



The Devil's Disciple

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The first English language translation of a chilling murder mystery by a prolific Japanese detective novelist both psychological and legal.

The Devil's Disciple Details

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From Reader Review The Devil's Disciple for online ebook

Valentina says

Voto finale 4,5 stelle. Ne parlo qua: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JXPU2...>

David says

Erotic grotesque nonsense ... why would anyone write anything else? These two stories present adultery, homosexuality, sadomasochism and mahjong in the Taisho Democracy (Asia's answer to the Weimar Republic). Dirty, sexy, cool ... like one of the better Lady Gaga videos.

Tosh says

"eroguro-nansensu" or as they say in English "erotic grotesque nonsense" was a school of writing in 1920's Japan. Decadent, druggy, kinky, and...fun. The most famous writer in that movement without a leader was Edogawa Rampo (yes it is a play on the name Edgar Allan Poe) and Shiro Hamao. Hamao was a lawyer by trade from a very well connected family. He threw that life away to become a crime writer, and an early supporter of gay rights in Japan. Died young, yet a dandy, Hamao had it all. And we can be thankful for Hesperus publishing these two short novels "The Devil's Disciple" and "Did He Kill Him?"

Both stories are pretty pulpy, but it drips with Asakusa 1920's life, and both have a gay sensual quality. Imagine Cocteau writing a gay noir detective story - and that is pretty much what is here. So yeah, not a masterpiece, but nevertheless a fascinating writer in a fascinating country in a very exciting series of moments.

Both stories deal with seduction that leads to a crime - and no regrets! One can only hope shortly that there will be more Shiro Hamao stories in English.

Mark Staniforth says

Lumping Shiro Hamao's sashimi-sized slivers of short stories in The Devil's Disciple down as detective fiction would be a little like calling Mark Twain a travel writer, or Charles Dickens that bloke who penned miserable Christmas stuff: in other words, it would do scant justice to a writer who wrote the stories that make up this intriguing, translated volume in 1929, six years before his tragically early death at the age of forty.

Originally published in the Japanese magazine Shinseinen, these appear to stand as the only work of Hamao - among his sixteen novellas and three full-length novels - to be put into English. For this, the translator J. Keith Vincent and the publisher, Hesperus Press, deserve much credit.

Hamao's work does indeed revolve around crime and justice, or rather injustice: there are also prominent sexual and misogynistic elements which brilliantly lay bare the decadent, honour-bound Japanese high society of which he was a part: a world in which marriage, publicly at least, was sacrosanct, and reputation

was everything, even in death.

Hamao was born into one of the most rich and powerful families in Japan. He trained in law but to his family's horror, relinquished his job as a public prosecutor to write books. 'The Devil's Disciple' and 'Did He Kill Them?' were the first stories he saw published.

In the title story, Shimaura Eizo languishes in jail charged with the murder of a young woman. The narrative takes the form of a letter from Eizo to the prosecutor of the case, who happens to be Eizo's former lover, and whom he blames for his predicament.

The narrator's unreliability lends a fascinating extra dimension to the story, as the reader is forced to address the issue of what, if anything, this inherently dislikeable man is guilty of.

Guilt, and the way in which the justice system dictates it, is broached more directly in 'Did He Kill Them?' in which Hamao's narrator assumes the role of an ailing barrister, regaling a group of detective novelists with the story of how an apparently water-tight, death penalty-punishable crime of passion turned out to be anything but.

Hamao makes some observations about the uneasy relationship between the courts, the media and the public in establishing guilty which, more than seventy years after his death, and in light of the tabloid media scrutiny currently obsessing the UK, seem remarkably prescient:

"the minute they catch a likely suspect the newspapers waste no time in making out that he's the real culprit and their readers have the bad habit of believing them. If he turns out to be innocent, people are just as quick to attack the police and kick up a ruckus about trampling on people's human rights or torture or what have you"

The only disappointment about this bite-sized collection is that it is over so quickly, and that, for the time being at least, there appears little or no other English language examples of his work. The guarantee is that while you will devour these stories in a couple of gulps, their mysteries will linger much longer.

Hana says

Con alle spalle la propria esperienza come avvocato e procuratore, Hamao Shir? (1896-1935) si dedica alla letteratura cimentandosi nel genere poliziesco, e più in particolare in quello che oggi potrebbe essere definito una sorta di progenitore del legal thriller.

Atmosphere Libri ci offre la raccolta Il discepolo del demonio, che comprende i quattro racconti Akuma no deshi (Il discepolo del demonio), Kare ga koroshitaka (Li ha uccisi lui?), Tasogare no kokuhaku (Confessioni al tramonto) e Seigi (Giustizia), scritti sul finire degli anni '20.

