ALTED PERCEPTION IN THE MODERNIST FICTION OF EDOGAWA RANPO

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

Edogawa Ranpo (1884-1965) became a prominent writer in the taishû bungaku (popular literature) movement after the publication of his maiden work "Ni-sen dôka" ("The Two-Sen Copper Coin") in 1923 was hailed as the first work of Japanese detective fiction. His most prolific period occurred during the 1920s and 30s when he published 74 of his short stories in various popular periodicals including the coterie magazine Shin Seinen, which provided a venue for literary experimentation for not only Ranpo but many other young writers went on to promising literary careers. He has long been admired as a writer of popular literature, but in recent years his work has come to be seen as part of a modernist movement that emerged in Japan in the 1920s and 30s. This thesis will adopt the latter view of Ranpo by analyzing the modernist concept of altered perspective in three of his representative works. Two of these stories are also presented here in translation.

This paper will analyze the importance of altered perception in three of Ranpo's important works. Imomushi, ("The Caterpillar") and Oshie to tabi suru otoko ("The Man Traveling with the Brocade Portrait") are two of Ranpo's most skillfully crafted kaiki shôsetsu (tales of the bizarre). Of the two, Oshie has received more critical attention because of its beautiful imagery and intriguing characters, but both are excellent examples of modernist influences at work on the author's literary style and imagination.
The third story to be treated Injû ("The Dark Beast") is the author's most critically acclaimed *tantei shōsetsu* (mystery fiction).

I have attached translations of *Imomushi* and *Oshie to tabi suru otoko*. It is my hope that my versions of Ranpo's stories will not only introduce key works of an important modernist author but also prove entertaining and provocative for today's readers.
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CHAPTER 1

PREFACE

Edogawa Ranpo (1884-1965) became a prominent writer in the taishū bungaku (popular literature) movement after the publication of his maiden work "Ni-sen dōka" ("The Two-Sen Copper Coin") in 1923 was hailed as the first work of Japanese detective fiction. His most prolific period occurred during the 1920s and 1930s when he published 74 of his short stories in various popular periodicals including the coterie magazine Shin Seinen, which provided a venue for literary experimentation for not only Ranpo but many other young writers who went onto promising literary careers. He has long been admired as a writer of popular literature, but in recent years his work has come to be seen as part of a modernist movement that emerged in Japan in the 1920s and 30s. This thesis will adopt the latter view of Ranpo by analyzing the modernist concept of altered perception in three of his representative works. Two of these stories are also presented here in translation.

Intrigued by the puzzle of solving a crime more than the execution of the villainous deed itself, Ranpo tells us he did not succumb to writing "true detective fiction" or newspaper reportage of crime. As a child, he had spend a great deal of time alone and as he did, "a demon of imagination" grew within him not unlike the "demon of licentiousness" that develops within Tokiko of his novel Imomushi. Ranpo steadfastly argues that, despite the assertions of newspaper writers of the time, he was not in the least
bit interested in the details of events of this world, including accounts of actual crimes, no matter how skillfully told the tale might be. For him, the imagination and the tales it could produce were much more enticing than details of actual crimes. As he proclaims in one essay, “I am a hopeless resident of the land of fiction.” ("Watakushi wa sukuigataki kakû no kuni no jûnin de aru.")

The “land of fiction” (kakû no kuni) to which he refers is the world of his own imagination. Doubtless, he possessed an imagination capable of entertaining many for years. But his claim that the events of the real world had no bearing on his fantasy world seems to be an artistic pose. While he states that circumstances or details of actual crimes never influence his writing, he provides evidence to the contrary in his own statement in the same essay when he tells us that reporters often approached him when there was a particularly baffling crime to get his opinion. Ranpo’s fertile imagination seems to have taken this kernel of an idea and developed a story based on the incident. In his story Injû ("The Dark Beast") an attractive young “damsel in distress” seeks out a mystery writer in hopes that he can handle a difficult, mysterious situation. If one draws a parallel between the incident from the above essay and the plot of the story, it seems clear that Ranpo has replaced annoying reporters asking bothersome questions with a fictitious beautiful woman seeking the aid of a capable writer. In this example alone, it is not difficult to see how reality inspires the imagination in Ranpo’s creative process.

This paper will analyze the importance of altered perception in three of Ranpo’s important works. Inomushi ("The Caterpillar") and Oshie to tabi suru otoko ("The Man Traveling with the Brocade Portrait") are two of Ranpo’s most skillfully crafted kaiki

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shōsetsu (tales of the bizarre). Of the two, Oshie has received more critical attention because of its beautiful imagery and intriguing characters, but both are excellent examples of modernist influences at work on the author’s literary style and imagination. The third story to be treated, Injû (“The Dark Beast”), is the author’s most critically acclaimed tantei shōsetsu (mystery fiction).

Although Ranpo is perhaps best known for his tantei shōsetsu and his master sleuth Akechi Kogorô, a closer reading of his kaiki shōsetsu and the kaiki elements in his tantei shōsetsu will help us to alter our the conventional assessment of his detective fiction and see how much of his work reflects his experiments in modernist stylistics and themes. In challenging the veracity of perception Ranpo intends to encourage the reader to question the nature of reality or at least the superficial appearance of “this world.” Ranpo’s fiction questions the accuracy of visual perception by employing such techniques as visions, mirages, radical plot twists and multiple identities in one persona, or what we will call here the doppelgänger (nijû jinkaku).

First, we will turn to biographical information concerning Ranpo including his early encounters with the works of foreign and domestic writers of mystery fiction. This section will also provide an introduction to the nature of popular literature during the early Taisho period and treat the background of both mystery fiction and tales of the bizarre.

Then we will turn to synopses of Inomushi, Oshie to tabi suru otoko and Injû, respectively, followed by an analysis of the role of altered perception and other modernist elements of each work.
I have attached translations of *Imomushi* and *Oshie to tabi suru otoko*. It is my hope that my versions of Ranpo’s stories will not only introduce key works of an important modernist author but also prove entertaining and provocative for today’s readers.
CHAPTER 2

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH AND LITERARY OVERVIEW:

NOVELS MYSTERIOUS, BIZARRE AND MODERNIST

Edogawa Ranpo was born Hirai Tarō on October 21, 1894 (Meiji 27). The only child born to Hirai Shigeo and Wasa of Nabari-machi, Mie-ken, he grew up in Tsu City of the same prefecture. Ranpo’s father was an industrious man who was quite successful in administering his small business for many years before it eventually went broke during Ranpo’s final year of high school (age 17).

Ranpo recalled his early schooling was rather uneventful, yet even before he had entered school, Ranpo had fond memories of his mother reading to him from the *tantei bon* (detective stories) of Kuroiwa Ruiko (1862-1920). Kuroiwa was a prominent translator of foreign mystery fiction for newspapers of the late 1880s and early 1890s. In addition, he is credited with introducing the mystery novel to Japan with his original work *Muzan* (Merciless) published in 1889.¹ Ranpo remembers being enthralled by both the words of Kuroiwa’s tales that his mother read to him and the vividly gruesome illustrations which accompanied the stories. He believed these experiences to be the origins of his lifelong interest in detective fiction.²

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Upon entering middle school, Ranpo recalled often falling prey to bullies who picked on him because he was naturally introverted and illness had made him physically weak. He does not give details of the illnesses which plagued him as a youth, but he was fortunate enough to avoid contracting the tuberculosis which was rampant in Japan at the time and that became a trademark of many young writers of the day. As noted in the preface, Ranpo tells us his introverted personality stemmed from his love of imaginary worlds. He would spend hours on end daydreaming alone in his room.

In 1912, after losing the family business seemingly overnight, his father took Ranpo and the last of the family’s money to Korea in an attempt to purchase land suitable for development. After Ranpo’s father spent one fruitless month searching, Ranpo decided he would rather attend university in Japan. His father gave him traveling expenses, and the son returned alone to Japan where he proceeded straight to Yokohama. Relatives there arranged for him to work as a live-in apprentice at a print shop. Ranpo commuted to Waseda University where he began the preparatory courses required to enter the Economics Department.

His family’s financial reversals meant that he had to work his way through school. Because he had neither the time nor money to buy and read the mystery fiction which captivated him, Ranpo did not discover translations of the works of Edgar Allan Poe and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle until his second year of university schooling when he was 21 years old. He read their stories voraciously and compiled a notebook of commentaries on their works. Indeed, Ranpo was so taken with Poe’s stories that in 1923 he adopted as a pen name for his maiden work an approximation of the pronunciation of Edgar Allan Poe in Japanese.
However, at the time he was earning his degree in economics from Waseda in 1916, he still had no intention of becoming a writer. His family’s financial hardships had persuaded him that he would be best suited for a stable profession which would provide a steady income. Upon graduation a friend of the family with connections at the Osaka Board of Trade was able to secure a position for the young graduate. But Ranpo quit the job before a year had passed. Accustomed to a life of time alone unencumbered by a fixed schedule, Ranpo admitted to being unable to adjust to the daily routine and the constant presence of others. During the six years between his job at the Osaka Board of Trade and the publication of his first novel, Ranpo worked at a variety of jobs including a lawyer’s assistant, cosmetics delivery man, shipyard employee and noodle vendor. Such jobs would be unnecessary after the publication of his maiden work Ni-sen dôka (“The Two-sen Copper Coin”) in the literary magazine Shin Seinen in 1923, however, earned Ranpo a great deal of critical acclaim.

At the time, there were a number of magazines of popular literature (taishū bungaku) which targeted adolescent and young adult males as their readership. To attract young male readers, these magazines often featured tales of adventure, ghost stories and tales of the bizarre (kaiki shôsetsu). Shin Seinen (“New Youth”) was one such publication which was particularly successful over its lifetime at introducing promising young authors to an eager audience. In the thirty years of its existence, (January, 1920 - July, 1950), Shin Seinen sales never surpassed 50,000 issues in any one year, but it was important in providing a venue for young artists. Such writers as Inagaki Taruhô, Tani Jôji, Yumeno Kyûsaku and Koga Saburô were among those whose works were published.

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in the early days of the magazine. Over the next seventeen years Ranpo published twenty 
works of fiction in this magazine alone, including the three stories to be treated in this 
study.

Initially, young men in rural communities were the intended audience of the 
magazine. However, Morishita Usan, the first editor, began to include translations of 
foreign -- often English or French, occasionally American -- mystery fiction which had 
the unanticipated but welcome result of attracting the interest of readers in metropolitan 
areas.\footnote{Unno Hiroshi. "Shin Seinen to toshi bungaku no keifu." Bungaku. "Tokushû = Taishû bungaku." May, May, 1980. p. 42.} This was a period in which a great number of people were leaving the countryside 
to relocate to the cities. The increasing urban population resulted in a rise in the crime 
rate which stimulated not only the number of people potentially effected by crime but 
also the number of people interested in reading about crime. As frightening as the crimes 
were, there was nonetheless an appetite among city dwellers for the gruesome details of 
m Murders, robberies and other violent acts as we can see when we look at newspaper 
columns of the Taishô and early Shôwa eras. Unlike the dry tone of the "Police Blotter" 
in some current papers, columns devoted to crimes contained more sensational accounts 
of the deeds.\footnote{Kawamoto Saburô, ed. Modan toshi bungaku, dai nana kan -- hanzai toshi. Tokyo, Heibonsha. 1990} Ranpo wrote stories aimed at satisfying the curiosity of the segment of the 
populace which read such columns regularly.

The popular literature movement of the Taishô-Shôwa eras reflected both the 
demographics and the belief that literature should be accessible to a broad readership. 
Critic Ikeda Hiroshi proposes that the involvement of the reader in the story was a 
specific objective of Japanese authors writing in all popular genres -- historical fiction,
romances, humor, adventure tales, etc. -- during the Taishô period. Ikeda argues that unlike naturalist works which usually appealed to a relatively limited audience who were familiar with the details of the authors' personal lives as represented in their stories, authors of popular literature treated subjects intended to satisfy the reader in a way which considered the entertainment of the reader one of its primary objectives. In order to heighten reader interest, many popular works contained a generous amount of the bizarre, the thrilling or sexual content and were dubbed ero/guro/nansensu pieces because of the erotic, grotesque and nonsensical qualities that they embodied.

Ikeda points to the pivotal role Shin Seinen played in the popular literature movement as it not only encouraged writers working for the magazine to adopt the approach in their own work, but it also sponsored contests intended to solicit manuscripts from as yet undiscovered writers. Ikeda argues that such contests were the magazine’s attempt to provide writers of a generation still too young to be recognized by prominent journals such as Chûô Kôron and Shinchô an opportunity to participate directly with literature.

In particular, Ikeda argues that the atmosphere of inclusiveness initiated by Shin Seinen was particularly important in inspiring the tremendous boom among mystery fiction at a time when there were no preeminent writers in the field. He argues that the following characteristics are implicit in the very nature of the tantei shôsetsu: the author’s conscious assumption of an independent reader and active participation by the reader. The process of solving the puzzles and riddles which constituted the crux of the story in

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works of this genre involves what Ikeda calls “the reader’s activism” (*dokusha no sekkyokusei*).  

As Ikeda suggests, Ranpo intended his fiction to elicit the reader’s active participation in the solution of the mystery. He expected the reader to take more than a passing interest in the ratiocination involved in the solution of a crime because he has taken great pains to describe the crime scene in the most detailed way. Take, for example, the extraordinary detail in “Ichimai no kippu,” (“A Single Ticket,” *Shin Seinen*, 1923) or “Nanimono,” (“Who?,” *Jiji Shinpō*, 1929). Such vivid depiction is often found in stories of this genre, but what sets Ranpo apart is his ability to guide the reader’s eye to a scene in much the same way that a movie director guides a camera. The strong visual nature of Ranpo’s fiction and the importance of visual perception in the three works under consideration in this study will be discussed later.

As previously mentioned, Japanese literary critics make a distinction between mystery fiction and tales of the bizarre. Although both terms seem fairly self explanatory, and we have already discussed the correlation with *ero/guro/nansensu* fiction, let us take a moment to review the history of the mystery genre in Japan. A wide range of categories have developed -- the “hard-boiled” (*haado boirudo*) novel modeled after the gritty works of Raymond Chandler and the deviant fiction (*henkaku tantei shôsetsu*) which depict the crime from the criminal’s perspective. But this was not always the case.

In the Asian tradition, mystery fiction has its origins in Chinese tales of legal

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7 Ibid, p. 64
magistrates who traveled the land hearing the complaints of peasants. The magistrate had to act as investigator, legal counsel to both parties in the case, as well as judge and jury. The formula for such stories was predetermined. Upon entering a village where a case awaited, the magistrate heard the complaints of both parties and conducted his investigation by interviewing witnesses in a make-shift courtroom. After hearing evidence, the magistrate pronounced a verdict on the spot.

During the heyday of mystery fiction in the Taishô era, Japanese mystery fiction, like its Chinese predecessor, witnessed the establishment of a formula. Takakuwa Noriko outlines the seven characteristics Ranpo deemed essential to the tantei shôsetsu (1935):

1) There must be a mystery of some kind. Often a crime is involved, but this need not be the case.

2) The mystery must be at least somewhat difficult to solve. Readers particularly enjoy the moment at which the solution to the mystery is revealed.

3) The mystery must be solved by the end of the story. While it is not inconceivable that a mystery story may not offer a solution, it can only be judged as incomplete.

4) The mystery story must be solved using a degree of logic. Both logic originating in scientific data and logic based on common sense are acceptable. The logic used must provide proof which leads to the solution of the mystery.

5) There must be considerable "distance" between the presentation of the mystery and its solution.

6) The route to the solution of the mystery must be the focus of the story.

7) Mystery stories are a form of literature. The author must take care to balance
the mystery and the methods with which it has been concealed with literary craftsmanship so that no single aspect is unduly emphasized. Mystery fiction is the product of science and the arts.  

In addition to the elements mentioned above, mystery fiction of this period also adopted stylistic conventions such as stock characters -- the master sleuth, the beautiful young damsel in distress and the wealthy businessman who is invariably murdered, gatherings at which a number of suspects are present, the use of scientific methods to evaluate evidence, and atmospheric turmoil which foretells impending doom ("It was a dark and stormy night").

The development of this formula naturally led to parodies by writers who realized that readers would recognize the conventions of the genre in works of humor. Take, for example, Tokugawa Musei’s (1894-1971) humorous parody of the mystery genre, Obetai buru buru jiken ("The Case of the Cold Shakes," Shin Seinen) in 1927.  

The wife of a professor rushes to his study after hearing him scream to find her husband gasping, eyes bulging. His final cryptic words are "O, obe, obetai, buru buru." The meaning is unclear, as is the cause of death. Neither the police detectives nor a famous private investigator are immediately able to determine whether the professor died of natural causes or of foul play. They question various witnesses and develop a variety of theories, but finally the renowned detective Rokusha Ieie discovers the killer’s identity.  

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9 Note: The translation of the title is an approximation of the original. The nature of the onomatopoeic play on the words buru buru (to shiver) and obetai (mispronunciation of “cold”) in the original makes an equally humorous rendering nearly impossible.

