



Poets and Murder

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A.D. 668

Master detective Judge Dee sets out to solve a puzzling double murder and discovers that complicated passions lurk beneath the seemingly tranquil landscape of academic life. A student has been murdered; a beautiful poetess is accused of whipping her maidservant to death; and further mysteries lie in the shadows of the Shrine of the Black Fox.

Poets and Murder Details

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Joseph says

An academic, a poet, two magistrates, a chan monk, and a poetess with a turbulent past convene during the Autumn Moon Festival for feasting and discussions on poetry. I enjoyed the setting, the emphasis on fox-magic, the addition of a Chan monk (a rarity in a Gulik novel), being within an elite circle of Chinese literati, and even some memorable characters, such as Magistrate Lo who also seems a very capable detective. However, much of the mystery was wrapped up in events of the past, which frankly there wasn't much hard evidence for--the murderer simply gives himself away in the end. So there wasn't a lot of first hand gathering of information and interviews as is usually in Gulik's detective novels. So, I enjoyed the atmosphere, down to poets composing tribute stanzas off the tops of their heads or showing off calligraphy after already having had imbibed plenty of drinks, especially the pilgrimage to Emerald Cliff, where they sit around eating dumplings in the mist and moonlight. The story ends with Gulik and the monk sitting next to each other gazing off into the night, pondering life and madness.

Mazeli Dee says

First read of the year! Unfortunately, this is also Robert van Gulik's last book in my collection. How sad.

Florence says

Ça faisait longtemps que je n'avais pas lu de roman policier, ce n'est pas un genre qui m'intéresse ces dernières années, mais j'ai bien aimé cette lecture. Elle change de ce que j'ai eu l'habitude de lire dans le sens où l'enquête se passe en Chine au 7ème siècle. Pour tout dire je ne connais rien de l'histoire ou de la culture Chinoise mais cela ne m'a pas empêché d'apprécier l'époque retranscrite. On retrouve beaucoup de folklore et la culture de l'époque -la façon dans le système fonctionne(-ait?)-. C'était très intéressant. L'écriture de la traduction est moderne, simple pour ne pas englober le lecteur sous la compréhension de la Chine de l'époque et une écriture singulière. Pour ce qui est l'histoire en elle-même je ne dirais pas qu'elle est originale mais la façon dont l'enquête est menée l'est. D'autant plus que le crime mêle aussi le folklore local (point très positif). Je recommande !

Lisa Kucharski says

In various stories Dee is partnered with a single compatriot to solve a crime. In this story he is in Magistrate Lo's district and together with Lo they work over various murders past and present.

Lo is a much different person than Dee and it is interesting to see the two personalities work. Lo, who can appear a dandy of sorts, has his own set up like Dee's to help solve crime.

Also in this story is a zen monk, showing how Buddhism was changing in China, as well as the fox lore many believed.

Colleen says

Interesting, enjoyed the fox lore though I missed the judges usual assistants

Bert van der Vaart says

A solid and entertaining Judge Tie mystery. Van Gulik was a remarkable Dutch linguist and diplomat, who explored Chinese history and culture through writing a series of mysteries wherein Judge Tie manages to unravel murders complicated by cultural issues such as the interaction between social ranks, local and centralized government officials, and motives which involve blackmail, jealousy, matters of honor and crimes of passion. *Moord op het Maafeest*, confusingly listed in Goodreads under an English title, is a great example of the series. Van Gulik does a great job setting the historical context for a complicated series of murders, based upon a historical female poet and courtesan in the Ming dynasty and a rebellion which was put down. I liked several poems included in the book, which as is so often the case, signal deeper as well as directly personal information which the writer would not be allowed to say directly. One remarkable couplet as an example: "Wij keren allen terug naar vanwaar we kwamen, Waar de vlam bleef van de gedoofde kaars."--(We all return to where we came from, where the flame remains of the quenched candle:. Well worth reading!

KHÁNH Nguy?n Qu?c says

Truy?n hay, n?i dung h?p d?n, có nút th?t m? h?p lý. Nh?ng d?ch gi? Tùng V? d?ch nh? ki?u là ng??i nhà c?a biên t?p.