In ciascun racconto è l'introspezione psicologica a farla da padrone, e non a caso molto spesso si lascia che siano i personaggi a parlare in prima persona. Il costrutto è molto buono, e si basa su una crescente tensione fino alla rivelazione finale, di cui astutamente si lasciano scorgere alcuni sprazzi nel corso della narrazione. Alcuni i temi ricorrenti, tra cui un indissolubile connubio tra Eros e Thánatos: passioni accecanti, per cui vale la pena morire (o uccidere), perversioni, sadomasochismo, omicidi e suicidi, e una buona dose di ambiguità morale, tutto come da copione secondo i dettami dell'eroguro-nansensu. Al di là delle manifestazioni più estreme, c'è una costante soffusa sensualità che permea tutti i racconti, fatta di sguardi e attimi fugaci che possono decidere un'intera vita.

E come in ogni noir che si rispetti, non possono mancare le femme fatale, donne per cui dannarsi, incantatrici più o meno innocenti, vittime o complici.

Ma Hamao Shir? è stato anche un uomo di Legge, ed è quindi più che consapevole di come spesso la Giustizia non riesca a punire i veri colpevoli, o, peggio ancora, condanni gli innocenti. Ad accomunare i

quattro racconti, infatti, il mettere in mostra le tante crepe del sistema giudiziario, di cui ci si può approfittare o di cui si cade vittima.

Altra tematica a cui si accenna più volte è quella dell'omosessualità, condannata dalla società, ma non certo dell'autore, che nel corso della sua vita si è battuto contro la discriminazione.

Ottima la postfazione a cura di Francesco Vitucci.

Il discepolo del demonio di Hamao Shir? è davvero una piccolo gioiello da riscoprire, per gli amanti del noir, ma non solo, raffinato, seducente e carezzevolmente ambiguo.

Jorge says

historias que llenan la mente de una trama tan peculiar y dedicada que te hacen disfrutar cada párrafo y frase de una manera extraordinaria. autores japoneses simplemente son de los pocos capaces de asombrar con palabras ordinarias utilizadas de maneras extraordinarias. sorpresa y mucho deleite... enero 2015

AC says

What a little gem...! Two very, very brief, and utterly brilliant novellas -- teetering on the razor's edge of sexual perversion and murder... shame and guilt... what a surprising find....

The short introduction to this volume is also essential, in placing both Hamao and this genre of ero-guro-nansensu ('dark, erotic nonsense') in its proper context).

Mircalla64 says

il thriller poliziesco nell'epoca Meiji

quattro racconti polizieschi incentrati più sull'analisi psicologica che sull'intreccio, quasi sempre narrati da un avvocato o un giudice, lo stesso Hamao Shiro era un pubblico ministero, e tutti caratterizzati da un colpo di scena finale...gli intrecci sono tutti a base di tradimenti e perversioni, fa sorridere che all'epoca si considerasse perverso un semplice adulterio, ma quasi sempre il matrimonio qui è visto come un'orribile trappola e il marito spesso trama l'uccisione della consorte...altro punto a favore di questa piccola antologia, oltre il gusto retrò e la buona prosa, è la raffinatezza dei riferimenti all'omosessualità, uno dei temi cari all'autore che si batté all'epoca contro la tendenza a criminalizzare e a giudicare malsano tale orientamento sessuale...

Israt Zaman Disha says

The first story was predictable. I liked the second story a little. So the 3 star.

Adam says

Out of the two short novellas here my favourite was called Did He Kill Them?, in what seems to be an open and shut case Hamao manages to turn things around with an ending which is kind of anticipated but the motive and circumstances of the crime are left until the culprit's confession, the translation flows really well, and the story stayed with me after I put the book down. This is the first translation of Hamao's stories available in book format, hopefully not the last. The first story The Devil's Disciple is a love story that transcends genders, the stories are told mainly from the perspective of the confessional with an eye on legal procedure as Hamao was a prosecutor and contemporary of Edogawa Rampo but died early at an early age.

Jayaprakash Satyamurthy says

This book contains two long-short stories by a 1920s/30s pioneer of noir influenced crime fiction in Japan.

The title story, The Devil's Disciple has a classic noir plot. Twisted sexuality, infidelity, hate, love, murder. It is also an intensely sustained narrative of moral corruption and reproach.

Did He Kill Them?, the second story, is no mere makeweight. It begins as a more conventional tale of a love...quadrangle?...and its murderous fallout. But then the ambiguities start to mount. Obsession, possession and a muddled path to execution.

I highly recommend this to fans of Georges Simenon and Jim Thompson.