10 Rokusha Ieie -- Written with the characters for "six car," Rokusha is a play on Sherlock (sharoku). The character used to write the "ie" of "Ieie" is the character for "house." Thus, two houses equal two homes (Holmes).
confession, the killer tells that his father had been a master calligrapher who suffered by
the spread of English usage in Japan. Seeing English on a movie screen had caused him
to want to kill the man who had written the subtitles as a means of avenging his father.
The killer learned that the professor had written the English for the subtitles. Knowing of
the professor’s weak heart and his fear of cold konyaku, a gelatinous root starch, he
plotted to drag a piece of konyaku over the professor’s head to induce a heart attack.\textsuperscript{11}

Tokugawa’s parody is instructive because parody exaggerates and highlights the
stock elements of the mystery fiction formula. A puzzling occurrence may or may not
involve a crime. The police conduct the investigation under the assumption that there has
been a crime, and this leads them to a series of suspects. After questioning many
suspects, the true killer is discovered and he confesses at last. The killer discloses the
shocking motive for the crime and the chilling details of its execution. By the end of the
story, the detective has learned the truth by combining his knowledge of scientific
principles and human nature to reach a logical conclusion.

By contrast, tales of the bizarre are less formulaic in plot and circumstances
because there is no prerequisite of a crime in such stories.\textsuperscript{12} Instead, the author attempts
to leave the reader with a sense of shock or horror at the story’s climax. Unlike mystery
fiction which presumes to operate under the accepted laws of science, tales of the bizarre
operate on no such assumption. Thus, one is more likely to encounter supernatural
phenomenon -- ghosts, apparitions, monsters -- in tales of the bizarre than in mystery
fiction. Yet it is essential that there be a sufficient air of normalcy about the story to lull

\textsuperscript{12} The Japanese term \textit{kaiki} means “strange, outrageous.” The translation of \textit{kaiki shosetsu} used in this
the reader into a comfortable feeling which can later be shattered by the startling details of the tale.

In the case of Japan, tales of the bizarre draw on an extensive body of myths, legends and folklore that dates back to the Kojiki (712), setsuwa literature and Edo period ghost tales. Suffice it to say that the theme of ghosts, demons and apparitions in twentieth-century tales of the bizarre draw on this tradition. Nonetheless, modern tales of the bizarre are not merely ghost stories created to send an exhilarating chill up the reader’s spine.

As Susan J. Napier points out in her study of what she terms “the fantastic” in modern Japanese literature, there are numerous theories as to the popularity of this genre. Perhaps the most obvious explanation is the genre’s ability to provide a necessary vehicle by which readers can eschew the hard facts of daily living and escape to a realm where “wish fulfillment” is the primary concern.\textsuperscript{13} Napier also cites the theory of Tzvetan Todorov who argues that

\begin{quote}
“...the fantastic is a limited genre marked by a moment of hesitation on the part of the reader, and often the characters, as to how to explain a particular event or occurrence which appears to be impossible.”\textsuperscript{14}
\end{quote}

Upon witnessing such an event, the characters ascertain one of two facts to be true: either the event actually occurs and the characters inhabit a supernatural world, or a rational explanation eliminates this possibility (i.e. hallucination, trick) and the characters find themselves in their original reality. For Todorov, it is the moment of hesitation before the revelation of the truth which contains the element of the fantastic.

Perhaps the most insightful of the theories Napier explicates is that of Rosemary Jackson who states that the fantastic is a "paradoxical genre" which seeks to resolve the very "uncertainties" on which it is based within the framework of the narrative. Jackson argues that it is the unending quest for resolution of that which can not be resolved that creates the energy necessary to propel the genre indefinitely.\(^{15}\)

In the Taishô and early Shôwa eras when modern mystery fiction was developing in Japan, elements of mystery fiction and tales of the bizarre often appear to commingle. For this reason, in this study I will not attempt to establish a distinction between mystery fiction and tales of the bizarre, although this issue occupies scholars in Japan. Analysis of Ranpo’s fiction will show elements of both genres side by side in his work, and it is the view of this thesis that the key element is the alteration of perception common to both.

Of course, mystery fiction and tales of the bizarre were popular for a variety of reasons. First, both genres allowed the reader to participate vicariously in dangerous, socially unacceptable acts such as murder, theft and robbery without fear of repercussion. The darker side of the human spirit has its fascination, but it goes without saying that there is a substantial difference between committing a murder, for example, and enjoying a murder mystery. Second, novels often portrayed graphic sexual content but it was in such a way that the author could not be accused of condoning the activities. Lewdness or aberrant sexual behavior could be excused as an essential component of the misdeed in

\(^{14}\) Ibid. p. 7 N.B. Many critics consider Todorov’s definition “limiting” because relatively few works are able to maintain this suspense throughout the entire narrative.

\(^{15}\) Ibid. p. 8
the story, thereby exonerating the author of any culpability. Third, the violence depicted in stories belonging to these genres represents the chaos of the period’s tumultuous social order, yet it does not assign blame to any one faction of the government or society. Against the backdrop of rising ultra-nationalism and extensive migration to the cities, the proliferation of mystery fiction and tales of the bizarre reflect the confusion which permeated Japanese society of the Taishō period. Finally, the works of these genres represent the search for truth on a scale greater than the search for a thief or murderer in a single robbery or homicide. In particular, mystery fiction is able to encapsulate the quest for truth into an attractive package as the genre presents and resolves a problem in a relatively short period of time.

As argued in the preface, Ranpo was an important writer in the modernist movement. Let us take a moment to discuss some of the modernist aspects of his prose. One important modernist technique he employs is that of the kōkei (“enlightened vision” or “illuminated perception”). In opposition to the fūkei (“background” or “landscape”), which may be understood as those quotidian things of which we are aware every day, the kōkei allows those who view it to penetrate the veil covering this world and glimpse into a world of imagination beyond that which we readily perceive. Kōkei in Ranpo are often powerfully visual, and they are often developed in highly lyrical passages. These moments of “illuminated perception” argue that the imagination is another form of visual perception which challenge standard notions of vision by showing that there exist levels of observation which people do not use on a regular basis. Moreover, the modernist approach to the “illuminated spectacle” as a form of altered perception arises in response
to the naturalist novel’s preference for being “glued to reality” (genjitsu mitchaku) and the landscape of the everyday.

Similar to the notion of kōkei is the theme of other worlds as represented in Ranpo’s fiction. The reference to “other worlds” does not refer to distant planets as modern readers of fantasy or science fiction might assume. Rather, the term refers to realities the imagination one can conjure up when provided the proper stimulus. These other worlds represent alternate methods of observing the world as we know it.

Just as enlightened visions allow the viewer to see beyond the bounds of the world, one may use other methods to take a quick glimpse of realities at variance from our own. Dreams and visions often serve as a means of seeing into other worlds. The relaxed consciousness of sleep allows the human mind to explore the possibilities of fantasy, imagine unthinkable realities and travel to distant horizons. As we will see later in this study, a voyage through the alternate world of the mind can be liberating.

The idea of “the double” (the doppelgänger) was another technique modernists used to suggest the possibility of a varied reality. The doppelgänger is either multiple personae (not always just two) in one character, or the literary manifestation of the author’s persona in one or more characters of the novel.16 According to Robert Rogers, the double may manifest itself in a number of forms. The doppelgänger may appear as a composite of the best or worst characteristics of more than one individual and may be a direct opposite of a character or the author in every respect. Or the double may be a

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duplicate representation of another character or the author.17 Ranpo uses the double to suggest that all is not always as it seems.

Other modernist elements of Ranpo are his fascination with the foreign and a cosmopolitan lifestyle. Although Japanese were fully aware of the gadgetry, clothing and customs imported from Europe and America after the opening of the country in the mid-nineteenth century, the inclusion of "newfangled" devices in modernist works served to alter the public's perception of these objects. In the hands of the modernists, devices such as binoculars, cars, pistols and gramophones ceased to seem "foreign." The characters of the works almost always have a sophisticated understanding of the operation of the items. Although such items were relatively new to Japan, the familiarity of the characters with gadgets from abroad demonstrates that the hardware of modernity loses some of its foreignness in Japanese modernist prose.

Just as foreign objects were relatively new to mass culture in the Taisho period, the urban setting too was a new frontier to be explored for the many emigrants leaving the countryside for their first encounter with the city. A major metropolitan area such as Osaka or Tokyo could have been as foreign to someone from the more removed areas of Japan. Ranpo himself was from a relatively isolated area on the Japan Sea. It is easy to see why he was so enamored with the exoticism -- both foreign and domestic -- of Tokyo. Ranpo was particularly fascinated with Asakusa and the sideshows and street vendors which surrounded the twelve-storey tower, or Ryo'unkaku. Asakusa which was then the heart of Tokyo, was a magical place for him that dissolved the bounds between this world and the fantasy world he loved.

17 Rogers, Robert. A Psychoanalytic Study of the Double in Literature. Detroit, Wayne State University
Finally, a modernist stylistic trait of Ranpo’s is the garrulous style (jōzetsutai) of his prose. Any given sentence is quite lengthy; it weaves in parenthetical remarks and subordinate clauses modifying lengthy noun phrases which the author has assembled in such a way that the prose prepares the reader to have his perception (of grammar) altered. Although this style might initially seem confounding to the non-native reader, in the original Japanese, the effect is akin to listening to a story being narrated by a witness.18 Let us turn our attention now to the prose fiction itself and analyze how its modernist traits and the concept of altered perception are treated in Ranpo’s works.

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18 While a literal translation of such extensive passages might be possible on occasion, it is not advisable. The resulting English would be far too convoluted for even the most patient reader to penetrate.
CHAPTER 3

IMOMUSHI: ANALYSIS

"Imomushi" ("The Caterpillar") was originally published in the January, 1929 edition of Shin Seinen. It is an excellent example of Ranpo's liberal use of erotic and grotesque (ero-guro) elements employed by modernist writers of the period in an effort to shock the reader into seeing a less traditional view on the world. Imomushi is noteworthy for its insight into the effects of isolation on the human psyche, its ero/guro elements and its suggestion of the existence of worlds beyond that which most of us perceive everyday.

As the story opens, Tokiko is leaving the main house of General Washio's small country estate where she has been visiting with the women of the house. The retired general is her husband's former superior officer. She makes every effort to visit the main house when the general is out because something about his trite praise of what he refers to as her "unfailing virtue and devotion" makes her uneasy and his gaze makes her feel as if he is accusing her of a despicable evil. These feelings of guilt elicit a powerful physical reaction, causing her to taste the grilled eggplant she detests every time she hears General Washio's words of praise.

Upon entering the small room she shares with her husband on the second floor of a storage building, Tokiko finds her deaf, mute, quadruple-amputee husband Lieutenant
Sunaga pounding his head on the floor. Tokiko brings him a pencil and pad, placing the pencil in his mouth so that he can painstakingly write for her what he wants. His questions as to her whereabouts infuriate her, and she snaps that she has only one place to go -- the Washio's. In this exchange we see the first indication that frustration and loneliness may have placed such strain upon Tokiko that she may not be the paragon of virtue the old general lauds so readily. She confesses to being aware of startling changes within herself.

Sunaga reacts to his wife's anger by staring deep into her eyes as his most emotionally powerful form of rebuke. Yet Tokiko is not moved by the cripple's silent criticism. She recognizes the look in his eyes as a clear indication that their frequent quarrels have escalated even further. Tokiko knows that, when Sunaga has reached this stage, there is only one way to quell his anger. She pounces on him and forces him to have sex with her. Their lovemaking is possible because, despite the terrible damage done to Sunaga's body, he is remarkably well and retains the use of one last appendage. The quadruple amputee initially enjoys his wife's passion, but he is unable to resist when her advances begin to suffocate him. He can only stare into her eyes and attempt to end her rain of passionate kisses by sheer force of will. But Tokiko takes a perverse pleasure in having her way with this helpless man, because she often thinks of him not as a person but as a large, yellow caterpillar, or imomushi in Japanese. She delights in seeing the

\[ ^{1} \text{ERZS, vol. 5, p. 9} \]
\[ ^{2} \text{ERZS, vol. 5, p. 116 Note: The title of this story presents somewhat of a problem in translation. An imomushi is a small green caterpillar. The components of the word translate literally to "potato bug," a term we used in my childhood to refer to the small, gray slugs which could roll themselves into a ball in dangerous situations. Though this term is appropriate to the description of Lieutenant Sunaga, it is not true to the original Japanese. Given the couple's lascivious lifestyle, "Hornworm" was also suggested. I chose to err on the side of being conservative.} \]
agonized expression on his face as he writhes ineffectually beneath her as the weight crushes the breath out of his heaving lungs.

When their passions are spent, Tokiko crouches by Sunaga’s head and watches him as a predator might watch its prey. Unable to sleep, his mind slips off to some place other than the room to which they are confined. Tokiko falls asleep with thoughts of their latest moments of passion swirling through her head along with the sense of power she feels when she causes him pain. For all of Tokiko’s apparent weakness or gentleness, there dwells inside her what Ranpo refers to as a “demon of hair-raising desire” (mi no ke mo yodatsu jōyoku no oni).³

She awakens in the middle of the night from a nightmare to find her husband staring at the ceiling. She is disturbed by the idea that the blank expression on his face might not accurately represent the journey his mind is taking to distant worlds inside his head. Tokiko finds his detachment hard to accept, and after an extended recollection of the day she first saw the disfigured war hero at the veteran’s hospital, she leaps on her husband again and begins smothering him with kisses. The startled invalid goes rigid with surprise and stares at his wife in horror. Tokiko, mistaking his reaction for anger, gouges out his eyes with her thumbs in a fit of rage.

When her anger has subsided, she realizes the extent of his wounds and fetches the local doctor. After the doctor has tended to the invalid, Tokiko spends the next day by Sunaga’s side tracing the letters of the words “FORGIVE ME” on his chest with her finger. Finally, her shame is too much to bear, and she decides she must confess her sin to the people in the main house. In the time it takes her to give a sobbing account of the
events of the previous evening and bring the old general to the detached building to look
after Sunaga, the deaf, sightless husband, who has no arms or legs, has disappeared from
the tiny second-storey room. Tokiko discovers the word yurusu ("forgive") written in
pencil on a pillar near the invalid's bed. She interprets the message to mean that her
husband has forgiven her for her aggressive behavior toward him, sexually and otherwise.
The old man summons the servants who help search the large, overgrown area outside by
lamplight.

As Tokiko and the general search the grounds, they happen upon a large, gray
figure undulating at the very edge of the faint light of their lamp. Rushing to the spot,
they arrive to see the misshapen body of Sunaga plummet into an old, uncovered well. At
that moment, Tokiko sees before her eyes the "enlightened vision" (kôkei) of a caterpillar
dropping off the end of a branch into the darkness of the unknown.

One of the primary themes of this story is the effects of isolation upon the human
psyche. This isolation, though different in origin, has equally injurious effects on the two
main characters. Both husband and wife are effectively separated from the outside world,
he by his physical condition which renders him completely helpless and she by her
obligation to care for her disabled husband. He is confined inside a broken body which is,
in turn confined inside a tiny, six-mat room. Communication of any sort is laborious.
Without hands or even feet with which to grasp a pen or brush, he can only write by
clamping his mouth about a pencil and scribbling nearly illegible katakana symbols on a
pad held by his wife. The printed word is inaccessible to him as damage to his brain has

3 ERZS, vol. 5 p.9.
left his mind dulled. In addition, as a fierce soldier, he had never been given to literary pursuits. Now that shrapnel has left him somewhat brain damaged, he is unable to appreciate anything written, including the newspaper article describing his heroic acts which earned him a medal from the government.

Tokiko is as isolated as her husband. Though in theory she retains the freedom to move about, her duty as a wife binds her to him inextricably. For three years she has borne the burden of caring for a man who is, by her own estimation, not quite human anymore. Her husband’s hideous appearance has effectively alienated not only neighbors and friends but also family members, who dread not only the lieutenant’s scars and the withered stumps which remain of his limbs but also Tokiko’s requests for money. Thus, Tokiko finds herself cut off from substantial human contact save the occasional chat with the Washio women in the main house. Even when she does go to spend a few hours with them, she returns to her husband who is angry at her for having been left alone for an extended period of time.

Initially it may appear that Sunaga’s dependence upon his wife is not reciprocated. As a matter of fact, Tokiko has found that he is a suitable object for satisfying both her sexual desires and her cruel penchant for tormenting the weak. Each is pitifully dependent upon the other for whatever emotional sustenance they can extract from their shattered lives.

The degree to which her husband has suffered is clear. Yet Ranpo’s detailed descriptions of the thoughts and feelings which motivate Tokiko show that she too has suffered. The reduction of their relationship to such an atavistic level brings out deeply
suppressed tendencies in her. She grows to relish the power she wields so completely over her broken husband. Ranpo portrays the conflicting emotions within her quite clearly. She is compelled by her sense of duty, or at least her fear of censure by society, to care for her husband. Yet she finds herself not only instigating their violent lovemaking but also continuing to force herself on him despite the pangs of guilt she feels at taking advantage of a helpless victim. The reader is privy to such feelings of remorse as they manifest themselves in the form of Tokiko’s heightened awareness of her physical appearance early in the story. She confesses to feeling as if others must be aware of her body odor, and that the old general reciting his litany of praise for her and her husband must notice how plump she has become. She often refers to a demon of licentiousness which has “built a nest” (su o kuratte) inside her.\(^4\) It becomes a metaphor for those urges which cause Tokiko’s lascivious oppression of her husband.

