Disability, Deviance, and Modernity in the Early Works of Edogawa Rampo

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Abstract

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Japanese mystery fiction author Edogawa Rampo (1894–1965) frequently depicted disability in his novels. While some have criticized these works' highly negative imaginings of disabled characters by appealing to contemporary standards, this thesis argues that it is important to historicize the status of disability in the 1920s and 1930s when reading these works. While these stories stand out today because of the characters' recognized positions as disabled minorities, in an era before an overarching concept of "disability" had consolidated, these figures were part of a larger trend Rampo exhibited: a fascination and sympathy with all kinds of different, strange, modified, and transformed bodies and minds. Rampo used physically disabled characters as cultural and political symbols that reflected the transformations of the interwar era, whose narrative use in turn worked to develop novel nuances of understanding surrounding the value of deviance versus the norm. This paper examines Rampo's *Issun bōshi* (The Dwarf (1926-

1927)), *Imomushi* ("The Caterpillar" (1929)), *Kotō no oni* (*The Demon of the Lonely Isle* (1929-1931)), and *Mōjū* (*The Blind Beast* (1931)), first contextualizing themes of physical disability in historical terms of the rapidly modernizing and globalizing society of the 1920s and 1930s. Second, I analyze how physically deviant characters function as plot-driving devices to clash with powers of the norm and attempt to transgressively reappropriate the value of deviance. Rampo's struggle between the desires to control, objectify, pity, and fear difference signifies a modern struggle to reconcile stereotypical ideas about deviance with what it means to be a part of modern society in an era when the masses were pushed to understand the different types of bodies and minds newly revealed to them through advancing science, technology, consumerism, and imperialism. The works of Rampo's early *ero guro* period use disability to fashion hyper-concentrated depictions of the tumultuous interwar era and rebelliously champion the outsider through the timely medium of the erotic grotesque.

I. Introduction

Edogawa Rampo[1] (October 21, 1894 – July 28, 1965) is known in Japan primarily as one of the fathers of Japanese mystery and detective fiction, and as a writer of bizarre, erotic horror, whose prolific career spanned four decades from the 1920s to the 1960s. Rampo earned popularity through his breakthrough detective works such as *Nisen dōka* ("The Two-Sen Copper Coin") in 1923 and *D-zaka no satsujin jiken* ("The Case of the Murder on D. Hill") in 1925, which were praised for utilizing distinctly Japanese motifs and style at a time when translations of Western detective novels dominated the genre.[2] His works have since come to be regarded for representing the interwar phenomenon known as "erotic grotesque nonsense" (*ero guro nansensu*) and for reflecting the unique social climate of the city of Tokyo in a period of rapid change—Japan's imperialistic interwar period.

Ero guro nansensu was the buzzword for a phenomenon of consumer culture during Japan's colonial period, particularly visible in magazines, advertisements, and other print and visual media of the time. The trend lasted roughly from 1923 to 1938 and was characterized by an intensified fixation on the decadently erotic and sexually deviant, grotesque, and nonsensical.[3]

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[1] Pen name Edogawa Rampo 江戸川 乱歩 (born Hirai Tarō 平井 太郎, October 21, 1894 – July 28, 1965). In keeping with Japanese name conventions, I write Japanese names in the order of family name, given name, though I will abbreviate to "Rampo" for short. The pen name "Edogawa Rampo" is a pun on the Japanese pronunciation of "Edgar Allan Poe" (*edogaa aran pō*), an homage which should not go unnoticed as one of Edogawa's literary inspirations.

[2] Rampo's debut work *Nisen dōka* was the first Japanese-authored detective story published in the modernist magazine *Shinseinen*, and he was billed by the editor as a new Japanese competitor to the Western translations *Shinseinen* had specialized in until then. (See Edogawa Rampo, *Edogawa Rampo zenshū*, volume 1 (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2005), 43-54.) As for Japanese motifs, for example, *Nisen dōka*'s story hinges on a secret code comprised of a jumbled Buddhist mantra and Japanese Braille; *D-zaka no satsujin jiken*'s tricks rely on features of traditional Japanese architecture and kimono patterns.

[3] Miriam Silverberg places the range from 1923, the year of the Great Kantō Earthquake, to 1938, seven years before the end of the Pacific War, with some aspects lingering into the Pacific War due to consumers' reluctance to trade the modern decadence of the era for wartime

This "included sexology, detective fiction, graphic art, soft-core pornography, and urban anthropology."[4] During this period, the acceleration of consumer culture, booms in print culture and availability of photographic images of different bodies,[5] a burgeoning of other technologies such as film, and developments in the study of hygiene, eugenics, and abnormal psychology encouraged a new fascination with the body; this fascination led to an overhaul of the way people thought about their bodies and those of others. In sum, bodies valued as erotic, grotesque, and deviant became a fresh new cultural commodity in a plethora of strange, new, primarily visual ways. In one sense, the presentation of deviance in terms of sexuality, race, and ability high and low became a form of entertainment that processed the new exposure to these ideas and reinforced ideas of normalcy in 1920s Japan. For example, images of non-Japanese bodies presented as erotic or grotesque served as benchmarks for comparison against the Japanese body in terms of a desirable "civilized," healthy ideal to strive for, an undesirable level of "savagery" to rise above or conquer, or a way to confirm the nature of an "essential" or superior Japaneseness in terms of race. Stories of deviant crimes and sexuality or abnormal psychology and the downfalls that followed reinforced the dangers of not maintaining the rule-following,

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frugality. See Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2006).

[4] Mark Driscoll, *Absolute Erotic, Absolute Grotesque: The Living, Dead, and Undead in Japan's Imperialism, 1895–1945* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), xi.

[5] Including erotic/grotesque niche magazines such as *Gendai ryōki sentan zukan* (*Contemporary guidebook to bizarreness and the avant garde*, 1931), and *ero guro* forerunner Umehara Hokumei's *Gurotesuku* (*Grotesque*, 21 issues from Nov 1928 – Aug 1931). *Gendai ryōki sentan zukan* transfixed itself primarily on nude bodies of Japanese and European women, images of sport and healthy modern bodies, and pictures of "grotesque" Black, African, and other indigenous people, while *Gurotesuku* similarly hawked images of "the scatological, sexual, parodic, antiauthoritarian, and feminized aspects of the grotesque" and "racist and pornographic elements," per Silverberg. Shimamura notes that the fact that *Gendai ryōki* was published by Shinchōsha, one of the largest publishing companies in Japan, is evidence of how strong the trend of the times was.

"normal" lifestyle of the majority. In another sense, the trend also served as a parody or rebellion against Japanese imperialistic authority which tried to control and censor deviance. The deluge of erotic and grotesque media enthusiastically showed difference and transgression that had been previously out of reach or hidden from view from the Japanese public. This presentation of difference and transgression that was too abundant and unruly to fully censor was a challenge and a threat to censoring authorities' attempted control, and was an affirmation of freedom for transgressively different possibilities.

As Rampo's popularity increased in tandem with this trend, