobu meet when they are very young and fall in love. But they both know their love is doomed from the start. Their differences are too great. Taka is the daughter of General Kitaoka a Satsuma from the Southern Clan. He is a much-respected leader of the new government. Nobu is from the northern Aizu. His clan were defeated and reduced to poverty by General Kitaoka during the Japanese Civil War.

This is a very enjoyable read and I found it difficult to put down. Lesley Downer has researched her subject well and tells the story almost as though she were there. She gives vivid descriptions of how Japan would have been at that time. Telling of how some of the Japanese had taken to Western ideas and dress during the 1870s. However, there were times when I felt the descriptions were too lengthy and that the story would have benefited being told at a slightly faster pace. But that is probably just me.

Jeane says

I bought this book in Japan during my holiday and loved it.

It is a great mix of history, the Japanese way of living in the past and (unfortunately) our Western ways arriving in Japan is shown and what it does to the people living in Japan and the difference between different regions.

All this as the base of the story told by Taka and Nobu made it so beautiful. I felt that while reading it, a smile would come on my face.

Anna says

Dopo aver letto e amato L'ultima concubina della stessa autrice, mi sono buttata a capofitto in questa lettura che pensavo mi avrebbe fatto di nuovo sognare con le sue descrizioni, i paesaggi, i sapori, le antiche poesie... No. No niente. L'inizio è lento e dolce, pone le basi per tutto ciò che speravo di incontrare, ma poi tutto si rivela su un'altra lunghezza onda. Forse ero io che avevo delle aspettative esageratamente alte, ma non sono rimasta colpita. Interessante e ben elaborata la parte storica del romanzo, unico punto a favore che mi sento di mettere in rilievo, perché per quanto riguarda la storia d'amore - fulcro centrale della vicenda - proprio non ci siamo. Non era nelle mie corde probabilmente, mi è sembrato di leggere Romeo e Giulietta ambientato in Giappone durante la guerra civile... Mmh. Buone le potenzialità, ma poco affini ai miei gusti personali, perciò non mi sento di condannare il romanzo in sé. Qualcuno lo avrà sicuramente apprezzato di più.

Alison Campbell says

I've been transported to an alien country, culture, and age, where my sensory organs have been bombarded to their fullest potential, leaving every nerve ending in my body tingling and screaming out for more of the same.

A wonderful saga based on the true story of the Last Samurai. A tale of star crossed lovers, Taka and Nobu, the Japanese version of Romeo and Juliet, destined to be together, although forbidden, due to family status and economic feuds of the time.

It was clear that the author has a vast knowledge and a great love for Japan, and her description of Geisha's, customs, food, dress, flora and fauna, which was second to none, brings the story to life for her readers.

This is the first time I've read any Lesley Downer books, and indeed anything about Japan and this era, and it sure won't be the last on both accounts.

The author has whetted my appetite, and I look forward to reading more on this subject.

Beverly says

This had something of the feel of those Japanese movies that seem to go on and on. Interesting bit of history though.

Angie says

Across a Bridge of Dreams is just as much about war as it is romance.

The backdrop of the Satsuma Rebellion provided an interesting and entertaining addition to the drama of the story, providing a forbidden love between our two main characters, Nobu and Taka. I liked the dynamic between these two, but I feel like I would have liked it more if their characters were better developed.

The main issue I have with this book is that most of the characters fell a bit short of personality for me. The only character I feel had a developed personality was Eijiro. Everyone else was bland and boring. I also feel like the romance was developed weirdly as well.

Lesley Downer's writing is amazing. It's so poetic and brilliant I found myself a bit envious of her skills. I think if I get the chance to I might read another one of her books.

Oh, and as an afterthought, I didn't like the binding on this book. The pages were really thick and it was hard to open, and really heavy. It didn't change my perception of the novel, but I found it to be a bit of an annoyance.