Just as Tokiko has only the vaguest notion of what her husband is thinking or feeling, Ranpo discloses no more to the reader than Tokiko herself knows about Sunaga’s psyche. By allowing the reader no more access to the wounded soldier’s feelings or thoughts than Tokiko herself, Ranpo effectively places the reader in the small, six-mat room which is the soldier’s world. Like Tokiko herself, the reader too can only speculate as to what might be happening inside the mind of Sunaga. The physical world of Sunaga is necessarily limited to the space inside their room, but Tokiko fears that his mind is nonetheless free, however damaged it might have been by the shell fragments. She fears that in his freedom mentally he roams at will, traveling through the space and time of this world or even going so far as to create his own realities.

\(^4\) ERZS, vol. 5, p. 9.
Tokiko recognizes that as long as his mind is free, her control over her husband is limited to his physical self. His eyes remain his last window of communication and they are the last vestige of humanity in the twisted face atop his shattered body. They are his last means of psychological communication with Tokiko. His expressive eyes speak to her in ways that his words no longer can. They tell her that a core of humanity still exists inside his body which reminds her of nothing more than a yellow caterpillar. As long as the eyes remain, she can not make her husband her toy, her “top” (koma) she can use to satisfy her licentious desires. Looking into his eyes, Tokiko believes she can read his thoughts and what she believes she sees there ultimately drives her to take his eyes from him in hopes of making him completely her own.

Tokiko’s control of her husband’s corporeal self is complete, but when she wakes to see him staring blankly at the ceiling, she realizes that she does not have the same power over his psychological self. Tokiko fears his mental freedom, a freedom which she herself does not possess because she is rooted in the reality of their situation by the demands her invalid husband places on her. Ironically, it is the able-bodied Tokiko who is confined to the six-mat room because she does not possess her crippled husband’s mental ability to enter the world of imagination.

Sunaga’s suicide at the story’s climax causes an enlightened vision (kokei) to appear in Tokiko’s mind’s eye. The vision of a caterpillar falling helplessly off the tip of a branch into total darkness leaps unbidden to her mind, providing a revealing glimpse of her true feelings for her husband. The vivid image invoked in the passage can leave no doubt that the earlier reference to Sunaga as a “large yellow caterpillar” (“oki na kiiro

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5 ERZS, vol. 5 p. 13. Koma is used on this page in the phrase “niku goma,” “toy top of flesh.”
"imomushi") is not just a metaphor. This vision demonstrates that Tokiko thought of her husband as less than human. He was nothing more than a toy for her to use at her whim or an animal she kept. Thinking of him in this way, it was all too easy for her to torment him and ultimately stand by as he threw himself into the oblivion they both craved for him.

The final kokei is representative of the visual quality of Ranpo’s prose. Much as a final, still scene in a movie is intended to leave a strong impression on the viewer, the enlightened vision of Sunaga falling into the darkness has a profound effect on both Tokiko and the reader. It leaves a definite sense of sugomi ("eeriness") in the reader and causes one to wonder how Tokiko will lead the rest of her life knowing that she drove her husband to suicide.

It is clear that imomushi exhibits many excellent characteristics of ero-guro (erotic-grotesque) fiction. Ranpo gives detailed descriptions of the scarred face, misshapen stumps and disfigured body of Sunaga with the intention of eliciting an emotional response from the reader which approximates what Ranpo believes one might feel by actually being in the presence of one so mangled. The descriptions of the frenetic sex between Tokiko and Sunaga are meant to shock and arouse the reader. Inspiring such visceral reactions in the reader is an attempt to elicit emotional involvement in the story. Ranpo used such imagery to startle the reader by exposing what lies beneath the polite veneer of society. By dispelling the initial supposition of Tokiko’s virtue in such a startling way, Ranpo suggests that beneath the veneer of every human relationship there reside feelings and practices which would startle the dispassionate observer.

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6 ERZS, vol. 5 p. 13
Furthermore, even if the case of Tokiko and Sunaga may be extreme, everybody hides certain aspects of themselves from others.

Altered perception as depicted by Ranpo in *Imomushi* proves to be a liberating, illuminating experience. For Sunaga, his imagination allows him to alter his perception of the physical world in which he is trapped. Escaping to his own reality seems to be his sole means of coping with his awful situation. Tokiko’s final *kôkei*, a form of altered perception, gives the reader a telling glimpse of her real self and her actual feelings toward her husband. It allows the reader to see what only Tokiko can see, that is, her own thoughts played out on the movie screen of her mind. Sunaga’s altered perception provides a means of avoiding the reality which haunts him. Tokiko’s altered perception provides the opportunity to confront the depths of her self.
CHAPTER 4

OSHIE TO TABI SURU OTOKO: ANALYSIS

Oshie to tabi suru otoko ("The Man Traveling With the Brocade Portrait"), another of Ranpo’s great *kaiki shôsetsu*, is an excellent example of Ranpo’s modernism at work in the construction of alternate realities, its use of a layered or framed narrative (i.e., story-within-a-story narration or *gekichû geki*), and a fascination with cosmopolitan settings and things new or foreign (i.e., non-Japanese). Like *Imomushi*, *kôkei* and other visual phenomena play a major role in the narrative.

According to Ranpo, this story almost was not published. The idea for the story originated after a trip in 1927 to Uozu to see the mirages there. At the time, Ranpo was in the midst of a two-year hiatus, during which he traveled extensively outside of Tokyo. Yokomizo Seishi, the editor of *Shin Seinen*, had followed Ranpo to the Ôsugi Hotel in Nagoya to convince him to forego his travels and return to writing. Ranpo told Yokomizo of a story he had written based on his trip to Uozu, but he confessed that he was so dissatisfied with the original draft that he had thrown it into the trash in the hotel bathroom. Yokomizo rescued the manuscript and returned it to the author. Ranpo later revised the piece and submitted it for publication under its current title. Despite the lack of acclaim for the work at the time of its publication, Ranpo wrote that it is his most
faultless work. In recent years as Ranpo’s works have gained more critical attention, this piece has been hailed as one of the author’s masterpieces.

Oshie begins with the narrator boarding a train at Uozu on the Japan Sea bound for Tokyo after traveling to Uozu with the express purpose of seeing the mirages which are visible over the bay there. It is twilight, and he boards a railway car to find only one other passenger already in the car. The other passenger is a tall, thin old man wearing a black suit who carries a picture wrapped in black velvet. The narrator is intrigued by the old man and the care with which he handles the frame. Eventually he works up the courage to approach him.

The old man proceeds to tell the tale of the two people in the picture -- an old man and a beautiful young woman. In 1895, while he was still a schoolboy, the old man and his older brother used to enjoy surveying the city of Tokyo from the top of the twelve-storey tower (Ryo’unkaku) and visiting the various side shows in Asakusa. His brother fell into an extended period of depression, the cause of which none of his family could fathom. Every day, even in such a melancholy state, the brother would leave their parents’ house as if going to work and stay away until night. Determined to discover the nature of his brother’s malaise, the boy surreptitiously follows him one morning to learn that his brother has been going to Asakusa. The boy follows his brother through the arcade of freaks, acrobats and picture shows to the twelve-storey tower. Seeing him disappear inside the entrance, the boy pays the admission fee and begins to climb the

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2 The picture is an oshie. The background of an oshie is a painted scene. The human figures are made by
stairs to the top of the tower. There he finds his brother standing at the edge and peering down at the stalls below with an old pair of binoculars. The boy approaches and unintentionally, startles the brother by calling to him from behind. His brother whirls around with a crazed look on his face, but he relaxes when he sees his younger brother. The boy explains the family is worried and begs his brother to tell him why he has changed so over the past month. The older brother finally reveals his secret.

A month earlier, he had come to the top of the tower to study with his foreign-made binoculars the crowds in the grounds at the base of the tower. From out of the masses, he had spied the face of a woman who was so beautiful as to make him think she was not of this world. He lowered the glasses from his eyes for a moment, but when he attempted to find her amidst the crowds a second time, he could not. Thus, every day for the past month, he had returned to the tower to spend the day peering through the binoculars in search of the girl. Having revealed the source of his obsession to his brother, he returned to his search. Suddenly, he finds the object of his affection, and dragging his brother along, he races down the steps of the tower.

The two brothers rush to the place where he had seen the girl but there is no sign of her. They become separated in their search of the grounds, but when the boy returns to the original starting point of their search, he finds his brother bent over, riveted to a peephole of what was called a nozoki karakuriya.\textsuperscript{3} His brother tells him that the girl they are seeking is not alive but is a brocade figure in one of the scenes. Nonetheless, the

\textsuperscript{3} Such stalls presented a series of pictures -- in this case oshie -- which illustrated popular folk tales. Patrons looked through a hole in the front wall of the stall at the picture beyond which was illuminated
young man can not give up his love for her, and he conceives a method to finally be with her. He tells his younger brother to look at him through the large lenses of the binoculars. As the boy watches through the lenses, his brother's form is reduced gradually by the magical binoculars and he disappears into the twilight behind him. When the boy goes to the picture show stall and asks the proprietor to show the scene from the story depicting the green-grocer's daughter Oshichi and the acolyte Kichizo after whom she longs, there -- just as the boy suspected -- the boy sees his brother has replaced Kichizo in the picture and the brother now stands happily beside the beautiful girl.

The old man on the train goes on to explain that, although the girl in the oshie does not age, his brother has grown quite old inside the picture frame. The purpose of his trip today is to show the pair of lovers in the picture how much Tokyo has changed over the years, or to give them a "honeymoon" of sorts. Soon after finishing his story, the old man disembarks at a small, remote town where he says he will spend the night with relatives. He takes the frame containing his brother and his brother's bride and disappears into the night.

That altered perception is essential to the story is clear from the opening lines of the work as the narrator questions if the story he is about to relate is his own dream or an hallucination. As an alternative to either of these choices, he states that it is not his sanity to be called into question, however it is the man he met on the train who must be crazy. The narrator admits he cannot convince himself or others he was even in Uozu. Not only

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by lantern. This stall relies on sunlight to illuminate the pictures as it has no awning covering the area in which the oshie are presented.
does he have no physical proof that he was ever there, but the atmosphere of the town and the story he hears on his return trip have left him questioning his own memories.

Mention of the mirage at Uozu is the first indication that visual perception will play a major role in the story. The mirage at Uozu resembles the dragon king’s palace floating inside a huge open clam shell amidst air bubbles rising through the water. Despite the fact that the narrator knows the image is merely the result of certain atmospheric conditions, he admits to having been captivated by the vision. Air and water vapor form a lens which filters light to create an image much the same way a lens creates an image. An incredible vision appears in the air due to a trick of the atmosphere.

Similarly, the binoculars the old man carries perform a fantastic feat. When the smaller end of the lenses is held to the eyes, the binoculars function normally, magnifying the size of distant objects. However, peering through the larger end of the binoculars causes whatever is viewed to disappear into the world of the brocade portrait, as in the case of the old man’s brother.

The origin of his interest in lenses is described by Ranpo in an essay entitled “Renzu no shikōsho” (“A Proclivity Toward Lenses”) first published in 1937. In this essay, he relates his first encounter with the powers of a lens. During his final year of middle school, Ranpo was depressed because he had found some astronomy books in his father’s study. Reading them had convinced the boy of his relative insignificance in the grand scheme of the universe. He shut himself in an upstairs room. He closed the shoji and the shutters of the room in an attempt to block out all light so that he might feed his depression with the darkness it craved. But a ray of sunlight penetrated the defenses of
the room, carrying with it shadows cast by the leaves of the tree outside. The beam happened to strike a three-inch wide magnifying lens his father used for inspecting machinery. The reflection created on the ceiling what Ranpo first took to be a ghost of immense proportions. As the image danced about the ceiling in tandem with the motion of the leaves on the tree outside the window, Ranpo realized it was not a ghost, but a trick played by the light.4

In the same essay, Ranpo tells that he bought a small telescope for his children because they had reached the age when they could appreciate such pursuits. He admits unabashedly that the purchase probably excited him more than his children. He also recounts the joy he felt in buying a small home movie camera and experimenting with it. Ranpo was obviously intrigued by the sense of sight. Yet beyond this, he challenged alternative perspectives. Refracting light by means of a lens was not merely a scientific process for Ranpo. Nor was using a movie camera merely a method of recording events. The act of looking through a device which enhanced one’s optical abilities took on metaphysical implications. The passage of light through a lens was a process of transformation for Ranpo who saw the passage of light through a lens as being tantamount to the creation of a new world. The lens somehow alters the essence of the image. In Oshie Ranpo expanded on the idea that optical devices could somehow transform reality in capturing and processing an image by causing it to reappear in a different medium. An old pair of binoculars bought by the old man’s brother at an obscure curio shop in Yokohama’s Chinatown prove to be the means by which his brother is transported into the world of the brocade portrait. Having seen the power of the

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4 ERZS, vol. 17, p. 49-51
binoculars, the old man himself holds no small degree of distrust for the artifact which once belonged to a foreign ship's captain. The old binoculars have the power to convert people into figures made of cloth as demonstrated by the transformation his brother undergoes.

Altered perception is necessary to see the true nature of the figures in their framed world. Looking through the small lenses of the binoculars creates an image for the viewer wholly different from that seen with the naked eye. What to the unaided eye appears to be only finely wrought cloth figures, comes alive in the lenses of the eerie binoculars. Perhaps it stands to reason that a world wholly unlike our own requires a somewhat different method of observation. That the essences of the two worlds -- the one within the portrait and the one in which the narrator exists -- are completely different is made clear by the fact that the old man's brother continues to age after entering the framed world. His bride remains forever young, however for she is a creation of human hands. While she is animate within the frame, she will not age because she was intended to dwell within the world of the portrait. A transformation must, then, alter only shape and substance, but not the essence of whatever is viewed through the "wrong" end of the mysterious binoculars. This is consistent with Ranpo's feelings about the magical function of lenses.

Oshie is a haunting story peopled by characters who are as numinous as the background against which the story is set. In particular, the old man is a mysterious figure. The reader never learns his name, where he lives or even where he boarded the
train. The scholar Sukegawa Noriyoshi argues that the old man is not really who he says he is. Instead he is merely an extension of the mirage the narrator has traveled to see. In other words, he is a portion of the mirage which has detached itself from the larger image, boarded a train and traveled far from the bay where the mirage appears. As evidence of this, Sukegawa cites the similarities between the color of the mirages and the man’s suit -- both are jet black, as well as the manner in which the old man disappears into the darkness after leaving the train much the same way that the brother is purported to have slipped into the darkness just before he entered the world of the frame. Sukegawa suggests that there really is no “older brother.” On the contrary, he suggests the old man is, in fact, the same person seen in the frame.\(^5\) I disagree with Sukegawa on this point as it does not seem to be consistent with the circumstances Ranpo has established in the story. The man in the painting can not be in two places at the same time, that is, both holding the picture and appearing on its surface. The narrator’s assessment that the two figures bear a remarkable resemblance to each other is not necessarily compelling evidence of a single persona having multiple physical manifestations.

Like the figures made of cloth piled in layers, the narrative structure of *Oshie* also consists of an elaborate series of layers carefully designed to focus the attention of the reader upon the center of the story -- the couple in the brocade portrait. Sukegawa calls this structure *ireko* (nested boxes), referring to the manner in which each layer fits neatly

inside the other. The unnamed first-person narrator begins the narrative by stating that the tale is his recollection of a story told to him on his way home from Uozu. He tells of meeting a strange old man on the train. From this point, most of the narrative is delivered not by the narrator but in the voice of the old man who relates what he calls “the story of the people in the portrait.” Ranpo adds an additional layer to the narrative structure when it becomes clear that the space inside the frame -- the space which is at the center of this story -- is yet another world apart from this one. Just as the focus gradually closes in on the portrait as the story progresses, the focus also recedes, with watakushi the narrator describing the old man disappearing into the fog to bring an end to the story.

When one considers that this all takes place within the structure of a short story crafted by an author, we are made to realize that yet another layer of narrative distancing is being introduced. In total, there are no fewer than four levels of narration, or framing, at work in this piece.

Such “framing” is one of Ranpo’s more effective devices. Frames represent windows into alternate realities in his work. In Oshie frames appear again in the twelve-story tower in Asakusa. The old man tells of chasing his brother up the winding stairway of the tower. On the way up he sees the eerie oil paintings of fiercely charging Japanese soldiers on some foreign battlefield. The paintings have deliberately been hung opposite windows in order to catch the bright light from outside the tower. The starkly lit colors of the gruesome scenes seem to leap from the canvas in the dim stairwell, giving the impression that the action they depict is not at all a static representation of a moment in time, but a kokei, a fluid vision into an alternate reality.

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6 Ibid., p 113
The narrator describes another “enlightened vision.” He relates his impressions upon looking at the oshie on the train through the binoculars while the lenses are still out of focus. He likens it to the impression one gets sitting in a boat watching a pearl diver rise from the depths. At the greatest depth, her naked body is only vaguely recognizable as it undulates with the currents of water and makes her appear to be a part of the sea grasses. As she rises to the surface, however, her form gradually takes shape until she breaks the surface in a sudden burst of clarity.

