

早稲田法学部 THEME 16 秋

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THE IDEA OF JAPAN [II]

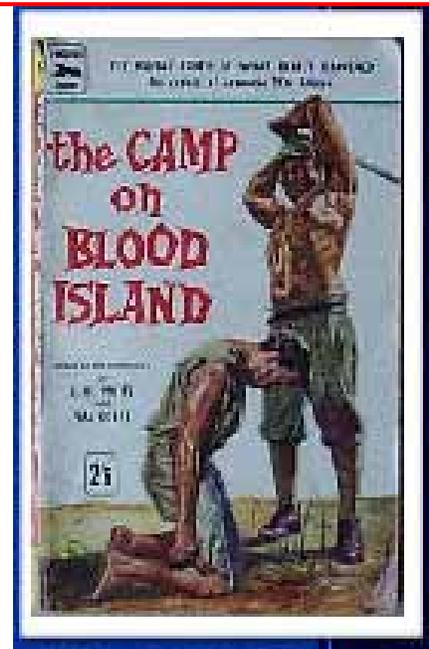
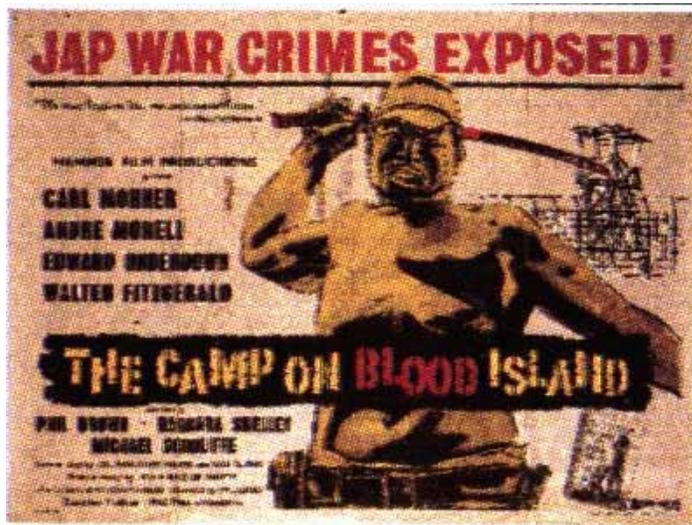
Week 5

In the shadow of the Pacific War

- Film: *The Camp on Blood Island* (1958)
- Fiction and memory
- Questionnaire

Reading 1 IN THE SHADOW OF THE PACIFIC WAR

IN 1958, young children were still playing war games, and Panther published *THE CAMP ON BLOOD ISLAND*. It was an early example of novelisation, being based on the screenplay by Jon Manchip White and Val Guest for the film of the same name.



The novel and the film were low budget productions. The novel was written in a few months to capitalise on public interest generated by the film. The film was shot in black and white entirely on set, with painted backdrops and no external locations. The screenplay and the novel writers show only a rudimentary knowledge of Japan, and few of the 'Japanese' soldiers have recognisably Japanese names (i.e. 'Yashid Lamoo'). From camp commandant Sakamura to 'Yashid Lamoo', the Japanese guards are unredeemably evil, lecherous, greedy, cowardly and cunning, and the foreign prisoners are brave, enduring, smart and noble.

And yet the novel *The Camp on Blood Island* was one of the surprise best sellers of 1958, and the film broke box office records, with long queues outside the cinema and glowing reviews in the newspapers. In 1959, *The Camp on Blood Island* opened in the United States and both film and novel did good business there.

Both the paperback and the film poster featured a similar illustration. The paperback cover, quite a well known picture by Kirby, showed a British soldier about to be decapitated by a large, fleshy Japanese soldier holding a sword high over his head. The film poster had a similarly well-fed Japanese soldier with sword raised, but no prisoner. Either way, *The Camp on Blood Island* was all about Japanese cruelty.

Reading 2: Fiction and Memory: Pornography for patriots?

THE BOOK OF *THE CAMP ON BLOOD ISLAND* is not kept in the catalogue of the British Library and copies of the film and the book are hard to get hold of today. But in 1958 the novel went through nine editions and was one of a group of about nineteen books about the experience of male combatants in the Second World War that constituted the staple reading experience of most adult British males (Worpole 1983, Littlewood 1996). Of these nineteen, four books dealt with the confrontation between Britain and Japan in East and South-East Asia: *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *The Naked Island* by Russell Braddon, *The Knights of Bushido* by Lord Russell of Liverpool and *The Camp on Blood Island*. Of these, only *The Camp on Blood Island* has not been reissued. Here's the inside page blurb:

It is 1945. The camp on Blood Island is one of those forgotten areas on the Malayan Peninsular where news of the Japanese surrender has not yet penetrated. It is a fragment of hell on earth for several hundred men, women and children of all nations, trapped during the Jap invasion in 1942, and held there under conditions of cruelty, privation and degradation. The prisoners – held in separate camps – are in terrible despair, almost praying for death to release them from their appalling ordeal. Only Colonel Lambert, the senior officer of the camp, and Van Elst, a former rubber planter, know that the war is over. Lambert knows, too, that every prisoner will be slaughtered immediately Colonel Yamamitsu, the gross, brutal commandant of the camp, learns of the Japanese defeat.

The story is set in a prison camp on an island in Malaya (or in the Malayan jungle – it is hard to be sure). It begins with the sadistic Captain Sakamura organising the execution of a young British officer, Davies. The officer has dug his own grave. In the book, the Japanese guard shouts. “No talk! Dig faster, faster.” Then Sakamura arrives. “See,” shouted Sakamura, “It is easy to get out of this camp. Just volunteer for a special execution. Very quick. Also very clean.” In the film script, the direction reads, “With a brutal swing he brings the sword flashing down” but the book delays the execution with a portrait of Colonel Yamamitsu, who...

...had had enough of special executions, and the advancing Allies could wait. His mind was now on pleasure. On prawns. On saki. And on the white girl he had taken from the women's compound two years before – and who now lived in his bungalow. The memory of that girl made him feel slightly hot and sticky.

Back at the execution site, Captain Sakamura checks his watch (stolen during the looting of Singapore). Davies is thinking about his life back home. Then,

The sun glinted on steel as Sakamura's sword flashed eathwards and the machine-gunners fired a long, steady burst. Davies was still clutching his spade when the bullets cut him down into his grave.

In the end, the British rise up against the Japanese and take over the camp. Ian Littlewood has shown how ‘the shadow of Captain Sakamura’ hung over a great many similar accounts of Japanese cruelty in the post-war years and today, with examples from the 1990s such as *Rising Sun* and Joe Joseph's *The Japanese* (1993) Littlewood 1996, 170-183). What is this emphasis on Japanese cruelty about? What's going on?

THE IDEA OF JAPAN [II] Week 5 QUESTIONNAIRE: THE CAMP ON BLOOD ISLAND	Name No. Date
1. What is this film about?	2. Do you think the Japanese characters were like real Japanese people?
3. Do you think the British and other foreigners were like real people?	4. Were Japanese soldiers really so cruel?
5. Do you think this film is just entertainment or can we learn something from it?	6. Why did Japan open camps for enemy prisoners?
7. Why was this film so popular in Britain and America?	8. Would <i>The Camp on Blood Island</i> be popular today?
9. Any other comments?	