



The Curious Casebook of Inspector Hanshichi: Detective Stories of Old Edo

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That year, quite a shocking incident occurred. . . . So reminisces old Hanshichi in a story from one of Japan's most beloved works of popular literature, Hanshichi torimonochō. Told through the eyes of a street-smart detective, Okamoto Kido's best-known work inaugurated the historical detective genre in Japan, spawning stage, radio, movie, and television adaptations as well as countless imitations. This selection of fourteen stories, translated into English for the first time, provides a fascinating glimpse of life in feudal Edo (later Tokyo) and rare insight into the development of the fledgling Japanese crime novel.

Once viewed as an exclusively modern genre derivative of Western fiction, crime fiction and its place in the Japanese popular imagination were forever changed by Kido's unsung Sherlock Holmes. These stories--still widely read today--are crucial to our understanding of modern Japan and its aspirations toward a literature that steps outside the shadow of the West to stand on its own.

The Curious Casebook of Inspector Hanshichi: Detective Stories of Old Edo Details

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From Reader Review The Curious Casebook of Inspector Hanshichi: Detective Stories of Old Edo for online ebook

Kelly says

I found this book while exploring a section of my uni's library that I've never been to before. I was the only person in there and it was creepy too, but eventually, I didn't mind the eerie feeling because I found lots of books by Russian, Middle Eastern, Indian, and Japanese authors! I wanted to take home a lot of books, but I was only one book away from the check-out limit, so I chose *Hanshichi torimonochō* because the idea of a Japanese Sherlock figure intrigued me. And the cover was excellent as well!

While the various cases encountered by our protagonist were quite entertaining, I didn't really feel the mind-boggling intensity whenever we are watching or reading good detective stories. The criminals gave up too easily and didn't put much of a fight, really. The cases were just way too easy. And convenient.

My favorite cases were The Mystery of the Fire Bell, The Dancer's Curse, and Benten's Daughter. As a history geek myself, I loved the regular footnotes that appeared on the pages as well.

I was debating giving this a two, but I understand how translating from one language to another takes away some of the essence and wit of the story, no matter how good the translation is. How I wish I could learn other beautiful languages quickly!

Camilla *tactile seeker* says

I have developed a new habit, over the years: when I have no idea what to read next, but crave some Japanese literature, I go to my favorite library, start scanning and closely observe every spine, determining if its color and title font look interesting.

You might definite it superficial and lame, I adore it. I've borrowed quite a few books following this method, and not a single one has disappointed me, so far.

When I read the title of Okamoto Kido's newly translated short detective stories, I remembered reading of him in a literature book. He'd been a war correspondent, before he became a writer, and the way he'd described the horrors of war had immediately made me sympathize with him. I was really curious to find out what kind of stories he'd written, with that background.

The Curious Casebook won't be remembered because of the "mystery" factor of the stories it tells. Many people will find it rather lacking of the elements that make a detective story worth noticing: little suspense or pathos. No detailed descriptions of Hanshichi's methods of case solving. Almost no info about him, his personal life, his story.

He's there, at the beginning of every chapter, old and retired from his job and amused by the eagerness of his fan and sole audience - the narrator - to listen to his most peculiar and puzzling cases, but also to be taught about the old Tokyo, and hence the old Japan.

And that's exactly what makes this book charming and unforgettable: it gives the feeling you used to get,

when your grandparents decided to tell you how their lives were, when they were your age. How society worked and how the places you know now were, back then. It's a bittersweet feeling of something grand and at the same time simple, that got lost through the years.

Something you've heard people older than you discuss, seen decayed and imagined in its original form, skeptical it was once so different from what you know.

The amount of info, entertainment, magic contained in each of these stories make up for the disappointing "detective" elements.

I've learned so much about 19th-century Japan thanks to Okamoto that I can't really give it less than four stars.

And the way he decided to structure it, made it even more interesting. Three levels of narration, the first being the narrator himself living in "present" Tokyo, going to or simply meeting by chance old Hanshichi - second - who'd invite him to his house or somewhere else, and - third - the time when the stories are actually set, from fifty to about thirty years before.

It may sound confusing, but it's incredibly fascinating, really. With just the interaction of two characters, we get two different generations' point of view, as well as two different examples of how the city they live in was before, and is at the moment of their meetings. Not to mention, the different festivities, the different religions, aspects of the Japanese culture that inevitably changed in that time span, like the theatre, the role of women, the Japanese family and ancient traditions.

I'm glad I found this book and I feel like recommending it to everyone interested in Japan and its beautiful history.

Noa Velasco says

Intentaré ser sintético como la ropa del Decathlon.

Varios relatos en los que el detective de Kanda resuelve casos "like a boss". Entretenido, pero a día de hoy resulta previsible y a veces decepcionante.

::¿Te ha gustado?

Menos de lo que esperaba del Sherlock Holmes japonés del s. XIX.

::Independientemente de lo anterior, ¿crees que es un buen libro?