The old man describes yet another kôkei he witnessed. When he arrives at the top of the tower to find his brother at the edge, he witnesses a spectacular sight. At precisely the moment the older brother turns upon hearing his name called, a mass of multi-colored balloons rises behind his brother, and the balloons float upward into the bright blue sky. The boy initially is frightened by this occurrence, but he then realizes that a balloon vendor has carelessly let loose his wares. Upon realizing the origin of the spectacle, the boy is able to appreciate the rare beauty of the scene. The incident is even more important when one realizes that soon after the balloons float off the older brother finds the woman he has been seeking. In this instance the kôkei serves as a harbinger of good fortune. In both instances, the visions represent occurrences witnessed in this world which seem out of place because of their rarity, and this fills the witness with a feeling of awe. They are lyrical vignettes which blend well with the rest of the narrative in this tale of the bizarre.

Ranpo chooses the stalls and sideshows of Asakusa to comprise the backdrop for most of the story. His interest in the cosmopolitan atmosphere of this bustling section of
the city is a modernist trait in his work. He was particularly fond of the Asakusa district for its carnival-like atmosphere. According to his description, he and friends often went there to watch the acrobats, ride the merry-go-round and stare at the strange people in the freak shows. They sought out those exhibits which induced an unconscious physical reaction they called nejire (twist, turn). Today, we would equate their reaction with the effect of seeing something hideous or shocking which causes the viewer to cringe and turn away.\(^7\) Ranpo’s imagination doubtless thrived on the bizarre stimuli he encountered in Asakusa as the story plays a prominent role in many of his works.

Ranpo’s fascination with altered perspectives and devices which can enhance the viewer’s perception of the visual world is central to Oshie. As we have seen above, the methods of altering perception may be man-made or natural. The resulting visions may be harbingers of good fortune or insights into the reality beyond the veil which separates the readily visible world from the world of the imagination.

\(^7\) ERZS, vol. 16, pp. 21-25
CHAPTER 5

“INJŬ:” ANALYSIS

Regarded by many Japanese literary critics as a ground-breaking piece of mystery fiction, Injŭ (“The Dark Beast”) first appeared in Shin Seinen from August to October of 1928. Among the notable aspects of this piece are the prominent role of the doppelgänger, the multiple plot twists designed to keep the reader off balance, and Ranpo’s self-parody in the form of allusions to many other of his previous works and inclusion of many of his personal traits in those of his characters.

Injŭ is a deductive mystery story (honkaku tantei shôsetsu) in the most traditional sense. The story is narrated by Samukawa, a writer of mystery fiction who explains at the outset that the events he is about to relate could be written up into a good story someday, but for now he will only record them as notes in a diary. He opines that there are two types of mystery writers. The first kind write tales which are more like confessions told by a criminal and focus on the psychological aberrances of the criminal. The other type of writer traces the detective’s path down a trail of clues to its logical conclusion and shows more interest in the process of solving the crime than in the crime itself. Samukawa states that he is a member of the latter group while the famous author Oe Shundei belongs to the former.¹

¹ Note: Oe Shundei is a fictional character created by Ranpo.
Samukawa is visited by a beautiful young woman, Oyamada Shizuko. She begs for Samukawa's help, saying that she has received threatening letters from a former lover who has become a famous writer of bizarre mystery fiction. The jilted ex-lover is none other than the infamous Oe Shundei, but Shizuko first became acquainted with him when he still went by his family name, Hirata Ichirô. Shundei is jealous because Shizuko rejected his increasingly amorous advances and left him. She finally married a wealthy businessman, Oyamada Rokurô, and believed that she had successfully kept her earlier affair with the unstable Shundei hidden from her husband. Because Shundei is a recluse who refuses to disclose his whereabouts even to his publishers, tracking him down will prove to be no mean feat, but Samukawa is quite stricken by the beautiful Shizuko. He pledges to do his utmost to expose Shundei.

As for the distressing letters Shizuko mentioned, the most disturbing was the first in which Shundei gives a detailed description of her actions one night when she thought she was in the house alone. He mentions the book she had read, how long it took her to undress, what she wore and other frighteningly accurate details that he could have known only had he been in the house. Samukawa forms the theory that Shundei must be copying a trick from one of his own stories -- Yaneura no yugi ("Attic Pastimes") -- in which a madman kills a fellow boarder at a boarding house by dropping poison into his mouth through a knothole in the ceiling of the man's room.

A few days later, the dead body of Shizuko's husband is found floating naked in the Sumida River with multiple stab wounds in the back. Through a complicated series of discoveries which involve a pair of gloves given to a driver by Shizuko's husband and a button from these gloves found in the attic of the house by Samukawa when he
investigates to determine if Shundei had been there, the detective forms his hypothesis concerning the true identity of Shundei. Samukawa remembers seeing welts at the base of Shizuko’s neck at their first meeting. He believes that Shizuko’s husband had assumed the role of Shundei and sent the letters to her as an extension of a sadomasochistic game he was forcing her to play. Spying on his wife from a crack in the attic flooring had served to heighten his sense of sexual excitement. Samukawa believes that Oyamada Rokuro suffered his critical wounds while climbing up the outside of the house to enter the attic. He theorizes that Oyamada fell onto jagged shards of glass imbedded atop the garden wall.

After informing the police and Shizuko of his findings, Shizuko is relieved to learn Shundei will no longer threaten her. Samukawa’s attraction to Shizuko has not waned during the course of his investigations. On the contrary, it has increased. When he has assured himself that his feelings are reciprocated, he rents a house that they use as a site for their assignations, and Shizuko introduces Samukawa to the world of sadomasochism. At first, Samukawa believes that this habit is a remnant of her seven years with her husband who taught her to love to use the whip. And Samukawa himself grows to enjoy the kinky diversions from his life as a writer. Yet as it turns out, it is Shizuko who initially had the penchant for violent sex, not her husband.

Samukawa does not see Shizuko for several days. This prompts her to send him a telegram begging to see him. When they finally meet, Samukawa reveals to her that he has finally figured out the identity of Oe Shundei. Shizuko listens in dumbfounded silence as Samukawa explains how he has come to realize that it is actually she who has assumed the role of the famous author. In fact, from the very beginning, Oe Shundei was
merely a pen name under which Shizuko had written mysteries in order to pass the time while her husband was abroad for two years on business. There never was a Hirata Ichiro. Nor was there ever was a mysterious voyeur in the attic. And there never were any threatening letters. Everything was the product of Shizuko’s sharp mind and devious imagination.

After divulging the results of his investigation to Shizuko, Samukawa leaves. The last we see of Shizuko is her sitting alone in the room they had used for their rendezvous. The following day Samukawa reads in the paper that her body has washed up on the river bank at the same spot at which her husband was found. Samukawa wonders if exposing Shizuko’s deeds drove her to take her own life. Or have his unfounded accusations caused the woman who loved him to kill herself to avoid embarrassment? The question remains unanswered, but Samukawa resolves to search all over Japan, if not the world, to learn the truth about the people behind the names Oe Shundei and Hirata Ichirô -- if, in fact, they ever existed.

Not only did readers buy the issues of Shin Seinen in which Inju was serialized in unprecedented numbers, the story also received a great deal of critical acclaim from noted authors. The issue in which the final installment of the novel appeared was so popular that it was reprinted twice to meet the demands of readers eager to learn the conclusion of the story. Ranpo himself later wrote he felt a great deal of the story’s success was due to editor Yokomizo Seishi’s decision to use the final installment of Injû as the cover story for the issue in which it appeared.²

by popular authors to elicit interest in coming issues, but Yokomizo relied on the
tremendous popularity of Injû to induce readers to buy the final issue. Yokomizo’s
decision stemmed from his confidence that the work would prove to be a singularly
innovative piece of mystery fiction as well as an immensely satisfying experience for the
reader because of its original plot twists and what he called the tale’s “shocking secret.”
Nonetheless, there were more than a few critics who were quick to point out the work’s
imperfections. These will be treated later in this chapter.

The most prominent modernist feature of Injû, and for that matter the most
shocking feature overall, is the adoption of multiple personae by Shizuko and the broader
theme of the deceptive nature of surface appearances. At their initial meeting, Samukawa
is struck by Shizuko’s beauty, refinement and her unabashed fondness for his mystery
fiction. He can not help but feel pity for her as she relates how she has been stalked by
Shundei/Hirata. As the story progresses Samukawa learns more about the case, yet he
still looks on Shizuko in a most favorable light, choosing not only to lay the blame for her
sado-masochistic fetish on her deceased husband but also to believe that it was the
husband who had assumed the identity of Shundei/Hirata. It is only with the greatest
reluctance that Samukawa accepts the idea that Shizuko created the personae of
Shundei/Hirata. Samukawa’s lust for Shizuko acts as a lens which filters out all her
negative characteristics, leaving him to see only the truth he wanted to believe.

Similarly, Shizuko was adept at deception. She deceives the reading public for
two years by creating the persona of a mysterious male author while keeping her own
relationship to the fictitious person secret. This situation becomes problematic only when

her husband returns from abroad, but, rather than give up her secret life as a writer, she kills him and manufactures a third identity which she masterfully relates to both her actual self as Shizuko and her manufactured identity as Shundei. She manipulates the police and Samukawa so that the other two personae, which she has them believe are embodied in one fictitious writer, are the target of the police investigation. All the while, however, in a brilliant “sleight-of-hand” (tejina), which Ranpo loved, she has played three roles: vindictive ex-lover, famous novelist, and innocent victim.

Shizuko and the personae she manufactures are excellent examples of the modernist concept of the doppelgänger. Shundei/Hirata are a composite of all that society does not allow Shizuko to be. In her male personae, she publishes widely, she commits murder and schemes to escape detection for some time. Shizuko would never be allowed to do any of these things as the female Shizuko, but the surreptitious assumption of new identities affords her the opportunity to do what she could not as herself.

Ranpo himself has a doppelgänger in this tale in the form of Shundei and Samukawa. In the narrative, the layering of Shundei/Hirata clearly is meant to parody the author. Critic Suzuki Sadami states that Injū is the sum of Ranpo’s works to date in themes, plots and interests. The titles of Shundei’s novels are parodies of Ranpo’s. For example, Ranpo’s novel D-zaka no satsujin jiken appears as Shundei’s B-zaka no satsujin, Ranpo’s Yaneura no sanposha as Shundei’s Yaneura no yūgi and Ranpo’s Panoramato kidan is transformed into Shundei’s Panorama kuni.4 Ranpo also attributes many of his own personality traits to Shundei, including his reclusive nature, his habit of

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4 Suzuki Sadami, “Injū ron.” Kokubungaku kaishaku to kannshō -- tokushū Edogawa Ranpo no miryoku --
eating, working and reading while lying in his futon, his penchant for changing
apartments frequently and his role as the creator of the modern Japanese mystery novel.\footnote{Nakajima, Nihon suiri shōsetsu shi -- dai nikan, p. 233.}

Suzuki goes on to say that the themes present in Injū also occur in other works by
Ranpo. A murdering wife appears in Osei tojo; sado-masochism proves to be the
shocking cause of murder in D-zaka no satusjin jiken; competition between two writers
turns to crime in Kūki otoko and Ranpo’s escapist fascination with the atmosphere of
Asakusa appears in both Injū and Oshie to tabi suru otoko.\footnote{Suzuki, “Injū ron.” p. 96.}

Suzuki also cites a study in which Otsuki Kenji discusses the similarity present in
the birth names and pen names of Ranpo and Shundei. Compare Ranpo’s birth name
(Hirai Tarō) with Shundei’s alleged name (Hirata Ichirō) and one sees the play on the
characters used in the surnames and personal names. Such similarity extends to the pen
names. “Edogawa Ranpo” and “Oe Shundei” share the “e” in “Edo” and “Oe.” In
addition, if one considers the name of the narrator (Samukawa), one can see yet another
layer of Ranpo’s textual persona in the use of the “kawa” character from “Edogawa.”\footnote{Otsuki Kenji in Suzuki Sadami, “Injū ron.” p. 96.}

As with the other works discussed in this study, there is a great deal of ero/guro
content in this story as well. The grisly death of Oyamada Rokurō by impalement on
shards of glass and the appearance of the resulting wounds are described in great detail.
Although societal norms of the day would not allow graphic descriptions of sado-
masochistic sex, there can be no doubt as to what Shizuko and Samukawa are doing
during their liaison.\footnote{Note: The cover of the issue of Shin Seinen in which the final installment of this story appeared depicted a scene from the story in which a man holding a whip stands over a naked woman lying
46}
that Shundei was spying on Shizuko as she undressed lends an element of voyeurism to
the work.

Though this work has many strengths, it received a fair amount of criticism at the
time of its publication for being “contrived.” The final chapter of Samukawa’s diary
entry is full of his own uncertainty as to the veracity of his ratiocination. In creating such
an ending, one can assume it was another of the author’s attempts to call into question the
nature of reality. But the overall effect is to make the novel seem, in the words of
Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke, “muddied.” Hirabayashi argues that he is not referring to
Ranpo’s stylistic qualities which are arguably quite complex. Rather, he is referring to
the author’s excessive manipulation of the “tricks” or twists (Japanese: torikku) central to
the narrative, twists which leave the reader with the impression that the story is not unlike
that of a woman who has applied so much makeup as to make herself unattractive. He
further states the reader does not willingly follow the author through the procession of
radically different theories surrounding the case but is dragged through it by the author.9

While tortuous plot twists are common in works of this genre and quite
entertaining if used judiciously, there is merit to Hirabayashi’s assessment that stories
with unresolved endings leave the reader of mystery fiction feeling unsatisfied,
wondering if the writer was not writing the story to challenge himself rather than to
entertain the reader. He goes on to say that not only is the inconclusive ending frustrating
for the reader, but it is also easier on the writer as it does not require a commitment to any

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one position concerning the story.\textsuperscript{10} Considering Ranpo’s own criteria for mystery fiction listed earlier, one wonders what prompted him to leave the ending so vague. Though Ranpo compiled the list of criteria after \textit{Inju} was published, it is appropriate to subject his published works to these criteria to determine whether they match his own standards.

In \textit{Inju} Ranpo contradicts at least the third of his own guidelines, as well as the last which stipulates that mystery fiction balance science and the arts. As the narrator himself is left without any resolution of the situation at the story’s conclusion, the reader too cannot draw any conclusions based on the work’s thematic commentary on the deceptive nature of appearances. On the contrary, the lack of resolution detracts from the integrity of the story. One could also argue that Ranpo fails to follow his own guideline with respect to the balance between the literary characteristics of the work and the tricks used to conceal the truth behind the identity of Shundei/Hirata. As Hirabayashi’s comments cited earlier show, Ranpo leaves the impression that the author has been testing his own mastery of plot manipulation in creating this story, rather than writing a work of literature which both entertains the reader and carries a broader message. This impression originates in the author’s excessive attention to the development of the “tricks” of this work. Following the narrator through his process of ratiocination engages the reader. However, the multiple theories Samukawa develops along his path to solving the mystery leave the reader struggling to keep pace.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, p30.
Injū is an excellent example of Ranpo’s fascination with sleight of hand as it relates to his concepts of the value of altered perception. The work suggests that “lenses” are not limited to mechanical devices. Emotions and preconceptions can act as filters for information which allow us to perceive the world as we would like it to be. Shizuko’s manipulation of Samukawa is aided by his infatuation for her. His stubborn refusal to accept what logic dictates must be true allows Shizuko to perpetuate her doppelgänger charade.
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to provide an introduction to the literature of Edogawa Ranpo and demonstrate the role altered perception plays in his works by analyzing three of his most prominent stories. We have also discussed the modernist traits in his works, including enlightened visions, the use of visual phenomena such as dreams or mirages to suggest alternate worlds or realities, a fascination for the foreign “objet” and a cosmopolitan atmosphere and the adoption of multiple personae by an individual (doppelgänger).

For Ranpo, altered perception involved allowing the imagination the freedom to see what emotion, logic or preconceptions might normally not permit the mind to process. Altered perception can serve many purposes: it can be liberating, as it was for Sunaga; or mystifying as in the case of the narrator in Oshie; or revealing as it was for Samukawa and Tokiko. In all these cases, however, altered perception allowed the characters to perceive something about their world that previously went unnoticed or to understand something about themselves that they had not known.

Ranpo’s literature is successful in its attempt to entertain a broad audience. He was a master at describing the shocking and grotesque so as to make the reader shiver and want to read more. His plots are original and the twists which form the basis of the
denouement are highly inventive. In particular, the three stories of this study are both
good entertainment and good literature.
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APPENDIX A

TRANSLATION: IMOMUSHI

BY EDOGAWA RANPO

Translated by Michael Tangeman

Leaving the main house in the gathering darkness and crossing the wide-open, overgrown yard left to the thriving weeds, Tokiko headed toward the detached building in which she and her husband lived. She remembered with a truly strange sensation the same old trite words of praise that the owner of the house, a major general in the reserves, had just used. Hearing these words always left her with an unpleasant taste in her mouth similar to that which came from taking a slippery bite of the grilled eggplant she detested so.

