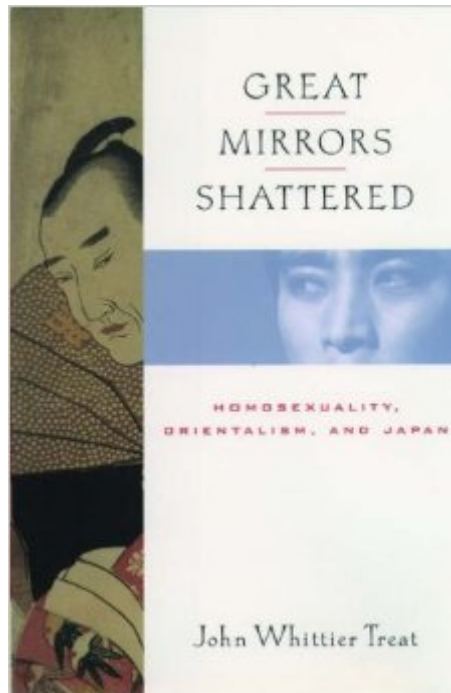


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Great Mirrors Shattered: Homosexuality, Orientalism, And Japan (Ideologies Of Desire)



Synopsis

In 1986, John Whittier Treat went to Tokyo on sabbatical to write a book about the literature of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. But once there, he found himself immersed in the emergence of new kind of Holocaust, AIDS, and the sweeping denial, hysteria, and projection with which Japan--a place where "there are no homosexuals"--tried to insulate itself from the epidemic. *Great Mirrors Shattered* is a compelling memoir of a gay man thoroughly familiar with the Japanese homosexual underground, a man anxious for his own health and unsure of the relationship he has left behind in the US. It is also a highly self-aware analysis of Orientalism, which the author defines as "the Western study of everywhere else," and an exploration of how sexual identity conditions knowledge across cultures. Jump-cutting between such texts as Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, Pierre Loti's *Madame Chrysantheme*, Saikaku's *The Great Mirror of Male Love*, the writings of Roland Barthes, newspaper headlines, and his own experiences during a previous stay in Japan, Treat creates an intricately textured account of the problems inherent in how we "know" another culture. The questions of self and other, difference and sameness, time past and time present, America and Japan, are explored here with rare intelligence and unabashedly personal disclosure. *Great Mirrors Shattered* gives us a brilliantly fractured reflection of a year in one man's life, and the first study of the sexual politics behind what the West has come to know not just about Japan, but any place Europeans and Americans have gone to escape the confining rules of their home cultures.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I really found this book to be a lot more provocative than I expected. Treat does a really effective job of presenting the attitudes towards homosexuality and AIDS that he experienced while living in Japan at various times in recent decades. His "snapshot" style of presenting a scene from his life followed by a quotation from someone else followed by his discussion of someone else's ideas followed by another scene from his life did get confusing at times. But, overall, his ideas were interesting and really got me thinking about AIDS and homosexuality in a culture that I don't know too much about. I'll be going back to this book, I'm sure.

Such an honest, interesting read. Weaves together his own private life with observations about Japan and the US and some literary references. I came to Japan a few years after the author but so much of what he wrote resonated with me.

I've been a big fan of Treat's essays since I read *Contemporary Japan and Popular Culture*, so I picked up this book with some understanding of his writing already. Anyway, I expected this book to be about gay life in Japan and Japanese literature, but it turned out not to be about that at all... or at least, not much. A lot of the book is a memoir/travel-diary that Treat apparently wrote on the side as he was living in Japan on fellowship money, working on *Writing Ground Zero: Japanese Literature and the Atomic Bomb*. Treat reflects on various lovers that he had in Japan, things they did together and places they went, what gay life is like in Tokyo and a few other places in Japan. And all that is interwoven into news stories about the growth of AIDS in Japan, stories from Japanese literature, and Treat's own experience being HIV positive and having to hide it during his stay. It's not, by any means, a comprehensive autobiography (Treat isn't so famous as to attempt that), but it's interesting in the way that stories about living in another country often are. On the whole, the book isn't so much about homosexuality and Japan as it is about AIDS and Japan. There are some very interesting sexual anecdotes in the book, all told with a kind of hyper-awareness of the historical relationship between the Occident and the Orient, and the roles the author himself, as a white man, plays in his sexual relationships. Despite being surprised about the main themes, I found it to be an interesting book, and all the personal anecdotes keep the theory from becoming too dry. The book is very honest and candid, and I came away from it with a greater understanding of John Treat as a person, which I liked. And I think a big part of Treat's intent with the book was to show how the "self" and "other" really have more in common than they think, and on that level he succeeded.

Reading everyone's comments of this book, I realize how controversial this piece must be and is in

reality. That NO ONE rates this book anything but a 1 or a 5 speaks to its strong nature. You either love it, find meaning in it; or are repulsed by it. Speaking as a white American lesbian who has been studying queer culture in Japan and has also visited Japan, I am completely horrified by the certainty with which Treat dabbles in topics of enormous proportion. Why write a memoir if you are supposedly addressing so many key issues of social concern unless you are actually going to address them?! Besides that fact, he never once seems to apologize or doubt his masculinist and racist grip on his material. He is always a spectator, always the man behind the controls. It is sickening really. I have only read half of this book, but as I read, I read to see how much more I can become baffled at his arrogance of subject matter. His treatment of each subject, at best, leaves me cold and wondering why he even bothers to make it seem like he cares. It seems like a completely narcissistic attempt to get through some clearly lingering white suburban American guilt. I don't think the fact that queers in America have become involved with Asian Studies because of an Orientalist gaze gets to be made into a "duh" statement or be left unquestioned. It is NOT ok, and DOES need to be discussed, not just left for stereotyping or pigeon-holing. The only part of this book that I can remotely enjoy is references to a country that I miss and experiences that may seem similar, but do not somehow excuse themselves as "boys will be boys" or some crap like that. Very disappointing perspective, yet almost predictable from a white gay male with so much arrogance.

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