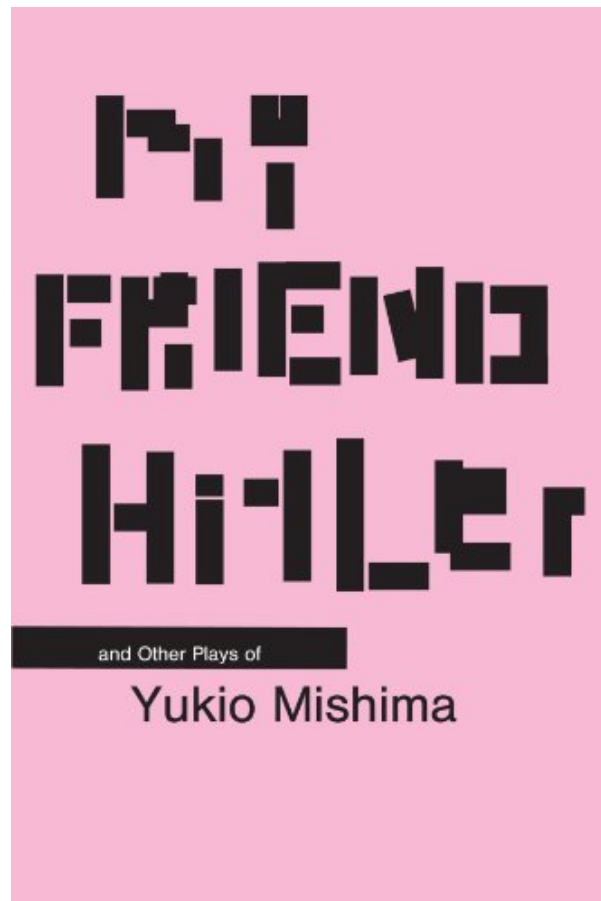


MY FRIEND HITLER BY YUKIO MISHIMA



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From Library Journal

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Ming-ming Shen Kuo, Ball State Univ., Muncie, IN

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MY FRIEND HITLER BY YUKIO MISHIMA PDF

Though best known for his novels, Yukio Mishima published more than sixty plays, almost all of which were produced during his lifetime. Among them are kabuki plays and others inspired by No dramas?two types used in classical Japanese theater. Of play-writing Mishima once observed, "I started writing dramas just as water flows toward a lower place. In me, the topography of dramas seems to be situated far below that of novels. It seems to be in a place which is more instinctive, closer to child's play." For English readers, these plays have been one of Japan's best-kept secrets?until now.

In this anthology, Hiroaki Sato translates the brilliance and richness of Yukio Mishima's writing into the English language. He has selected five major plays and three essays on dramaturgy, providing informative introductions to guide the reader. Sato's translations offer a broad historical and personal context in which those new to Mishima's work can place his writing. For those more familiar with Mishima, these translations offer another medium in which one can access his ingenious work.

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adaptation of another writer's story, cast in classical Kabuki style for a theater school aiming to revive a then-dying form; Mishima was the first prominent Japanese playwright in decades to compose a Kabuki play. Mishima is as comfortable with the Western genres of tragic, historical, and naturalistic domestic drama. The Rokumeikan takes a minor nineteenth-century diplomatic incident, in which Japan first asserted its power internationally, and transforms it into a Sophoclean tragedy. The Decline and Fall of the Suzaku chronicles in four beautiful acts Japan's agonies just before and after defeat in 1945. My Friend Hitler, an intense re-creation of Hitler's cold-blooded 1934 purge of Ernst Roehm and other S.A. leaders, also speaks volumes about imperial Japan's uneasy relationship with the Nazis. Jack Helbig
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Hide the women and children

By epic phlegm Hooha

Imagine the final play in this book coming after a summary of the original tale in which an ancient imperial family has surpassed Freud in arranging family relationships:

"Sutoku (1119-64)--officially the first son of Retired Emperor Toba (1103-56) but actually a son of Toba's father, Retired Emperor Shirakawa (1053-1129) because Shirakawa made Shoshi pregnant after he married her to his son--was installed as emperor when he was four, but was tricked into retirement by Toba in 1141, before ever having a chance to exercise real imperial power. His actual father, Shirakawa, had started the insei, a political arrangement in which the retired monarch wielded far greater power than the ruling one. . . ." (p. 242).