"It goes without saying that the loyalty of Lieutenant Sunaga (Ironically, even now the major general called the shattered soldier by his previous military rank despite the fact that the soldier could not be identified as a human being.) is the pride of our army but that, well, everyone far and wide knows that. As for your fidelity, why, you've cared for that boy all these months over the past three years, completely abandoning your own
wishes and without showing the least sign of resentment. People say that’s what is expected of a wife, well, I don’t think you can say just that. I truly admire you. I think yours is one of the heartwarming stories of today’s world. But the story is still a long way from over. Don’t change your mind. Take good care of him.”

Every time old Major General Washio saw Tokiko, he did not fail to recite the litany of praise for the wounded Lieutenant Sunaga, his former junior officer and now dependent. As for the Lieutenant’s wife, it was as if the general felt compelled to include her in his words of praise. Since listening to him left Tokiko with the taste of grilled eggplant in her mouth, she did her best to avoid meeting her husband’s old general by calling when he was out. Yet, she could not spend all day face to face with a silent invalid so she slipped out of the apartment and went to the main house to talk with his wife or daughter.

Naturally, at first, the general’s words were appropriate to her spirit of self-sacrifice and her rare sense of virtue. These words even held secret feelings of proud satisfaction and tickled Tokiko’s heart, but of late she had not been given to taking these compliments so unthinkingly as she had in the past. But more than this, the words of praise had taken on frightening implications. When the words were spoken, she felt as if she were being condemned by someone standing right in front of her pointing a finger at
her, "You're hiding behind the good name of virtue and committing this hideous evil!"

She became so scared that it made the hairs on the base of her neck stand on end.

Upon reflection, though she had to confess, it was a drastic change - a change of
such a degree as to make one wonder if human feelings can change so much. At first,
a naive and shy, she was quite literally the virtuous wife, but now, however she might
appear to the outside world, in her heart of hearts a hair-raising demon of desire had built
its nest. She had been transformed to such a degree that she came to think of the pathetic
freak of her husband (a man so pitifully maimed that the word "cripple" was
insufficient) as something that existed to satisfy her desires. This man who had formerly
been a brave and loyal bulwark of the nation was now something akin to a beast she kept,
or perhaps some kind of tool.

From where had this licentious demon come? Was it from the workings of the
mysterious appeal of that lump of yellow flesh, (Truly, her husband Lieutenant Sunaga
was nothing but a single lump of yellow flesh, shaped like some sort of deformed top. He
was something which served merely to arouse her desires.) Or was it the doings of an
indefinable power that welled from within her 30-year old body? Doubtless, it was a
combination of both of these forces.

Whenever she was addressed by old man Washio, Tokiko could not help but feel
extremely guilty about her body. Lately it had become plump and oily, and her body odor which must surely have been noticeable to others.

“Well, I wonder how I could have let myself go so horribly, get this fat like a complete fool?”

At the same time, her face took on an unattractive wan cast. It was always the case that the old general, in lining up his words of praise, looked on her plump, oily appearance with a touch of doubt. It was probably this look more than anything else which had caused Tokiko to harbor a decided dislike for the old general.

Since this was the countryside, the main house and the outlying buildings were somewhat separated from each other. The space was a pathless, overgrown field where green garden snakes rustled through the grass every now and again. The mouth of the old well lay overgrown in weeds, waiting menacingly for those who took even the slightest misstep. A mere semblance of a hedgerow surrounded the large grounds while outside it paddies and fields continued on unabated until they reached the distant forest which belonged to the shrine dedicated to the war god Hachiman. The two-story detached building which was their home stood on the grounds, black and stoic against that backdrop.

In the sky, one or two stars had begun to shine. The inside of the apartment would
already be pitch dark. Because her husband did not have the ability to turn on the lights by himself, if she did not turn them on for him, the lump was forced to lay in the dark just fluttering his eyes. He would either be slumped over in the chair or, having slid out of it, rolling around on the tatami mat floor. “Poor thing,” she thought. The frustration, pity and sadness, combined with a touch of sensuality, washed over her and her spine went rigid with terror.

On nearing the building, it appeared to Tokiko that the second floor window glass looked like a pitch-black, gaping mouth. It was as if the window symbolized something. From that mouth she could hear the dull sound of something thumping the tatami mats repeatedly. “Oh, he’s at it again” she thought. She felt so bad for him that tears welled in her eyes. This was her handicapped husband who, laying prone on the floor, instead of pounding with his hands to call for someone like any ordinary person, was compelled by his physical condition to pound his head on the floor over and over. In doing this, he was impatiently calling for Tokiko, his one and only companion.

“I’m coming. You must be hungry.”

Even though Tokiko knew he could no longer hear her, it had become her habit to talk to him nonetheless. As she spoke, she hurried to the kitchen door and climbed the back stairs which were right next to it.
In the small room on the second floor there was the barest semblance of a decorative alcove, in the corner of which was a lamp stand and matches. Just as a mother would speak to a suckling child, Tokiko repeated again and again, "I left you alone too long. I'm sorry." and "I'm here, I'm here. Hush, now. There's nothing I can do in the dark. I'll light the lamp, all right? Just a second. Just a second." While mumbling these phrases to herself, (meaning that she was talking to herself because her husband was deaf and could not hear a word) she lit the lamp and carried it to a place near the desk on one side of the room.

In front of the desk, a futon of Yuzen silk had been tied to a new-fangled, specially designed and patented arm chair, however, the chair was empty. At a spot on the floor far removed from the chair, some sort of strange object was rolling about. Although the thing wore a classic Oshima Meisen kimono, it would be more accurate to say it was wrapped in it, or more precisely, it was like some bundle wrapped in cloth and dumped on the floor. It was a bizarre sight. From one corner of the shroud, a human head poked out. Moving like a cricket, or some odd machine piston, it beat its head on the floor incessantly. The momentum generated by pounding its head on the floor caused the large bundle of cloth to inch across the floor.

"It's nothing to get upset over. What do you want? This?"
Tokiko pantomimed eating rice with chopsticks.

“That’s not it? Well how about this?”

She acted out another gesture. But her mute husband shook his head from side to side and then resumed beating his head on the floor. Shrapnel from a shell had left his whole face damaged beyond recognition. His left earlobe had been completely torn off, leaving nothing more than a small black hole as evidence it had ever existed. A large seam-like scar ran on the diagonal from the area around the mouth on the same left side above the cheek to the area under the eye. An ugly scar crawled across his face from the top of his right ear to his crown. The area about the throat had sunken as if it had been gouged out and neither the nose nor the mouth retained their original shape. In that literally ghoulish face, the only feature even slightly whole and totally different from the ugliness of everything which surrounded it were the eyes. Like those of an innocent child, they were refreshingly round. But just now, they were blinking angrily.

“All right, you have something to say. Wait for me to get it.”

She took a scratch pad and pencil from the desk drawer, had the invalid grasp the pencil in his distorted mouth and held the pad close for him. True, her husband could hardly write with his mouth, but it was even more apparent that he had neither hands or feet to hold a brush.
“do u hate me”

Like the unfortunate wretches who live on the broad thoroughfares of the city, the wrecked man had to use his mouth to write out the characters on the pad his wife held. It took a long time and he was only able to line up the most barely legible of letters.

“Hahaha, you’re mad at me again, aren’t you? No, I don’t hate you. That’s not it.”

Laughing, she shook her head.

But the cripple began stubbornly pounding his head on the floor again. Realizing the meaning of this act, Tokiko once again took the pad and held it near his mouth. The pencil moved uncertainly, spelling out the words

“where were u”

No sooner had she read his question than she cruelly snatched the pencil from his mouth. She wrote “the Washio’s” in the margin and thrust the paper under her husband’s eyes.

“You knew that, right? Is there anyplace else I go?”

The cripple motioned for the pad again and wrote

“3 hrs”

“You’re saying I left you waiting here, all alone for three hours? Sorry,” she said,
looking none too apologetic. She dismissed the issue with a wave of her hands, saying, “I won’t leave again. No, never.”

Though he looked as if he had more to say, her husband necessarily had been incapable of expressing himself adequately. He appeared exhausted from the efforts of writing with a pencil clamped in his mouth and he grew still, letting his head drop. Instead of violent protestations, he stared intently into Tokiko’s face, his eyes deep with meaning.

In instances like these, Tokiko understood there was only one way to improve her husband’s demeanor. Since words could not get through to him, she could not offer him a detailed excuse; and the subtle color of her eyes, which certainly communicated the content of her heart infinitely more eloquently than words ever could, did not reach her somewhat mentally dulled husband. So it was that, always after these strange lover’s quarrels, an impatience with their fate overcame them and they resolved their dispute in the swiftest of manners.

She suddenly squatted over her husband and showered a rain of kisses on his twisted mouth and the wet, shining scars on his face. With this, a look of relief finally appeared in the wrecked man’s eyes. In the area around his twisted mouth a smile surfaced, so ugly that it would make one think he were weeping. As was always her
habit, she did not stop her crazed kisses even though she could not escape his smile. One reason for this was her need to lose herself in the excitement which took her away from their predicament and her husband’s hideous appearance. Another was the strange desire to torment this pathetic cripple who had completely lost his freedom of movement and thereby impose her will on him.

Overwhelmed by her excess of affection, he could hardly breathe. His body shook with pain, the suffering and agony showing on his distorted face. As usual, upon seeing this, Tokiko sensed a certain impatience welling up inside herself.

She struggled with him as if deranged and stripped away the silk cloth. From out of the bundle rolled a lump of flesh of an unknown species.

The story of how he had managed to survive after being so seriously wounded stirred the medical community and was written up in the press as an unprecedented tale of the bizarre. The mangled body of Lieutenant Sunaga, like a doll which had its arms and legs torn off, was so cruelly, disturbingly injured that one felt there was nothing more which could be done to wreck it. Innumerable scars of all sizes shone on his face. Both legs and arms had been all but completely severed, leaving a ghostly apparition of a body which was nothing more than a slightly distended lump of flesh. He was a torso, nothing more than a place where scars remained.
His was a truly cruel situation. Strangely enough, despite the fact that his body was in such a condition, his appetite was good and he maintained his health as best a cripple could. (Old General Washio, saying this was due to Tokiko’s healing ministrations, did not forget to include this fact in his words of praise.) Having no other pleasure -- or was it because of a voracious appetite? -- his belly grew so plump it glistened tautly as if it might burst. This particular physical feature became all the more noticeable because the man was a mere torso.

In every respect, he was a large, yellow caterpillar. Or as Tokiko always described him to herself, he was an extremely strange, deformed toy top of flesh. She felt this way because, on certain occasions, with his hips as the center, using his head and shoulders, he would spin round and round on the mats, just like a top, oddly wiggling the four stubs which were the relics of his arms and legs -- those fleshy protuberances which were just like the legs of a caterpillar. (On the ends of these stumps, like handbags, the skin had been pulled together from all directions and sewn together, creating a deep crease and, in the middle of it all, a deep, eerie cavity.)

Now, laid bare for Tokiko’s benefit, the broken man was not particularly resisting, but as if expecting something, he stared upward. As she squatted by his head, his gaze first fell on her somewhat hard, slight double chin. It then found her eyes -- eyes strangely
narrowed like a beast hunting its prey.

Tokiko was able to read the meaning in his gaze. In times like these, if she were to go one step further, the look would disappear. But, if for example, she were doing needlework near him, there were times when, out of boredom, he would stare fixedly at one point in space as if he were not even there. At these times the depth in the color of his eyes increased, expressing his agony.

This shell of a man who had completely lost all but two of his five senses -- sight and touch remained -- previously had been a blood-and-guts-soldier who, by his very nature, possessed no interest in things like reading. And since his brain had grown addled from the head wound, he was now totally disassociated from the printed word. It was now his fate that, like an animal, he could find no amusement in anything other than corporeal desires. However, even in this monotonous life so wholly like the blackest hell, the military ethics drilled into him when he was whole sometimes grazed through his dulled mind. Made sensitive by the fact that he was now a cripple, his old military ethics and his physical lust battled within his mind, and there was no mistaking the strange agony which resided in his eyes. Or that is how Tokiko interpreted it.

Tokiko did not wholly dislike seeing the agonized expression which surfaced in the eyes of the powerless man. Although she was an awful crybaby, strangely enough,
she possessed a penchant for picking on the weak. The pain of this pathetic freak was an insatiable stimulus for her. Even now, she did not take pity on her husband. On the contrary, she closed in on the overly sensitive and lustful desires of the cripple.

Tokiko suddenly awoke drenched in sweat, having been visited by a nightmare of an unknown nature and wondering if she had raised a terrible cry.

Oil smoke had accumulated on the glass of the lamp by the pillow in an odd pattern and the wick was giving off a sputtering noise. The inside of the room, both the walls and the ceiling, strangely appeared to be bathed in an orange light. The face of her husband sleeping beside her, his scars reflecting the light thrown by the lamp, also glistened with an orange hue. Although there was no reason why he should have heard the scream raised moments before, his eyes popped open, staring straight at the ceiling. Looking at the small clock on the desk, she saw it was just past one o’clock.

Though Tokiko guessed at what had been the cause of her nightmare, soon after waking, she became aware of a certain unpleasantness in her body. Still in a rather sleep-besotted state, she had a strong feeling that something was quite odd before she clearly noticed the unpleasantness. Suddenly, something else -- the vision of their earlier unusual
game -- floated like a specter before her eyes. In that vision, there was a lump of flesh like a living top spinning powerfully. Their bodies were entwined, just as one might see in a medieval depiction of Hell. What manner of horror and ugliness could this be? But more than anything else, like a narcotic, the horror and the ugliness aroused her desires and deadened her nerves, but not once in her thirty years had she ever imagined its power.

"Unnhhhh, unnhhh."

While tightly clutching her own chest, Tokiko gazed at the sleeping figure of her husband, so like a broken doll, as he emitted a sound which was neither an exclamation or a groan.

For the first time she understood the origin of the physical unease she had felt since waking. And, while thinking "Looks like he's a little earlier than usual," she slipped out of bed and went down the stairs.

When she returned to bed and looked at her husband, he remained as before, staring at the ceiling without turning his head in her direction.

"He's thinking again."

The image of this lone man, who had no means of communicating his will apart from the movements of his eyes which now stared unwaveringly at one spot, brought on an eerie sensation in her whenever she witnessed it. Even though she felt his mind had
grown dull, wasn’t it possible that inside the head of such a terrifically disfigured man a completely different world had come into existence -- a world wholly different from the one in which she and those like her lived. To think that he might be roaming through just such a world now shocked her.

Now wide awake, she could not fall asleep. Deep in her head a flame burned hot and a low, repetitive sound arose. Then, an array of wild images floated to the surface and disappeared. Interwoven in those images were the events of three years ago which had changed her life so radically in one fell swoop.

When she received notice that her husband had been wounded and was being sent back to Japan, first she thought, thank goodness he wasn’t killed. She had been the object of envy among the other military wives who remarked how happy she must be. Soon her husband’s brilliant battlefield heroics were written up in the paper with great fanfare. At the same time, she learned that his wounds had been quite extensive, but, of course, she had never imagined they would be like this.

She supposed she would never forget her trip to the veteran’s hospital to see her husband. From the middle of the snow-white sheets the horribly scarred face of her husband had looked at her dully. When she heard the doctor, in words interspersed with difficult medical terminology, explain that because of his wounds her husband was now
deaf, and because of rarely observed damage to the vocal cords, he would not be able to
speak, she found that she could not help herself. As she wiped her already bright-red
eyes and runny nose, she had no idea what sort of terror would await them later.

The doctor was a stern, solemn man and as he said, with government-issue
sympathetic expression, “You mustn’t be startled,” he pulled back the perfectly white
sheets and showed her. Like a ghost from the depths of a nightmare, in the places where
legs and arms should have been, there was nothing but a torso, made round by its
bandages. It was just as if a lifeless bust crafted by a sculptor lay in the bed.

She had felt her head spin in a fit of dizziness as she bent over the foot of the bed.

It was after she was led by doctors and nurses to another room that, wracked with
grief and heedless of the presence of others, she raised a cry and burst into tears.

Stretched out unabashedly on a table which was less than clean, she sobbed for the
longest while.

“It truly is a miracle. Lieutenant Sunaga is not the only patient we have had who
has lost all his limbs, however we were unable to save the lives of the others. It really is
miraculous. His current condition is due to the astounding surgical techniques of the
army doctors and Professor Kitamura. Perhaps there is no other example of its kind in
any military hospital in any country.”
The doctor bent over and spoke into the ear of the wailing Tokiko as if to cheer her up. He repeated one word time and again -- "miracle" -- The word made Tokiko wonder if she was supposed to rejoice or mourn.

It went without saying that Lieutenant Sunaga's brilliant battlefield heroics -- and the miraculous facts of the surgical procedures -- were written up in the papers.

Half a year passed like time spent in a dream. At about the same time that the surviving stump of Lieutenant Sunaga was carried home, accompanied by his superiors and fellow soldiers, he was awarded the Fifth Order of the Golden Kite in compensation for the loss of his four limbs. While Tokiko shed tears as she was nursing the cripple, the world was carrying on in its boisterous celebration of the triumphal return of the troops. From relatives, acquaintances and people of the town the word "honor, honor" came pouring down like rain even on her.