Nancy Oakes says

The Devil's Disciple is composed of two short stories: "The Devil's Disciple," and "Did He Kill Them?" Each story is firmly planted in the noir genre, although the stories also reflect the growing movement in art and literature of the time known as "ero-guro-nansensu," or "erotic grotesque nonsense." This movement and more about the form of the two short stories is discussed in the very well-written introduction to the book written by the translator. In The Devil's Disciple, both short stories examine the nature of guilt as well as the fallibility of the law; but on a deeper level, the stories reflect the writer's fascination with the complexity of the human psyche.

The first story is entitled "The Devil's Disciple," and is the story of a man called Eizo, charged with and facing trial for murder. The story is a letter to a prosecutor, former mentor and lover of Eizo, Tsuchida Hachiro. The two met in their school days, and Eizo quickly fell under Tsuchida's spell. In fact, Eizo blames his current plight on Tsuchida, saying that "If I hadn't met you when I was a boy I would never have ended up in this place. You didn't teach me crime. But you did give me the personality of a criminal." Eizo sets forth the actual events of the case, telling Tsuchida that although someone did die, it wasn't really a case of murder. What follows is a tragic story, all of which Eizo says was due to Tsuchida's tutelage leading Eizo to "build up a demonic philosophy."

Story number two is "Did He Kill Them," a rather twisted tale of the bloody death of a married couple in

their own home. At the scene there is only one possible suspect, Otera Ichiro, who is arrested for the crime and refuses to speak, or even file an appeal after he is tried, convicted and sentenced to death. After Otera's death, the barrister discovers a manuscript he wrote while in jail, outlining the truth of what happened that night and why he kept his silence. Part of the story is narrated by a barrister who is addressing a group of detective novelists, reflecting a rather postmodern approach taken by Hamao in writing this piece; the other part is told through what Otera wrote in his manuscript.

While both stories are intriguing and capture the reader's attention immediately, "Did He Kill Them" has a much darker tone and is much more atmospheric and psychologically complex than the first. "The Devil's Disciple" has a rather twisted ending that will lead the reader to reflect mainly on the question of guilt. I can't really go into either story in any depth without spoiling it, but considering how short these stories are, they are very intense and provide a great deal of food for thought; they also remind me a great deal of some of the stories by Tanizaki, another Japanese author whose works I enjoy immensely. The Devil's Disciple is one of those rare books that works well both in the field of crime fiction and outside of it; it is probably one of the most literary pieces of crime fiction I've read lately.

I'd recommend this book first and foremost to people familiar with Japanese crime fiction and who enjoy that genre's dark atmosphere, psychological complexity and in many cases, the bizarre twists these authors love to employ. While much of Japanese literature has these traits (Kobo Abe just popped into my head, for example) many of the crime writers from Japan really know how to get into the darkness of the soul and transform it into a work of art. Other than that audience, crime fiction readers who are more into the psychological aspects of crime would like this; if you're looking for something cozy, cute or warm and fuzzy, this is not the book for you. A lot of Japanese crime might be seen as "weird," and this one is, but deliciously so.

Sean O'Hara says

Japanese mystery fiction is an acquired taste. The Nihon version of the genre remains much more closely tied to its origins in the works of Poe and Wilkie Collins than its European and American counterparts -- indeed, horror in Japan is classified as part of the mystery genre, and books by the likes of Koji Suzuki and Ayatsuji Yukito are as much about figuring out what's going on as grisly supernatural murders.

But this also means that Japanese mysteries contain a number of elements that Westerners find off-putting, including unfair tactics like unreliable narrators and hiding vital, need-to-know information until the last minute.

The two novellas collected in this book definitely fit into this school of mystery fiction.

In the first we have a letter written by a man in prison to an ex-lover whom he blames for turning him into a murderer (if he is a murderer, which is an open question). This is the simpler of the two mysteries and gives us a simple, straightforward explanation. Except there are a number of subtle contradictions in the narrator's story which force you to question whether he's telling the truth about any of it.

The second story increases the complexity further by presenting a tale in which we get three contradictory accounts of the same incident -- but unlike Rashomon, these are not the accounts of three different people. One account appears to be more-or-less objective, but it only tells of the *discovery of the murder*. For the

murder itself, we have only the accounts of the prime suspect and only witness, and they contradict each other on every single level. One is supposedly more accurate, but as in the first novella this is far from certain. No matter how you put the puzzle together, there are pieces left over and gaps in the picture -- what's with the detailed account of the Mahjong game? What was the moaning Ootera heard on the first floor? What exactly is the deal with Tomoda? Ultimately the definitive version of events raises as many questions as the others.

Amidst all this mystery, the story also contains a good deal of social satire. Hamao was a lawyer and he uses both tales to skewer his profession. He also attacks the misogyny of the early Showa Era when he wrote, with the motives in both cases raising serious questions about society's expectations for women and what constitutes proper sexuality.