Tocotin says

Loved the Meiji atmosphere and the details (ah, by the way, Kodenma Prison wasn't functioning at the time, that would be Ichigaya)... but was disappointed at the end. The storyline was meh – a Romeo and Juliet story of sorts, only he is not really a poor servant, he's a prince, read: a samurai. He even has "an aristocratic nose"! She is a willowy, tiny girl, an illegitimate daughter of Saigo Takamori, oops pardon, a General Kitaoka, and his geisha mistress, so she is a samurai too. They almost die, but almost, during the Seinan War of 1877.

What is it with the long-suffering samurai, folks? Can we not laugh at them, like the Japanese do? Why so serious? Why are all the people of the other classes vulgar, fat, obnoxious bullies? So the geishas hated the

fat merchants and loved the samurai? Yeah right. Please go watch some kabuki. Samurai were pompous, penniless bores, and cut very sorry figures in Edo-period pleasure districts. Also “samurai took orders from no one” – what? Taking orders was about the only thing samurai did. Taking orders was their purpose in life.

But whatever, really, I don't mind samurai that much. The thing which spoiled my enjoyment of the book was the sidestepping of the real historical issues which were the reason for the whole Satsuma rebellion. General Kitaoka, the father of the heroine and the samurai in the title – in reality Saigo Takamori – is shown as the benevolent, simple warrior opposed to the corruption of the politicians in Tokyo and the slow death of the samurai class. The reader is only told this; there is no politics whatsoever in the whole book. The drunken rants of the heroine's brother don't count.

What the book doesn't say a thing about is that Saigo Takamori resigned from all of his government positions in protest, because his colleagues were against his proposition of a punitive expedition to Korea. By provoking a war abroad, Saigo was determined to find *raison d'être* for thousands of samurai who were left without means of survival after the abolishment of their privileges. He even offered to go to Korea and behave so offensively there that the Koreans would be forced to kill him and therefore start the war. Interesting, no? But it doesn't look cool, according to our standards, so in the book Saigo remains this jovial, all-forgiving uncle, blessing the lovers from above, and doesn't touch his weapons ONCE.

I didn't care for anyone. Geisha and samurai have a good press anyway, they don't need mine. Ah. I liked Tsukasa, the lover of the bully Eijiro. I was hoping he'd redeem her and raise hell in the family. No such luck though. Bye-bye third star.

(P)lla says

Ancora una volta la Downer riprende il tema sviluppato ne *Il kimono rosso* e ci racconta una storia ambientata nel Giappone di fine Ottocento negli anni in cui Nord e Sud si davano battaglia; già dal precedente libro infatti la parte dedicata al mondo delle geishe/concubine viene leggermente lasciata da parte e viene curata maggiormente quella storica.

Il libro si legge con piacere: è la storia travagliata tra Taka e Nobu, due giovani appartenenti a due regioni contrapposte e quindi a due clan diversi, ma non è solo questo perchè è il racconto di tradizioni e usi diversi nonostante lo stesso luogo di appartenenza, è il viaggio attraverso un Giappone diviso tra passione e divertimento nei quartieri del piacere e la vita in nome dell'onore dei samurai.

La Downer come sempre intrattiene con buoni romanzi senza essere eccessiva o cadere in errore: mi piace perchè le sue storie non sono mai smielate storie d'amore ma sono il ritratto di una nazione che mi ha sempre affascinato ma soprattutto non sono mai storie volgari che danno un'immagine sbagliata della geisha. Un'autrice che tratta un mondo particolare e molto lontano da noi con assoluta delicatezza.

Angigames says

La Downer è riuscita ad incantarmi, di nuovo!

La Figlia della Concubina è un romanzo estremamente semplice, di base la storia è già stata ampiamente

affrontata da tanti e più celebri autori: due innamorati appartenenti a due clan rivali, che sfidano il destino per far trionfare il loro legame. Come ho detto, storia già sentita.

Quello che rende però speciale questo libro è la narrazione.