Kathy Chung says

this has been a juice tale.

last round Judge Dee came across Magistrate Lo, he was hoodwinked by Magistrate Lo to stand in for him (see *The Red Pavilion*), when in actual fact Lo was running away from the mess he found himself in with a courtesan.

this time, Judge Dee thought he could see how his friend , Magistrate Lo governs his district but when a murder case came up, Judge Dee found himself getting deeper into the mystery.

to make the matter worse, time is of the essence. and the mystery might involve a highly regarded person.

it was page turning. Especially when their potential witness and key persons are dropping dead left and right.

the only downside is that I did not like the solution of Saffron character. it would have been good if the ending is a bit different.

overall it had been an interesting read

Kevin says

I believe This is the last Judge Dee book that Robert van Gulik wrote. Again, Judge Dee is away from home and his usual helpers. He is the guest of a fellow magistrate, whose methods differ greatly from Dee's, along with several scholars for the mid-autumn festival. One of the other guests is a talented poetess who has been convicted of beating a servant to death but is traveling to the capital to appeal her conviction. During the celebration there is another murder, which must be solved quickly. This is the most "psychological" of the Judge Dee books, in my opinion. Not typical of the series, but very good and recommended.

Franz says

There were certain parts to this story that I liked very much, and some that I didn't like. I did like the fact that the story re-introduces his friend and colleague Lo. I also liked the fact that this is a story that elaborates on the role/status of women (even more so than in most of his stories - women always play a central part in his stories) and that women in very different circumstances and from different walks of life are introduced, and in many ways this story is an eyeopener with regards to the way women were treated in this culture.

I thought that the ending was unlikely. Di might have had his suspicion about who was the murderer, but he had no evidence, and yet a cold-blooded murderer chooses to commit suicide for a rather far-fetched reason (in my opinion) rather than keeping quiet. I think this was a missed opportunity, as a brilliant yet ruthless opponent of Di's could have been introduced here.

John Frankham says

I have thirteen of this series, and I read them very sparingly, as I don't want to get to the end. Aping the traditional structure of 18thC Chinese mysteries, with three interlocking cases, the prose is spare and beautiful, the line drawings (by the author) enchanting. This was the last he wrote, in 1968.

"A.D. 668. Master detective Judge Dee sets out to solve a puzzling double murder and discovers that complicated passions lurk beneath the seemingly tranquil landscape of academic life. A student has been murdered; a beautiful poetess is accused of whipping her maidservant to death; and further mysteries lie in the shadows of the Shrine of the Black Fox."

"Robert Hans van Gulik was a Dutch diplomat best know for his Judge Dee stories. His first published book, The Celebrated Cases of Judge Dee, was a translation of an eighteenth-century Chinese murder mystery by an unknown author; he went on to write new mysteries for Judge Dee, a character based on a historical figure from the seventh century. He also wrote academic books, mostly on Chinese history."

Dave says

The last book of the Judge Dee series, I think the best.

Timons Esaias says

I have been rationing the Judge Dee mysteries to myself, reading one every six months, because I didn't really want to finish the series. Alas, this is the last entry in that series (though I hear good things about Zhu Xiao Di's homage and continuation, which I expect to read in January).

This volume omits the map of the city in question, which most volumes have, in favor of a plan of the princely mansion in which it takes place. Fifteen or sixteen courtyards, depending on which you count; and something I'll seriously have to consider building for my wife and I when we retire.

The book has the normal "three cases" for Dee to solve, or at least for him to work on; three murders, in this case. There are other collateral cases, as well, so this runs into a bigger-than-usual body count. The setting is the neighboring district of Chin-hwa, and the palace tribunal of his fellow magistrate, Lo Kwan-choong. Dee's boss is there, too, participating in the Mid-Autumn Festival. The boss is forever telling Dee he's anxious to hear his views and opinions, but not just now. And Dee, who isn't much for poetry, is in the company of Important Poets, because Lo is a poet and has, by chance, managed to assemble several for the Festival. One of them is accused of murder (as all poets probably should be), hence the title.

I'm not sure van Gulik would have wanted this to be the end-note of the series (cancer decided that for him), because Dee's in Chin-hwa without his usual entourage of assistants, so we lack the usual cast. Instead, Dee is assisting Lo, and using the folks in Lo's circle for support. Lo is rather clever, we learn, and might well have solved the case on his own, if he hadn't been overwhelmed with other duties. Dee is less crucial, in some ways, in these investigations than he normally is in the books of this series.

Van Gulik tended to avoid the heavy reliance on the supernatural that the Chinese novels that he was using for models normally depend on. However, in this case, the belief in fox spirits is a major component of the plot, and one of the characters inhabits a fox spirit shrine.

Potential spoiler: I was confused, and remain confused, by one structural detail of this novel. In the opening scene there are cryptic remarks made about an "experiment" that is suggested by Dee's being in town. I see that we're supposed to add someone to our suspect list as a result, but I finished the book without a clear idea what experiment was being tried by whom. One can guess at a meaning, but there's no evidence that I can see. Hmmm.

Olha Yeremenko says

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