Juan Jiménez García says

Shiro Hamao. Encuentros con el mal

De Shiro Hamao no podemos decir muchas cosas, más allá de alguna fecha y algún dato puntual. Su carrera como escritor fue breve, apenas unos pocos años, pero fue suficiente para ser un nombre importante dentro del desarrollo de la novela negra japonesa. Publicados por Satori bajo el título de *El discípulo del diablo*, su debut en la escritura sería a través de dos relatos: el que da nombre al libro y *¿Fue él quien la mató?*, ejemplos emblemáticos de aquello que le apasionaba: las raíces psicológicas del crimen, a través de la lógica deductiva.

Siguiendo una línea habitual en el relato japonés, tanto uno como el otro estarán escritos bajo un tono epistolar o, mejor, de confesión. Tal vez el que frecuentemente aparecieran en revistas invitaba a este recurso. Así, en *El discípulo del diablo* un preso se dirige a su viejo amigo, amante y ahora fiscal, para poner los puntos sobre las íes en el caso que le ha llevado a la cárcel.

Eizo Shimaura no parece haber conservado muchas cosas de su juventud, pero todas ellas serán determinantes: primero, su relación con Hachiro Tsuchida (el ahora fiscal), especie de ser satánico, con el que mantuvo una relación ya no solo de amistad sino también sexual, y al que no duda de calificar de su maestro en lo terrible; segundo, heredado de Tsuchida, su necesidad de los tranquilizantes para poder dormir, siempre, hasta necesitar cantidades y compuestos increíbles; tercero, su amor por Sueko. Su amor por Sueko quedará en nada cuando esta se case con otro en un matrimonio concertado. Él, por su parte, hará lo mismo con Tsuyuko, una chica complaciente hasta lo imposible. Será su víctima, aquella sobre la descargará todas sus frustraciones, que son muchas. Hasta que un día, Sueko vuelve, el discípulo del diablo lo abandonará todo con ella y Tsuyuko quedará embarazada. Y debe morir.

En *¿Fue él quien la mató?*, un abogado defensor reconstruirá un horrible crimen para evitar la pena de muerte segura para su cliente, que por otro lado se ha confesado culpable con todo lujo de detalles. Sin embargo, hay algo extraño en todo esto y no dejará de buscar, contra todo, algo que arroje una respuesta a sus inquietudes. Seizo Oda es un joven de familia adinerada que se casa con otra joven de familia bien, Michiko, aunque todo indica que venida a menos (¿una chica tan liberal como ella aceptando un matrimonio convenido?). Su vida estará expuesta a la gente y las habladurías, que convierten a uno u otro en personajes siniestros según la ocasión. Un día, en su casa, se quedarán a jugar al mahjong dos estudiantes amigos de ella, tal vez amantes, Todoma y ?dera. Y este último también a dormir, dada la noche tempestuosa. Entonces llegará el horror. Y más tarde, la verdad.

Los relatos de Shiro Hamao son inquietantes porque la sociedad en la que se desarrolla es inquietante. Tras la apariencia de normalidad, de rígidas estructuras sociales, estaban aquellas inevitables grietas que acaban por derrumbar el edificio construido precariamente por sus protagonistas. Unos protagonistas siempre dispuestos a la transgresión, pese a que estamos hablando de relatos escritos a finales de los años veinte del siglo pasado. Ya el simple hecho de que en ellos se muestre sin tapujos la homosexualidad o la infidelidad, deberían ponernos sobre aviso de un Japón que no se corresponde al retrato lleno de ataduras que nos ha llegado. Vendrían tiempos peores y sus protagonistas, en especial el de *El discípulo del diablo*, tal vez anticipaban a ese hombre sin conciencia, cuya única motivación es él mismo.

Escrito para Détour.

Jim Fonseca says

Two short stories by an early writer of Japanese crime fiction. We are told in the introduction that the author was an early champion of gay rights in 1920's – 1930's Japan and both stories have homoerotic overtones. In Japan at the time this genre was called "erotic grotesque nonsense." (Clearly something is lost in the translation.)

In the first story, the same as the book's title, a young man is accused of a murder he did not commit. But coincidentally the prosecutor was a former lover of his and the accused spends all his time in jail writing letters to the prosecutor blaming him for the unfortunate turn in his life and giving long explanations for his behavior, which of course, only serves to dig him deeper in the eyes of the authorities.

The second story is Did he Kill Them? Again a young man is accused of killing a married couple. Only after he is executed for the murders does a document surface that he wrote explaining his actions and shedding a totally different light on the situation.

Even in translation we learn things about the Japanese language; for example, as he writes his letters in prison, depending on his mood, he used three different versions of the word "I": a formal version, a casual, masculine version and a neutral version.

You could call these two stories "pulp fiction" but they are also early versions of what we would call now "psychological thrillers." Reasonably good stories, but period pieces and I found the going a little slow.