They had scraped by on a meager pension for a while, but the couple came to live in one of General Washio's buildings after Sunaga's battlefield superior had appeared, kindly offering to allow them to stay on his property for free. It was due in part to their moving to the country, but from that point on, there was an abrupt change and their lives grew lonely. Once the fever of the victory subsided, society forgot about this couple. Nobody came around as before to pay sick calls on the wounded soldier. As the days and
months passed, the excitement of the victory, too, subsided, and likewise, the sense of
appreciation for those who had served with distinction in the war faded. Nobody
mentioned anymore the story of Lieutenant Sunaga or other such things.

Be it out of revulsion at the sight of the cripple or fear of being asked for material
support, even her husband’s relatives had almost entirely ceased to set foot in her house.
On her side of the family, her parents were dead and her brothers and sisters were an
unfeeling lot. The pitiful cripple and his virtuous wife wound up all alone in a rural
house, as if cut off and separated from the rest of society. The six-mat room on the
second floor was their whole world. Moreover, one of the two could not hear, could not
speak, and could not stand up. He was like a completely useless clay doll.

He was like a person from a different world, suddenly thrown into this one and
facing a different life. Even after recovering his health, for some time the shattered
soldier lay face up, unmoving and distant. He would lay there between sleep and waking,
regardless of the time of day.

When Tokiko came up with the idea of carrying on a conversation by using a
pencil clutched in his mouth, the first words he wrote down were “paper” and “medal.”

“Paper” meant the clipping from the wartime press article in which his deeds of valor
were written up. Of course, “medal” referred to the Order of the Golden Kite that he had been awarded. When he had regained consciousness, these were the first objects which General Washio placed before his eyes, and the wrecked soldier remembered them well.

He repeatedly wrote the same words and requested the same two items. When Tokiko finally placed them before him, he would gaze at them endlessly. As he read the article over and over, she held it and endured the numbness in her arms, looking on at the utterly satisfied expression on her husband’s face and wondering if it wasn’t all just too ludicrous.

It was only long after she had begun to despise the word “honor” and everything it stood for, that he, too, began to look as if he had grown tired of the word. He ceased to call for the two items as he had before. All that was left was the abnormally powerful physical desire that came as a result of being a cripple. Like a patient recovering from an abdominal disease, his appetite had returned and he required food unceasingly. At times when Tokiko did not respond to his needs, he would transform himself into a large top of flesh and flop about, spinning on the mat as if gone mad.

At first, Tokiko had been frightened, even disgusted, by this display, but as the days and months passed, she, too, slowly grew to become a demon of desires -- lustful desires. It would be suitable to say that this man and woman were unthinking when it
came to their own lives. Now that they were confined to the house in the middle of the
fields and had lost any hope for the future, desire became their whole lives. They were
like two beasts living out their years in a cage.

Because of their circumstances, it was truly natural that Tokiko came to look on
her husband as a large toy she could play with as her heart desired. It was also perfectly
natural that she who had been converted by the shameless behavior of a cripple -- she
who was incredibly strong compared to the average person -- she, too, had been
transformed into an insatiable being to such a degree that she now tormented the cripple.

She wondered if sometimes she were not going crazy. There were times she
shuddered to think of the vexing desire that lurked within her.

That this lone, strangely pathetic tool was not something made of clay or wood.
This tool which could not say a word, could not hear her speak, could not even move
about freely by himself was a living being which felt joy and anger. This tool and its
circumstances became a source of boundless attraction for her. Moreover, the rounded
eyes which were his only organ of expression spoke to her insatiable desires, at one time
appearing very sad and at another very angry. Moreover, no matter how sad he became,
he had no recourse aside from shedding tears. No matter how infuriated he became, he
had not the physical strength to menace her; in the end, unable to resist her overwhelming
power of seduction, he too went tumbling into a hell of strange and unnatural excitement.

To torment this completely helpless living being against its wishes became the source of greatest joy for her.

Only the violently passionate scenes of the past three years appeared inside Tokiko’s clenched eyelids. They came in fragments, flowing ceaselessly in duplicate or even triplicate, only to disappear again. The appearance and disappearance of these fragmented memories in such great cinematic clarity when she closed her eyes was a phenomenon which always occurred when there were extraordinary demands placed upon her body. When these phenomena appeared, to be sure, it was customary that the beast within her would grow even more ferocious and her damaging attacks on the miserable cripple would grow even more severe. She herself was aware of this but, in spite of her own wishes, there was nothing to be done about the ferocity that boiled within her body.

Suddenly, she felt the inside of the room was, like her phantom vision, going dark. It was as if they had been enshrouded in fog. Outside the dream lay another dream, and she sensed that the outer dream was now trying to vanish. That startled her overly-sensitive nerves and the beating of her heart grew more rapid. However, when she stopped to think about it, it was really nothing. Getting out from the bedcovers, she
adjusted the wick on the lamp by the pillow. The shortened wick was almost used up and the light in the lamp was about to go out.

The inside of the room became instantly brighter. However, the fact that the room was still bathed in orange light gave her a somewhat strange feeling. As if she had just remembered something, Tokiko used that ray of light to steal a look at her husband’s sleeping face. He was as before, without the slightest change in position, staring at the same spot on the ceiling.

“So, I wonder how long you’ll be thinking these things over.”

There was something disturbing about the look in his eyes. But more than the look in his eyes, she felt an awful hatred at the sight of the cripple who, because he had nothing to look at, was sunk deeply and purposefully in thought. Again, she felt the itch of the old cruelty that came welling up inside her.

Without warning, she leapt atop his quilt. She suddenly grabbed his shoulders and began shaking him.

Because it was such a startling move, the cripple’s whole body went rigid from the shock. He transfixed her with his powerful glare.

“Are you mad at me? What is it with those eyes?”

Shouting this, Tokiko pounced on her husband. She proceeded with their usual
game, making a grave effort not to meet her husband’s gaze.

“There’s no point in getting mad. You do what I say.”

Even though she had tried every means at her disposal, just this once there was no sign of the usual compromise on the part of the cripple. Was it something he had been thinking of while he had been staring at the ceiling? Had his wife’s blatantly selfish behavior simply touched off his fury? Seeking to pierce her with his gaze, he just stared and stared at Tokiko as if his eyes would leap out of his head.

“What is that look in your eyes?”

Screaming, she thrust both hands at her husband’s eyes. She continued to cry out as if crazed “What is it? What is it?” The abnormal excitement made her go numb. She was virtually unaware of how powerful her grip was.

As if suddenly waking from a dream, she realized that the cripple was writhing beneath her. With amazing strength brought on by something akin to the throes of death, her heavy body was thrown from him despite the fact that he was only a stump. A flow of bright red blood spurt eerily from both of the cripple’s eyes and the whole of his scarred face was flushed crimson like boiled octopus.

At that instant, Tokiko understood everything. In her frenzy, she had mercilessly destroyed her husband’s one remaining window on the outside world.
But she could not say without a doubt that it was the frenzy which had caused the accident. In her heart, she knew it to be true, though. What was most apparent to her was her feeling that the expressive eyes of her husband had rudely prevented the two of them from living the happy-go-lucky lives of beasts. How she hated the idea of what could be called decent intentions and how it occasionally had shown itself. Furthermore, in those eyes was not just something hatefully obtrusive, there was something else -- something eerie and terrifying.

But, no, that was a lie. Had not a different, more horrific idea existed in her heart of hearts? Did she not wish to turn her husband into a real living corpse? Did she not want to transform him completely into a toy top? Aside from the feeling in his torso alone, did she not long to turn him into a living being which had lost completely all its other five senses? Did she not want to satisfy, to its very core, her insatiable cruelty? Within the cripple’s whole body, only the eyes retained any vestige of humanity. Because they remained, she felt as if there was something incomplete. She felt he was not yet her true toy top.

Such thoughts passed through her head in the blink of an eye.

“Aaagghh!”

Thinking he had let out a scream, she left the lump flailing about and dashed
wildly down the stairs, racing barefoot into the darkness. Feeling that she was being
followed by terrible thing from a nightmare, she ran on blindly -- out the back gate,
down the village road to her right --but she was aware her destination was the doctor's
house, three blocks away.

When her cajoling finally succeeded and she came home dragging the doctor, the
stump was thrashing about as violently as before. The village doctor had heard the
rumors of the man, but he had never actually seen him. He was astounded by the freak’s
eeriness, and even though Tokiko explained repeatedly her claim that she had caused
this accident by pure chance, it appeared the doctor was too flabbergasted by her
husband’s condition to hear. Once the doctor had administered a shot to numb the pain
and tended to the wounds, he left in a great hurry.

By the time the patient had finally stopped writhing, dawn gradually broke.

Tears dribbled down as Tokiko rubbed the patient’s chest and kept apologizing.
She said repeatedly, “I’m sorry. I’m sorry.” It appeared the stump had developed a fever
as a result of his wounds. His face was red and swollen. His heart beat furiously.

Tokiko did not leave the side of the shattered man all day. She did not even eat.
Again and again she wrung out and replaced the moist towels she applied to his head and
chest. She mumbled lengthy, seemingly crazed apologies. Using her fingertip, over and
over she wrote out on his chest the words “FORGIVE ME.” In her sadness and consciousness of wrongdoing, she was unaware of the passage of time.

By nightfall, his fever had subsided and his breathing had become easier. Convinced that his mind had returned to its usual state, Tokiko renewed her efforts to communicate with him by painstakingly writing each letter of the words “F-O-R-G-I-V-E-M-E” on his chest and awaited his response. But the lump gave no reply. Even if he had lost his sight, surely there might have been a way for him to reply; he could have nodded his head given her a smile or by some sort of sign answered her message. However, the lump did not move or change its expression. Judging from his breathing, she did not think he was sleeping. She had no idea if he had lost even the faculty to comprehend the letters written on his chest, or was it that he was continuing to maintain his silence out of terrible anger. She did know he was now nothing more than a single piece of warm, limp matter.

While staring at the unspeakable, lifeless lump, she could not help but shake violently all over from a fear that rose out of the depths of her soul and that she had never experienced before in her life.

To be sure, the thing lying there was a living being. It had lungs and a stomach. But it could not see. It could not hear. It could not make its mouth move to utter a
single word. It had no hands with which to grab, and it had no legs with which to stand up. For him this world was static, an unbroken silence, an endless darkness. How many people could have ever imagined such a frightening world? To what can one compare the feelings of someone who lives in that world? Presumably the thing longed to scream at the top of his lungs, to cry out “HELP ME!” It must yearn to see the shape of an object, even if it be only the grayest outline. It must wish to hear the echoes of a sound, regardless of its faintness. It must want to cling to something, to grasp it with all its might. Yet for this thing, all of these acts were utterly impossible.

Suddenly Tokiko screamed out and burst into tears. Sniffling like a child at the unmitigated sorrow of her irreversible crime, she just wanted to see someone, someone outfitted with the figure of a real, regular human being. She left her pathetic husband and set off running for the main Washio house.

Old General Washio listened silently to her long, drawn out confession, a confession that was made difficult to understand because of the way she choked on her sobs. When she was finished, he did not speak for a few moments out of shock but, in astonishment he finally said,

“Anyway, let’s go see what’s happened to Lieutenant Sunaga.”

A lantern was prepared for the old man because it had gotten dark. Sunk in their
thoughts, the two of them crossed the darkened field in silence and arrived at the small building.

“There’s nobody here! What happened?”

Going up the stairs first, the old man had called out in a startled voice.

“No, he’s over in the corner.”

Brushing past the old man, Tokiko went to the place where before her husband had been lying on the quilt.

But something truly bizarre had happened. The quilt lay like a shed skin, empty.

“I...I...”

She stood dazed and fixed to the spot.

The General spoke at last.

“There’s no way anyone so crippled could leave this room. He’s got to be here somewhere.”

The two of them searched every inch of the house, upstairs and downstairs. They did not see any sign of the cripple anywhere, but they discovered something horrible.

“What...? I wonder what this is?”

Tokiko stared at the pillar which was near where the cripple usually slept.

There in pencil, unreadable except without taking great pains to do so, in a hand
that resembled a child’s scribbling, was haltingly written the letters,

“IFORGIV”

The moment that Tokiko read it to mean, “I forgive you,” she instantly knew she had grasped what had happened. The cripple had dragged his lifeless body to the desk where he used his mouth to find the pencil --how excruciating it must have been for him. Then clasping the pencil in his mouth, he had scratched out the letters of his message for her to read.

“He may have killed himself” she said, staring into the old man’s face in terror.

Her mouth trembled, the color having drained from her lips.

The Washios put out an alert, and servants carrying lanterns gathered on the weed lot between the main house and the guest house.

The search began after the grounds were divided and assigned to groups.

Following old man Washio, and relying on the faint light of his swinging lantern, Tokiko walked along feeling a tremendous pounding in her breast. The words IFORGIV” had been written on the pillar. She was sure it had been written in response to her previous tracing of the words “FORGIVE ME” on his chest. He was saying “I will die. But I am not angry with you. Rest assured.”

His magnanimity wounded her spirit all the more. When she considered the fact
that the legless and armless cripple could not have descended the stairs in the normal way, and that he had to have rolled down the stairs falling one step at a time, it made her hair stand on end. Such was her sadness and her terror.

As she walked about, suddenly she happened to think of something else. She whispered softly to the old man.

“‘It’s just ahead, isn’t it? The old well...’”

The old general merely nodded and headed in that direction. In the vast darkness, the light from the lantern did little more than faintly light the space before their feet.

“‘The old well is around here...’”

Mumbling to himself, the old man held the lantern higher, trying to peer as far as possible into the gloom.

Just then, Tokiko stopped in her tracks, as though overcome by some sort of premonition. Pricking up her ears, she heard a faint sound somewhere, like a snake sliding through the grass, or so it seemed.

She and the old man saw it at almost the same time. They both just stood there as if they had been glued to the spot by their terrible fear.

On the edge of the darkness, where the light cast by the lanterns did not wholly illuminate the ground, a jet-black figure was slowly snaking its way through the thriving
weeds. The thing had an eerie reptilian shape and, raising its serpentine neck, it
doggedly faced forward and pressed quietly on its way. Undulating its torso like a wave,
it scratched at the ground as it struggled and used the protuberance-like lumps at the four
corners of its torso to claw its way forward. It appeared to be in a great hurry. But since
it appeared that its body would not obey the commands of its mind, the thing moved, as if
by will alone, inch by inch across the ground.

Soon the rising serpentine neck dropped sharply and disappeared from sight. Just
as the sound it made as it rustled the leaves seemed louder than before, it flipped its body
around to face the opposite direction and, with a slithering sound, it was sucked into the
earth. And then, there was a dull splash which reverberated from the distant bottom of
the earth.

There, hidden in the mouth of the grass, the well gaped wide.

Even though the two of them saw this happen with their own eyes, they stood
there immobile, stunned and lacking the energy to rush to the well.

It was quite strange but, at the confusion of the moment, Tokiko had a ghostly
vision drawn in her mind that in the dark, a lone caterpillar had crawled out onto the
branch of a tree. Upon reaching the tip of the branch, under the weight of its useless body
it had plopped of the end and fallen into black space, into the unknown depths.
APPENDIX B

TRANSLATION: OSHIE TO TABI SURU OTOKO

BY EDOGAWA RANPO

Translated by Michael Tangeman

If this story were not a dream of mine or an hallucination brought on by temporary insanity, then, doubtless that man traveling with the brocade picture was himself insane. But, just as a dream allows us to glimpse other worlds different from our own, or like the lunatic who hears and sees those things which the rest of us cannot, I may have gazed -- if only for an instant -- beyond the field of vision of our world and into a corner of a world outside our own using the bizarre mechanism of the atmosphere for my lens.

I am not sure exactly when it was, but it was a warm, overcast day. On purpose, I had set out to see the mirage at the Uozu seashore and was on my way home. When I tell this story, close friends always interrupt, saying,

“You’ve never even been to Uozu, have you?”

When they put it that way, I am unable to produce evidence that positively shows I ever went to Uozu on a certain day. Maybe it was a dream after all. But I myself have never had a dream before in which the colors the were as rich as that one. Although the scenery within most dreams, like that of a black and white movie, is completely without color, the scene inside the train alone is burned vividly into my memory -- especially the
surface of that gaudy brocade portrait, done predominantly in purples and reds and resembling a snake’s eye. I wonder if there are people whose dreams are movies in color?

This was the first time in my life I had ever seen a mirage. I had been imagining a classical painting in which a beautiful dragon palace floats amidst bubbles of air rising from giant clams. However, upon seeing a genuine mirage, it left me so surprised, I was nearly panic-stricken. Seeing the scene caused me to break into an oily sweat.