La Downer trascina il lettore in un mondo passato, in un Paese diviso, patria di tradizioni particolari, speciali e antichissime. Il lettore si immerge così in una storia di Clan, politica, samurai e guerra e lo fa in una maniera estremamente delicata.

Le capacità narrative dell'autrice sono innegabili. È capace di far percepire al lettore tutta la bellezza della cultura giapponese con descrizioni molto dettagliate, mai pesanti e che, invece, risultano poetiche e intense. Con la Downer si sperimenta un sentimento d'amore fatto di sguardi, promesse sussurrate, gesti segreti e baci rubati, niente viene portato all'eccesso perché, altrimenti, ogni cosa perderebbe il suo potere di incantare.

Altra punta di diamante del libro è, secondo me, la ricostruzione storica. Questo romanzo permette al lettore di conoscere diverse sfumature di una cultura molto diversa da quella di appartenenza, l'autrice mette nero su bianco tutti gli usi e i costumi del popolo giapponese di fine 800 diviso tra doveri familiari, una radicata tradizione e la voglia e il bisogno di modernità.

Questa lettura non è solo un romanzo, è l'opportunità di conoscere un altro Paese e la sua storia.

Bellissimo libro!

Lupita says

Not my usual pick. A member of the book club told me about the challenge involving historical fiction, since I don't read that kind of books I thought about giving it a try, and I am really glad I did it. It is a real delight.

Japanese writers provided my knowledge of the historical literature of Japan. However Lesley's view and interpretation of the old Japan, their traditions, families, social concepts, etc. has proven to be as beautiful and detailed as if she had been there in 1873.

I enjoy reading; usually when reading I tend to picture the way I would love the story to follow, however when the story follows my imaginary path I get disappointed (I know I'm weird hehehe), but in this case the story made me cry, laugh and hope. But above all it made me hate and love the characters, is something new for me. Before this book whenever I disliked a character it would remain like that the entire book, however in this case I couldn't help myself in hating and caring for the characters (all of them).

Through the pages I've learnt the hard living of the samurais, I felt angry when they got rip off their duties and their honorable life. I could imagine how the "traitors" in their westerns' outfit looked for them. But also I was able to understand the other side, the side looking to get Japan involved in the world, to be part of the global economy, etc.

This book is so beautifully written, that get immersed in the story, almost as if you were living it as one of the characters. I wanted to protect Taka from her brother, and at the same time I needed her to understand her

brother actions. I could picture Nobu's eyes filled with anger when looking at Eijiro, but looking hopelessly in love when fixed in Taka.

This book not only revolves around the love between Taka and Nobu, but also their past, a social past, where is more important what happened to each clan than what they were feeling. It also portrays a future where, if they have it, they will have to learn to live with their betrays to theirs clans, principles and at some point, to themselves.

As in every story where war is involved, there is a winner and a loser, but at the end of this book you are so attached to every character that I found myself hoping for the book to end before the last battle, to leave me with the "hope" even when I also wanted closure and wished for the magpies to build a bridge for the "weaver princess and the cowherd".

Antonella Montesanti says

Libro piacevolissimo da leggere che fa fare un tuffo nel Giappone del secolo scorso.

E' la storia d'amore contrastata tra Thaka e Nobu, due giovani che appartengono a due clan diversi.

Ma non è solo questo, è molto di più, è un viaggio attraverso un secolo di tradizioni giapponesi, di lotte tra Nord e Sud, di usi diversi, un racconto d'amore ma anche un racconto di dolore e morte e guerra.

Il tutto raccontato con una grande delicatezza, dove ci sono ardenti passioni ma non c'è mai una scena di sesso, sebbene si parli anche di geishe, con descrizioni particolareggiate di luoghi e profumi che quasi sembra di essere proprio lì.

Lettura molto consigliata per capire mondi diversi, in quest'epoca di globalizzazione e integrazione a volte difficoltosa tra popoli.