There are a few footnotes in the play 'My Friend Hitler' which remind the reader that the translator is trying to capture the style of German political thought that has been staged in Japan. The footnote on page 133 actually begins with "Here, apparently with tongue in cheek, Mishima commits an improbable cross-cultural anachronism. What Hitler refers to . . ." I find it more ironic when Hitler is perplexed that his secret police are acting like secret police:

HITLER: No, you had your own problems. What can you say about the disgusting things the SA did during

the last two years? No wonder the Reichswehr was put off. You made hideouts in basements and warehouses; you tortured, kidnapped, demanded ransoms--I've even heard the story that in some districts troopers took their rivals in love affairs into basements, tied them up on the wall, and cut them up.

ROEHM: That lasted only a while. It's just that the young men wanted to mimic what secret police do. I've kept them in check and there's been nothing like that since. (pp. 128-129).

How likely is it that Hitler ever complained to a government official that "your men swagger about so obnoxiously that serious-minded citizens are completely put off, and as soon as they spot one of your men in the distance, they quickly hide their daughters." ? (p. 129).

There are only four characters in the play 'My Friend Hitler,' but it helps to have some knowledge of Goering and the rest of the upper echelon of the political hierarchy, including Defense Minister General von Blomberg, one that I do not recall myself, who are rivals of the main characters, half of whom will be liquidated by the final scene at midnight, June 30, 1934. Another thing I didn't know was about Hitler's "law I passed last February after you joined my cabinet, which would give storm troopers wounded during political campaigns the same pensions as soldiers wounded during the war" (p. 129). Things must have been pretty bad for the army to be begging to get into the fight to restore order, but that is what Hitler called "the Prussian National Army's tradition beginning to roar at last." (p. 130).

Surely the main point of "My Friend Hitler" is that being an old friend of young Adolf and a mouse that eats cheese left in a boot is not a perfect defense against imperfect legal proceedings, if you catch my drift.

This book contains a Preface by Hiroaki Sato, five plays by Yukio Mishima, short Backstage Essays on the first production of his play 'The Rokumeikan,' including "The Psychology of a Walk-On Role on the Stage" (pp. 60-62) about playing a carpenter who keeps his back to the audience for three or four minutes, during which the play seems "like an invisible monster that moves blindly in a certain direction while sucking them into the maelstrom it has created," (p. 61). There is a transcript of a speech Mishima gave to Kabuki trainees on July 3, 1970 with many footnotes added by Hiroaki Sato on pages 219-239, the explanation of the play on pages 241-245, and finally, "A Wonder Tale: The Moonbow, The Original Tale by Kyokutei Bakin" on pages 246-307. There is no index. The emphasis is on drama rather than history.

3 of 4 people found the following review helpful.

lackluster

By imran rehmani

in pretty much each preface to each play and essay, translator sato openly comments on some linguistic flourish in the original he doubts can be reproduced in english. his attitude is mainly one of, "well, here goes nothing." you are forced to take this book as a purely academic venture, an historical document, as opposed to any kind of endeavour worthy of the originals. this is bearable until the last two pieces, where the gist that still comes through is so powerful, so sublime, that the limitations of the translation become all the more irritating.

they're literal translations, so the aesthetic flavour is diluted, sentences run on forever and sound jilted when spoken aloud. these are not performable plays, however compelling their subjects are. at least there's some vestige of mishima's 60-odd plays in english, and i appreciate that. they are however mostly from the last 3 years of his life. sato also translated the book silk and insight, which i am afraid i have now lost interest in reading.

donald keene's trans of five modern noh plays, that's a quality piece. now i've got to head down to robbarts

library at university of toronto to look at his trans of madame de sade, which is regrettably far harder to find, and far more expensive, than this book, having been published once in the late 60s.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful.

A bit of a niche market but still great to own to see the different sides of Mishima

By andre zadorozny

Important works of Mishima, along with much needed translations of his kabuki plays. A bit of a niche market but still great to own to see the different sides of Mishima.

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