Soy muy fan de lo japo y, aunque he visto bastante cine, soy un profano en la narrativa japonesa. A mis ojos —poco rasgados—, este libro tiene una estructura algo dura. Me cuesta encontrarle el gusto, me lío con los personajes, no me calan sus problemas ni sus tensiones. No nos hemos entendido bien.

::¿A quién lo recomendarías?

Amantes de la cultura japonesa del siglo XIX. Irónicamente, no lo recomiendo a los amantes de la literatura

This does not mean these are dark noirish stories full of misery. They are interesting and entertaining. There is an old-fashioned air about the tales that may not appeal to everyone. However, you can say the same thing about Sherlock Holmes. Some favorites of mine:

"The Ghost of Ofumi" - the wife of a samurai claims she is being haunted

"The Stone Lantern" - the mysterious disappearance (twice!) of a young woman

"The Dancer's Curse" - the murder of the "Haunted Teacher"

"The Mansion of Morning Glories" - the disappearance of a young boy

I enjoyed all the stories and the introduction, which is very informative and helps you understand the background of Okamoto Kido and the stories.

Highly recommended.

J. says

What we have here is a group of stories written between the teens and thirties of the 20th century, about Edo Japan of the 19th century-- wrapped up in 'detective' clothing. Mr Kido was something of a literary entrepreneur, and like Conan Doyle and Wilkie Collins, was a serials writer in the then-newly-popular vein of detective fiction.

The actual crime and detection aspects are pretty much secondary, though, in a compilation easily enough seen as nostalgia for a bygone era. It's a difficult compromise to hit on, since the nostalgia thing immediately nullifies any suspense generated in a 'crime' genre, and anything that promotes chaos & jeopardy *too much* ... well, fairly abolishes the cherry-blossom & tea ceremony setting. So what is left is a gentle, "Cautionary Tales" sort of thing, as told by a kindly uncle.

A bit like when Kurosawa allows his plots to go a little goofy (samurai getting drunk on saké, say)... in order to balance out his otherwise earth-shattering crisis points. It doesn't always work.

Nothing really un-likeable here, though, and if you'd like to take a breezy, carefree holiday in Meiji era Japan, this has it's moments.

If you're looking for something a little suspenseful or haunting ... no.

Tenma says

The serialized short stories of inspector Hanshichi by Okamoto Kido were very popular in Japan between World War I and II. This book is a compilation of 14 of these stories. A very informative introduction about Kido and the cultural impact of the Hanshichi stories was also provided by the translator.

Hanshichi is by no means Sherlock Holmes. Most of the cases are solved by the most absurd of coincidences, or as Hanshichi would say "if this isn't a case of dumb luck, I don't know what is". As such the cases are not any more complex than what you would find in children's detective novels.

Rather, the detective stories were intended to bring an intertwining pretext to educate the reader about the

cultural norms of old Edo (Tokyo) in the period between 1840s and 1860s. Or, citing from the introduction, "Kido was motivated as much by a desire to educate his readers as to entertain them. He does this by infusing his stories with information about feudal institutions, customs, festivals, geography, and historical events".

In a nutshell, this is a great book for anyone who wants to read about the customs of the Japanese in old Tokyo (before the kanto earthquake) in an entertaining format without having to read a textbook.

Angelica Zubieta García says

En este libro nos encontramos con Hanshichi, un inteligente detective que con su astuto e hábil sentido de intuición logra conseguir la información exacta con grandiosos interrogantes. Siempre te lleva la delantera!. También contamos con una excelente introducción de Linea de tiempo en la historia japonesa, cultura, tradición, arte; de esta forma nunca te vas a perder en la historia.

Vicki Beyer says

These short stories reveal the life and times of a city and its inhabitants in a time of social and political change. Our guide on this adventure is not the narrator but his "source", the detective Hanshichi, whose knowledge, insights and judgement solve cases with a practicality that is refreshing. These are "whodunits", but the reader doesn't become so absorbed in figuring that out, because there is too much to savour on the canvas of life and social interactions that is painted for us.

Ignacio Senao f says

Un sherlock japonés mezclado con j-horror.

Leslie says

An enjoyable collection of stories. Hanshichi is sometimes called the Japanese Sherlock Holmes, but the comparison is misleading. The stories were written in the 1920s and 1930s, and the retired Hanshichi tells them to a younger friend in Tokyo in the 1890s, looking back to cases in Edo in the 1850s before the Meiji Restoration and the transformation of Japan. So, unlike the evocation of contemporary England in Doyle's stories, these are deeply nostalgic, looking back to a vanished world divided from the world of its first readers by a wide gulf. So the exoticism and nostalgic tone are deliberate, not just accidental artifacts of their Japaneseness. Doyle's readers may be nostalgic for the world of Holmes, but neither Holmes nor Doyle is; Hanshichi certainly is and so were Kido's readers, and I think Kido was, too. And whereas Holmes solved his cases mostly by the ruthless application of logic and forensics, grounded in close observation and deduction, Hanshichi solves his cases by far more indirect means--luck, hunches, connections, and behind-the-scenes string-pulling. The world of Sherlock Holmes is open to ratiocination; the world of Hanshichi is mysterious, ghostly, only periodically explicable.