A breathless throng of people resembling grains of sand gathered around the row of pine trees on the beach at Uozu, taking in the expanse of sky and sea which filled their vision. I had never seen the sea so quiet, silent as a deaf-mute. This calm, too, was most unexpected for me since I had always thought of the Sea of Japan as terribly rough. The gray sea, without even a single small wave, reminded one of a pond which stretched on endlessly. Just like the Pacific, there was no horizon, just the impression that the sea and sky had melded into the same shade of gray and were enveloped by a haze of indeterminate thickness. At the very moment I thought I was looking at the upper reaches of the haze -- that is, what I took for the sky -- I realized suddenly that I was actually looking at the water as a boat with a large, white sail floated like a ghost through the mist as it went scudding over the surface.

The mirage was like India ink slowly dripped onto the surface of milky white film, ink which penetrated the film slowly and steadily until it became an incredibly large movie projected onto the wide-open sky.
Viewed through the refracting lens of the two skies, the distant forests of the Noto Peninsula looked like a black bug seen through a microscope not yet in focus. It seemed somehow vague and gossly enlarged. Its body seeming to hang over the heads of all the onlookers. It was like a black cloud of a strange shape. But if the existence of the cloud was clearly apparent, the distance between the mirage and the spectators was terribly vague. Like huge cumulonimbus clouds floating on the ocean, or maybe resembling a strangely shaped haze which has advanced to within a foot of his face, the spectator even feels that a speck of cloud has popped onto the surface of the cornea and obscured his vision. The vagueness of distance is what left me with an uneasy, crazed feeling toward the mirage far greater than one might imagine.

The vaguely outlined, giant jet black triangles piled one on top of the other like a pagoda, divided in the blink of an eye and ran sideways like a train cutting across the horizon. When these broke into smaller clouds, they took on the appearance of the tops of a row of Arabian cedars. They appeared never to move, but before I knew it, they had changed into radically different shapes.

If the allure of the mirage was great enough to drive a man mad, then it is very likely that I did not escape their magical power at least until I was inside the train and on the way home. I spent over two hours riveted to one spot enthralled by the bewitching strangeness of the wide-open sky. For over two hours I was so enthralled by the uncanny look to the sky I stood anchored to the spot. There is no question that when I left Uozu that night, and what I experienced that night on the train, was quite unlike any average
occurrence. Perhaps, like a phantom, a mirage steals a person’s spirit, leaving the observer in a condition similar to a temporary state of madness.

I boarded the train bound for Ueno at about six o’clock. I don’t know if it was a strange coincidence or merely a normal occurrence for the trains in that area, but the second-class car in which I sat was as empty as a church save for me and one other passenger who boarded ahead of me and hunkered down on a cushion in the far corner.

The train ran on and on, its monotonous mechanical sounds reverberating over the lonely shore, steep cliffs and sandy bays. A dark, blood-colored sun floated lazily over the depths of the mist as it set over the pond-like sea. A white sail, which appeared to be of abnormally large size scudded through the fog as if moving in a dream. As it was a windless, stiflingly hot day, the windows were open here and there on the train, but even the gentle breeze which sneaked in like a legless ghost could do little to stir the air. The many short tunnels and rows of snow fences broke the endless gray expanse of sky and sea into stripes as we passed.

After passing a desolate precipice, the lamps within the car and the light of the sky appeared to cancel out each other, and darkness closed in on the train. Just at that moment, the only other passenger, the man sitting in the opposite corner, suddenly stood up and placed a large satin cloth on top of the cushion. He took the object which had been placed against the window and put it on the wrapping cloth. As he began to wrap the two feet wide by three feet high object, it gave me a decidedly eerie feeling.

The flat thing was almost certainly a picture in a frame which had been propped against the window facing out as if this action had some special meaning. I could only
believe that he had removed the object which previously had been wrapped in the cloth and intentionally stood it facing outwards. Based on the glimpse I stole when he re-wrapped the frame, the brilliant colors represented on the surface of the picture were strangely vibrant. They were somehow not anything one saw everyday.

I looked at the bearer of the strange package anew. I was surprised to realize that the owner, in keeping with the odd nature of his possession, was even more odd than his package. He was an old-fashioned man of the type that one can only see in the faded pictures from our fathers’ youth: dressed in a black suit with a narrow collar and bent shoulders. Yet the suit was strangely all too appropriate for his height and his long legs, even making him look chic. His face was slender and, aside from his eyes which seemed to burn a little too brightly, he was handsome and well-proportioned. His neatly parted hair shone, black and luxurious, causing me at first glance to think him about forty years old. However, upon closer examination, when I noticed the considerable number of wrinkles on his face he appeared to age twenty years in an instant. When I suddenly became aware of the contrast between his pitch black hair and the maze of wrinkles etched into his white face, I was left with a weird feeling which momentarily took my breath away.

As he finished carefully re-wrapping the frame, he happened to look in my direction just as I was intently observing his actions and our gazes locked. He smiled nervously. Unconsciously, I returned his greeting by nodding my head slightly in his direction.
For the time it took the train to pass through two or three small stations, we sat in our respective corners, and repeated the game of nervously gazing out the windows whenever our eyes happened to meet. Outside it was now completely black. Even if I pushed my face up against the glass of the window to see, there was nothing but darkness except for the occasional running lights of a fishing boat bobbing at a distance out on the ocean. In the endless dark, only our long, narrow car rattled on and on as if it were its own self-contained world. Inside the dimly lit compartment it felt as if all living beings in the whole world had disappeared without a trace, leaving just the two of us behind. No passengers boarded our second-class car at any of the stations and neither the porter nor the conductor ever appeared. Now that I think about it, such things strike me as quite bizarre.

This man who looked both forty and sixty and possessed the demeanor of a Western magician gradually grew more frightening to me. In those cases where there is nothing to dispel it, fear has a way of growing infinitely and overcoming one’s entire being. In the end, the hairs at the base of my neck stood erect with fear and, no longer able to bear it anymore, I suddenly rose and boldly approached the man sitting in the far corner. As detestable and fearsome as he was, I approached him nonetheless.

Without so much as a word, I lowered myself onto the seat directly opposite him. As I drew near, I narrowed my eyes to slits and held my breath as I stared at his very odd white face which was a relief map of wrinkles. I was aware of a certain strange, tumultuous feeling that I myself might be a phantom.
From the time I left my own seat, the man seemed to be welcoming me with his eyes, moreover, as I stared into his face he gestured with his chin at the frame sitting next to him. As if he had been waiting for me, and without an of the usual preliminary niceties, he spoke what he must have considered the most common of greetings.

"Is this what interests you?" His tone was so matter-of-fact that it gave me pause.

"Would you care to take a look at it?" He asked me very politely.

Because I stood there dumbfounded, he repeated the question once more.

"Would you be kind enough to show it to me?"

I was enchanted by his manner and now found myself uttering this odd request despite the fact that I had not left my seat with the intent of looking at the man’s picture.

"I would be delighted. I had been wondering when you would approach me. I was certain you would come over to have a look."

As he spoke, the man -- perhaps it would be more appropriate to say "the old man" -- had deftly undone the large wrapping cloth with his long fingers and propped the frame-like object in the window. This time he turned the frame to face the inside of the car.

I unconsciously closed my eyes upon taking a quick glance at it. To this day I still do not know why I shut my eyes, but I felt an inexplicable, overwhelming urge to do so. I closed them for only a few seconds. When I looked again, I saw a strange vision before me unlike anything I had ever seen before. Yet, I do not have the words at my disposal to describe what exactly was "eerie" about the scene.
As for the painting, the artist’s superb sense of the laws of perspective allowed the viewer to peer at the numerous rooms made to resemble the scenery of a palace from a Kabuki play. A fantastic vision of brand-new matting and a coffered ceiling continued on into the distant depths of the painting, gaudily depicted in tempera paints, especially indigo. In the left foreground, the window of a drawing room was clumsily drawn in heavy black strokes. A writing desk of the same color was positioned before the window in a hand which ignored the proper angles. If I said that the background resembled the style unique to votive picture plaques such as one would find at a shrine, perhaps it would be easier to understand.

Two figures about a foot tall floated against the background of the painting. When I say they appeared to float it is because they were the only portion of the painting represented in layered cloth. The old man with white hair wearing an outdated Western suit made of black velvet sat stiffly at the center (Upon looking at the man with the white hair, strangely enough, I noticed he was a perfect match for the man who carried the painting, even down to the cut of the suit.) His companion was a beautiful, smooth-skinned beauty of seventeen or eighteen who wore a black satin sash over a red long-sleeved kimono in a dappled pattern. She was perched on the old man’s knee, and the two of them looked like they belonged in a love scene from the stage.

It goes without saying that the image of an old man with an amorous young girl was quite strange, but it was not this point that struck me as “eerie.” In contrast to the artless quality of the background, the elaborate craftsmanship of the brocade was startling. White silk had been used to create a feeling of depth and to depict even the
tiniest wrinkles on the face. One by one strands of human hair were woven into the
material as the girl’s hair and coifed just like that of a real person. Doubtless, the hair on
the old man’s head, was genuine, as well, and it had been applied with equal care. The
seams in the suit were correctly cut and sewn and buttons no bigger than grains of millet
were attached in the appropriate places. The swell of the girl’s breasts, the elegantly
sensuous curves of the area about her thighs, the splash of scarlet crepe, the glimpse of
flesh tones, the nails like sea shells that grew from her fingers -- the brocade was all so
meticulously crafted that, were one to look at it through a magnifying glass, one would
see that the craftsman went so far as to include pores and downy hairs.

The only raised brocade work I had ever seen before had been the detailed
representations of actors on battledores. And though there are some quite elaborately
designed battledores, this portrait was so minutely crafted that the others could not
compare. It was probably the creation of a master in the field. But this was not what I
found so “eerie” about the picture.

Consistent with the apparent age of the painting, the tempera paints were flaking
away in places and both the cloth of the girl’s red kimono and the old man’s black velvet
suit had faded to the point that it was hardly its former self. However, despite the fact
that the paint was faded and chipping away, the painting still retained an indescribable,
ominous quality. It was also odd that the painting seemed to glow like a flame that
burned its way into the very depths of the viewer’s eyes. Yet, this is not what was
particularly “eerie” about the picture.
The most bizarre aspect of this picture was the overwhelming impression that the two people were alive.

In the bunraku puppet theater, there are only one, maybe two, moments in any given day’s performances -- and then only for a second -- when the puppet actually appears alive, and it is as if the master has breathed the breath of god into it. The brocade figures on the painting were like puppets which had been affixed to the background instantaneously at the very moment they lived. They appeared to have achieved a state of eternal existence with by being placed in the portrait at the moment they lived before life could escape.

Perhaps he saw my startled expression, but the old man was practically shouting as he said in the most hopeful tone of voice,

“Aaah, I think you are finally getting it!”

As he spoke, he used a key to carefully unlock the black leather case hanging from his shoulder and removed an ancient pair of binoculars which he offered to me.

“Take a look at it through these. No, you’re too close there. It’s rude of me to say this, but would you mind trying from over there? Good. That should be just about right.”

It was a very odd request, but because I was caught up by my own boundless curiosity, I did as the old man asked and left my seat to walk to a spot five or six paces removed from the picture. The old man grasped the frame in both hands and held it up to the electric light in order that I might see better. Looking back on it now, what a bizarre spectacle!
The binoculars looked like a thirty or forty-year-old import. They resembled the binoculars we often saw on the signs at the optician's store when we were children -- binoculars with an irregularly shaped prism. Much like the owner's suit, they had a terribly classic, nostalgic feel about them. The leather casing was worn due to being handled frequently and, in places, the brass backing shone through.

I held the binoculars in my hands going over them for a while in fascination, but presently I lifted the lenses with both hands and peered through them. But suddenly, out of nowhere, the old man gave such a shout that I almost dropped the glasses.

"No! Don't! They're backwards. You mustn't look through them backwards. You mustn't do that."

The old man was as white as a sheet. His eyes were wide open and he was waving his hands. Why is it so awful to look through the binoculars backwards? I could not understand the old man's strange behavior.

"I see...they were backwards."

I did not pay much attention to the old man's odd expression because I was so wrapped up in looking through the binoculars. I turned the binoculars around, quickly put them up to my face and gazed at the people in the brocade picture.

As I focused the binoculars, the two circles of light slowly blended into one and an image which was initially like a vague rainbow gradually grew sharper. The upper half of the girl's torso and her head loomed surprisingly large, filling my entire field of vision -- as if they were the entire world.
It is difficult to convey to the reader the manner in which the image presented itself as I have never witnessed anything like it before or since. Perhaps I can recall a similar feeling. Perhaps the image could be described as resembling the sight of a pearl diver seen from a boat at the moment after she dives into the sea. While she is at the bottom, the diver’s naked body in all respects resembles in every way swaying sea grasses because of the complex undulations of the layers of blue water; her body bending in unnaturally supple postures, its outline out of focus. She looks like a whitish ghost, but as she rises smoothly and quickly, the layers of water begin to lose their dark blue color before her. In the moment her body becomes clearly visible and she pops to the surface, the white ghost of the depths suddenly reveals her true, human form. That is how the girl of the painting to me as I looked through the binoculars. She began to move as a life-size human being.

There, on the opposite side of the lenses of that old-fashioned 19th century prism, existed another world, quite apart from anything we could imagine. In this world the downy soft young girl and the white-haired man in the old-fashioned suit lived out their bizarre lives. I knew it was wrong to spy on them, yet I peered in on that wonderful world as if forced to look by a magician. As I look back on it now, that was the kind of strange, inexplicable feeling I experienced. Nevertheless, I looked on that bizarre world as if possessed.

It was not that the girl was moving, but the overall impression I had of her was drastically different from that which she exuded when viewed with the naked eye. She brimmed with life. Her pale face was slightly flushed with a touch of peach and her heart
beat in her breast (Actually, I even heard it beat.). It seemed to me that she burned with a vitality so hot it seeped through the layers of her kimono.

After drinking in the whole of the girl’s image with the binoculars, I turned the glasses on the happy, white-haired man on whose knee she sat.

The old man too, was alive in the world of the binoculars. He looked happy to have his arm around a young woman who looked forty years his junior, it was strange that the hundreds of wrinkles on his face which filled the lens mysteriously appeared to originate not in happiness but sorrow. It may have been due to the lens making the old man’s face look strangely oversized, like it was only a foot away from me, but the longer I looked at it, the more I felt it was a frighteningly strange visage made up of a combination of fear and bitterness.

As I looked at it, I felt as if I were having a nightmare, and it became unbearable to look through the binoculars anymore. Without thinking, I lowered the binoculars and let my eyes run wildly over my surroundings. I was inside a railway car passing through the lonely night. The picture and the old man who held it were as they had been before. Outside the windows all was pitch black. I heard the monotonous repetition of the train wheels on the track just as before. I felt as if I had awakened from a nightmare.

“If I may be so bold, you have a very odd look on your face.”

The old man stood the picture in its place at the window, sat down and, while he motioned with his hand for me to occupy the seat opposite him, he looked deep into my face.

“Something’s wrong with my head. It’s all fogged up.”
My reply was intended to cover up my embarrassment. Then the old man stooped his shoulders and, fidgeting his long, thin fingers over his knee as if tapping out a code, he thrust his face close to mine. In the lowest of whispers he said,

“They’re alive, aren’t they?”

He bent forward even further as if he had yet another grave message to impart. He looked into my face with those eyes so wide-open and glimmering that I thought he would bore holes in my head.

“Would you care to hear their story?” he whispered.

I thought the swaying of the train and the clatter of the wheels had prevented me from hearing his low voice.

“Did you say ‘their story?’”

“Their story” he answered in a whisper. “However, it is actually the story of only one of them: the white-haired old man.”

“Is it a story from his younger days?” That evening, I, too, was saying uncharacteristically odd things.

“Yes. He was twenty-five at the time.”

“I would be honored if you would share it with me.”

I asked just as one would ask to hear the story of any living person. The wrinkles on the old man’s face danced about in even greater joy.

“Aaah, you will listen, won’t you?”

And then he began his singularly wondrous tale.
"As it was the most notable occurrence of my life, I remember it well. My older brother got like that (he said this pointing at the old man in the picture) on the night of April 27, 1895. At the time my brother and I were still living with our parents in the third chome of Nihonbashi-dori. Our father ran a dry goods store. It was soon after the twelve-story tower had been built in Asakusa. Called the Ryounkan, it was the tallest building in Japan at the time. My brother, he used to love to climb it every day. My brother was one of those people who could not get enough of any new-fangled gadget that came out, especially those from foreign countries. Take these binoculars, for instance. My brother found them in the store front of some strange curio shop in Yokohama’s Chinatown. Apparently they once belonged to the captain of a foreign ship. He told me he paid what would have been for the times quite a tidy sum to get them."

Whenever the old man said "my brother," he would cast a glance in the direction of the old man in the painting or point in that direction in a manner which suggested that the subject of the discussion himself were sitting right there. The old man had confused his actual brother, who existed in his memory, with the white-haired gentleman of the picture and, as a result, he spoke in a way which caused me to feel that a third party was at hand -- that the brocade was alive and listening to his story. Still, it was strange that I did not find this in the least bit odd. In that moment, it was as if we overcame the laws of nature and existed in a different world separated from this one.

