

Monday 23 August 2004



Click to buy from [amazon.co.uk](http://amazon.co.uk).

## *Twinkle, Twinkle* by Kaori Ekuni

Kaori Ekuni's debut novel, a charming and inconsequential romance-with-a-difference, is the story of a Japanese Will and Grace. It won the Murasaki Shikobu literary award and was a bestseller in Japan. Translated in to (American-) English by Emi Shimokawa, and presented in a trademark lovely compact little hardback by Vertical, *Twinkle, Twinkle* tells the story of Mutsuko, a gay doctor, and his wife Shuko who is, well, bordering on the alcoholic and "emotionally unstable" - she dutifully sings to the Cezanne painting hanging in the living room and talks earnestly to her yucca plant.

The two late twentysomethings married with full awareness of the other's tendencies and problems, but this doesn't make their relationships with each other, Mutsuko's long-term boyfriend Kon, his gay doctor friends, Shuko's best friend Mizuho, her ex- Haneki, and their respective in-laws any easier. Told in alternating voices, a chapter from Mutsuko's perspective and then one giving Shuko's view of events *Twinkle* occupies its 170 pages pleasantly enough. It is, quite easily, a one or two sitting read.

Never challenging, the translation occassionally feels a little awkward and the tone of the novel, whilst mostly maintaining a moderate light-heartedness all the way through, sometimes lunges into seriousness that seems overly melodramatic and could and should have been better handled. The characterisation is thin, particularly Mutsoko who we come to know principally through references to his obsessive cleanliness and perfect personal grooming. This feels very stereotypical - as does the fact that such a neat, pedantic professional would fall for a feckless slob. Mutsuko's relationship with Kon remains fairly impenetrable throughout, but the

mutually uncomprehending affection that develops and deepens between our doctor and Shuko is nicely drawn. There is a certain grace, too, in the flow of her story-telling and in the simplicity of Ekuni's writing - I hope it isn't disrespectful to say that knowing she writes for children shouldn't come as any surprise. For these qualities alone *Twinkle* deserves some attention.

Whilst Ekuni's debut doesn't yet position her anywhere near being in the same league as Banana Yoshimoto - there is a serious writer lurking behind Banana's work, Ekuni has just written fine fluff - *Twinkle* does sparkle and is worth seeking out.


#### Futher Information

More Japanese fiction on our [Japanese pages](#).

**Paperback isbn:** 1932234012

**Publisher:** [Vertical](#)

Copyright © 2004 [www.readysteadybook.com](http://www.readysteadybook.com). All rights reserved.  
More details [info@readysteadybook.com](mailto:info@readysteadybook.com).

**R**eadysteady**b****k.com**  
*a literary site*