"Did you ever climb the twelve-story tower? Aaah, you didn’t! That’s too bad. I wonder just what magician built it? Truly it was a remarkably strange building. The facade was designed by the Italian engineer Barton, you know. Think about it. Asakusa
Park at that time was known for the Human Spider sideshow, the women fencers, acrobats balancing on large balls, tops spinning on fountains and painted scene show booths. The most unusual exhibits were a model of Mount Fuji called “The Maze” and the Hidden Cedars of Yajin. You would have been surprised, my friend, to see that unbelievably tall brick tower jutting up into the sky. At that height -- over ninety feet tall; not quite as long as a city block -- it was incredibly tall, and its octagonal top was pointed like a Chinese hat. One only had to climb a slight rise anywhere in Tokyo to see “the red ghost.”

“As I said, it was the spring of 1895 soon after my brother came into possession of these binoculars. Something happened to my brother. Father used to wonder if he had gone mad. He was very worried about him. As you can imagine, my thoughts, too, I was devoted to my brother and I could not stop fretting about his odd behavior. You see, he ate very little, he never talked to anyone in the house and he would shut himself up in a room when he was home and do nothing but thinking. He grew terribly gaunt, his face took on the gray pall of someone suffering from tuberculosis and his eyes bulged. He did not have the best complexion to begin with, but it was sad to watch it grow paler still by another shade. Nonetheless, even in his weakened state he set off for somewhere everyday without fail, as if he were going off to work, leaving around noon and staying out until dusk. When asked where he was going, he wouldn’t say a word. Mother was quite worried. She used every possible trick to discover the cause of my brother’s depression, but he never revealed the slightest hint. This continued for almost a month.
“One day I followed my brother to find out exactly where he was going because we were all so worried. I did it at our mother’s request, you see. The day was an overcast and unpleasant day exactly like today. My brother left after lunch with the binoculars slung over a shoulder and wearing black velvet western-style clothes which he himself had recently had tailored, which at the time were deemed extremely fashionable. He made his way unsteadily for the horse-drawn tramway on Nihonbashi Street. I followed him so as not to be seen. He waited for a tram bound for Ueno and suddenly leapt aboard when it arrived at the stop. Unlike today, I couldn’t catch the next one and follow him. There weren’t too many trams then, you see. Having no choice, I splurged and used the little money my mother had given me to hire a rickshaw. When it comes to rickshaws, if the runner has any strength at all, it is no great feat to prevent a tram from getting out of sight. That is why I had no problem keeping up with my brother’s tram car.

“When he got off, I left the rickshaw and followed him on foot for some distance. Wouldn’t you know it, he lead me to the Temple of the Goddess of Mercy in Asakusa. He passed through the gates of the guardians, walked straight up the path to the main hall, then moved through the crowd around the sideshow stalls behind the main hall. It was like he was parting waves as he walked. He passed the stone gate of the Twelve-story Tower and, paying the admission fee, he disappeared into an entrance under a sign reading “Ryounkan -- ‘The Cloud Scraper.’” Not even in my wildest dreams, did I believe that my brother was coming to such a place day after day. I was flabbergasted. I was not even twenty at the time, and I had the wild idea in my childish mind that my brother had been bewitched by the red ghost of the tower.
“My father had taken me there once. We had climbed the tower, but I had never been back because I had a strange feeling about the place. But, because my brother was climbing to the top, I had no choice but to climb, staying one dim storey behind my brother. The windows were small and the brick wall very thick, making the tower as cold as a cellar. Because Japan was in the midst of the war with China at the time, oil paintings, which were rare at the time, of the fighting, were hung upon one wall in a seemingly endless string. The Japanese soldiers yelled as they charged, their frightful faces just like wolves'; and using bayonets affixed to their rifles to gouge out the enemies’ innards. The writhing, purple-faced and purple-lipped Chinese troops used both hands to hold back the heavy flow of blood which spurt from their bodies. Decapitated, pigtailed heads flew through the air like balloons.--- Such were the scenes portrayed in these unspeakably garrish blood-drenched paintings gleamed brightly in the dim light that filtered through from the windows. Between the paintings and the windows, the gloomy stone stairs continued to wind endlessly up and up like the shell of a snail.

“At the top of the stairs, were no walls --there was only an octagonal railing which created a walkway with a spectacular view. I finally made my way to the top and suddenly the darkness gave way to bright light, and I was surprised to realize how long I had spent in the darkness to reach the top. The clouds appeared low enough to reach out and touch. Looking out over the city, the roofs of Tokyo resembled trash raked together while the battery at Shinagawa reminded me of landscape stones in a bonsai tray. Enduring the feeling of impending dizziness to hazard a look down, I saw the great hall of
the temple way down at the bottom. The people walking about the sideshow stalls looked like toys and all I could make out were their heads and feet.

"At the top of the tower, about ten sightseers with uncertain looks on their faces huddled together whispering anxiously and looking out at the sea in the direction of Shinagawa. My brother stood alone and apart from the group looking intently through the binoculars at the grounds inside the temple. From behind, my brother in his black velvet suit stood out against the sea of clouds in the whitish, overcast sky because up here there was none of the confusion of the teeming masses below. Even though I recognized the figure as that of my brother, he looked so divine, like the subject from a western oil painting, that I was hesitant to speak to him.

"But remembering my mother's instructions, I knew I could wait no longer. I approached him from behind.

"'What are you looking at?'"

"He spun around in shock. There was an awful expression on his face but said nothing.

"'Mother and Father are really worried about you lately. They don't understand why you take off every day. So this is where you've been coming? Can't you tell me why? Just tell me. We've always been close.'" Fortunately, there was nobody nearby so I pressed my case.

"He didn't say anything for a while. But after repeated requests, he finally gave in and told me the secret he had kept hidden for the past month. However, the source of the anguish within his heart, well, this too was yet another strange affair. My brother said
that a month ago, while he had been looking over the temple grounds with his binoculars from the top of the tower, he caught a glimpse of a girl’s face among the crowd of people. Because the girl was an unbelievable beauty who could not have been of this world, my brother, who had usually been particularly indifferent toward women, had felt himself stirred by the woman in the binoculars and her alone. So overcome was he that a great chill passed over his body.

“At that time, my brother had caught only one glimpse of the girl. In his surprise at seeing such a beauty, he pulled the glasses away from his face. He said he searched the same direction in a dream-like state trying to find her again but, try as he might, she never appeared in his lenses again. You see, even though binoculars make distant objects look close, the objects are actually far away and, in the middle of that crush of people, there was no guarantee that he would find her again just because he found her once before.

“Then he said he could not forget the beautiful girl and, being terribly introverted, he began to suffer from a case of old-fashioned love sickness. Modern people will probably laugh, but people of that period were more genteel. It was an era in which many men fell head over heels in love after only one look at a woman they saw on the street. It goes without saying that my brother had been dragging his weakened, undernourished body to the temple every day as if it were his job, climbing the tower and peering through his binoculars in the vain hope of once again seeing the girl about the grounds. Love is a wondrous phenomenon, isn’t it?

“No sooner had my brother told me his story than he began looking through the binoculars feverishly. I found myself sympathizing with my brother completely.
Although he only had one chance in one thousand, and it was a waste of time, I did not have the heart to tell him to give it up. I was moved to tears by this sad state of affairs.

And then ....aahh, to this day I can never forget that mysteriously beautiful spectacle.

Even though it happened thirty-five or -six years ago, if I close my eyes, it comes back to me. It is so vividly clear that the dream-like colors still come floating back.

"As I said before, all I could see was the sky as I stood behind my brother. My brother's thin, suited figure seemed to waft like something from a painting within the hazy layers of clouds. His body seemed to float in space as the masses of clouds moved by. Suddenly, as if hundreds of fireworks had been set off, spheres of red, blue and purple rose lazily, aimlessly into the white sky. You can't get a feel for the scene just by my describing it, but it truly was like a painting or some kind of omen, and I was filled with an indescribable feeling of wonder. I quickly looked down to see what had happened, I discovered that a balloon vendor had allowed, in his carelessness, all of his rubber balloons to escape into the air at once. I was still left with an odd feeling because rubber balloons were much rarer then than they are now.

"I don't think it can be blamed on the balloons, but strangely enough, at that very moment, my brother became very excited. His pale face instantly flushed bright red, and his breathing grew more rapid. He turned and came toward me, snatched my hand and pulled me along intently.

"'Come on let's go! If we don't hurry, it'll be too late!'"
I asked him why as he pulled me pell-mell down the stairs of the tower. He said he had found the girl. She was sitting in a room floored in new mats and that we should go to her now as she would still be there.

"The place where my brother had found her was a large house at the rear of the temple and distinguished by a large pine tree. When we arrived at the spot, the pine tree was there as it should have been, but there was no building nearby resembling the one we sought. It was as we had been bewitched by a mischievous fox spirit. I thought my brother had allowed himself to be deluded by his hopes, but because he looked so pitiful bent over and despairing, we asked around at the teahouses in an attempt to soothe his spirit. But she was nowhere to be found.

"My brother and I got separated while we were looking for the girl but, after making one round of all the teahouses, after a while I went back to the pine tree where I noticed the various vending stalls. The proprietor of one of the picture show stalls was cracking a whip in the air to drum up business. When I looked, who else was crouched over using the viewing glasses to peer into his stall with all his might but my brother. When I tapped him on the shoulder and asked what he was doing, he whirled around in surprise with a look of utter surprise on his face that remains in my mind even now. How should I say this? He looked as if he were in a dream. The muscles of his face had gone slack, his gaze appeared to see into a very distant place and even the voice in which he spoke to me sounded strangely empty.

"'The girl we've been looking for is in here.'"
“Hearing this, I hurriedly paid the fee and, looking through the viewing glasses, saw the story of Oshichi -- the green grocer's daughter who falls in love with a priest and starts a fire so that she can be evacuated to his temple. I came in on the story just as the scene in which Oshichi is leaning coquettishly against Kichizo at the lecture hall of Kichijoji Temple was being displayed. I will never forget it. The proprietor worked the whip to keep the beat while he and his wife raised their husky voices time with the paintings and sang the line that goes ‘Get on your knees and tell me with your own eyes’ It seemed that the strange melody of ‘Get on your knees and tell me with your own eyes’ had worked its way into my brother’s head.

“The people represented in the pictures were done in brocade, and they must have been the work of a master. The vitality which shone in Oshichi’s face was beautiful. Because she truly looked alive even to me, I completely understood why my brother was so taken with the image.

“‘Even though I know this girl is an artist's creation -- only a brocade figure -- still, there is no way I can give her up. It fills me with sadness, but I can’t give her up. I long to become a brocade figure like Kichizo, if only once, so that I might step into the picture and talk with her,’ he said with a far-off look. He stood fixed to that spot and made no attempt to move. Now that I think of it, the picture show stall was open to the sky to allow sunlight to illuminate the paintings. My brother must have been looking down at the just the right angle when he saw the picture from the top of the tower.

“The sun was setting now and fewer people were about. Before the stall two or three children in pageboy haircuts were loitering about as if they had some lingering
affection for what was inside. Since noon the sky had grown gray and overcast. By dusk the clouds hung as if it would rain at any minute. It was the sort of unpleasant weather that threatened to pin us beneath its weight and actually appeared angry. In the depths of my ears I heard a low, rumbling noise like the pounding of a large drum. In the midst of this, my brother stood with his gaze fixed on the distance, without the slightest intention of moving. It felt like we stood there an hour.

"When the sun had completely set and the gas lamps on the stage for the balancing acrobats twinkled bright and beautiful in the distance, my brother suddenly grabbed my chest as if he had just awakened. He said something very odd.

"'I've got it! I have a favor to ask of you. Turn the binoculars around, putting the larger lenses against your eyes and then look at me,’ he asked.

I asked him why.

"'Don't worry why. Just do it, all right?’ he said without answering my question. I don't care much for lenses, glasses and the like. Binoculars and microscopes -- bringing distant objects right in front of your face, making tiny bugs huge like beasts -- the whole ghastly process is too eerie for my taste. Although I had not looked through my brother’s prized binoculars very often, the few times I did made me feel that they were an extremely magical device. Moreover, as for the idea of looking at my brother through reversed binoculars in the almost deserted area behind the temple as the sun set and we could hardly see one another’s face, it struck me as a bit mad, if not ghoulish. But it was my brother's sole request, and I had no choice but to do as he said and look through the larger end of the binoculars. Although he was standing no more than ten feet away,
because I was looking through the glasses backwards, my brother’s shape appeared to be two feet tall, yet the smaller he became, the more clearly defined he became as he floated in the gloom. Nothing else appeared before my eyes, just the miniature form of my brother who stood there in the middle of the field captured by the lenses. He grew smaller and smaller, probably because he walked backwards a few paces, until he had become a figure resembling a one-foot tall doll. He appeared to be floating in space and then, in the blink of an eye, he melted into the darkness.

“I was so frightened (You will think me too old to say this, but at the time, I was filled with hair-raising dread.) that I suddenly pulled the binoculars away and, running in the direction from which he had disappeared, called for my brother. Despite all my efforts, I could not find him. He had not had enough time to get far, but no matter where I asked, nobody had seen him. And that, my friend, is how my brother disappeared from the face of the earth. Since then I have become even more fearful of these magical binoculars. Moreover, I possessed a special loathing for these glasses which belonged to some ship captain from an unknown land. I don’t know about other binoculars, but I firmly believe that under no circumstances should one ever look through the large end of these because horrible misfortune will surely follow. Now I suppose you understand why I stopped you so abruptly when you held them backwards earlier.

“But, getting back to my brother, I returned exhausted to the picture show stand after searching for some time. Then I suddenly became aware of something. I am speaking of the realization that my brother slipped into that world of the painting using the powers of the magical binoculars to reduce his size to that of the girl in the brocade so
that he might be with the one with whom he had fallen so deeply in love. Since the proprietor had not yet closed up his stall for the evening, he obliged me by showing me the Kichijoji scene. Just as I had predicted, my brother was there, under the light of the metal lantern, having taken the place of Kichizo in the brocade, smiling contentedly with Oshichi in his arms.

"The tears I shed at that moment were not tears of sadness, but tears of joy for my brother who had attained what his heart most desired. I promised the proprietor that I would buy this picture from him regardless of his price. (It was odd that he never paid the least bit of attention to my brother dressed in his suit taking the place of the young Kichizo.) I flew home, but when I explained what had happened in detail to my mother, she scoffed at me and wondered if I weren't crazy. No matter how I begged her, she wouldn't accept what I told her. Isn't he funny? they said and laughed. Haha hahahaha."

The old man on the train laughed as if he were telling a joke. What was odd was that I sympathized with the old man and laughed heartily with him.

"They had it in their heads that of all things, a human being, could never be transformed into a piece of brocade work. Isn't the fact that my brother was never again seen on the face of the earth proof that he became part of the painting? They took it as proof that he had run away from home and in believing this they went off on a wild goose chase. It doesn't make sense. In the end, I wheedled some money out of my mother and, despite the protestations of my family, I set out on a trip from Hakone to Kamakura with the picture. You see, I wanted to give my brother his honeymoon. When I ride the trains as I am now, I find I can't help but think about those early days. I prop the picture up in
the window, as I did today, in order to show my brother and his lover the scenery outside. I can only imagine how happy he must be. And how could the girl despise him for such a true expression of his feelings? Just like a real newlywed couple, they blush in embarrassment and touch each other’s skin and engage in endless pillow talk.

“Later, my father closed his shop in Tokyo and retired to his hometown near Toyama where I lived with them for quite a while. It’s been over thirty years now, so I wanted to take this trip with my brother to show him how much Tokyo has changed over time.

“What’s sad about their situation is that the girl will never age even though she is partially alive because she is originally a creation of human hands, whereas my brother, who was once a living, breathing human being, will continue to age just like you and me despite the fact that he forced himself to undergo such a transformation. See for yourself. My brother who was once a handsome young man of twenty five now has a head of white hair and a face covered in unsightly wrinkles. He must be terribly unhappy. While his wife will always remain young and beautiful, he continues to age. It’s terrifying. My brother’s expression is so sad. He has looked so unhappy for the past few years.

“When I think of it, I get overcome with pity for him.”

The old man tearfully looked at the old man in the picture, but then as if he suddenly became aware of himself, he said,

“Ah, I’ve talked for far too long. Yet you understand me, don’t you? You won’t do as the others have done and say I’m crazy. If so, then I am happy to say I gained something from telling you my story. I think my brother and his wife are probably worn
out. I dare say they were embarrassed by my sitting you down in front of me and telling you their story. Well, I will let you all rest.”

Having said this, he quietly wrapped the frame in the black cloth. At that moment, it appeared the faces of the figures in the painting softened slightly, their mouths moved subtly and they both gave me a shy smile in parting.

The old man appeared not to notice. I said nothing. The train continued chugging through the darkness.

After about ten minutes, the sound of the wheels slowed and two or three lanterns could be seen outside the window as the train pulled into an small, obscure station in the middle of the mountains. There was only one station attendant standing alone on the platform.

“Well, I will be spending the night with a relative here.”

The old man stood abruptly with the frame under one arm and got off the train. That was all he said. Looking out the window, I saw his tall, thin frame -- so very like that of the old man in the painting -- at the simple wicket where he gave his ticket to the station attendant. Then, just like that, he melted into the darkness just beyond him and disappeared.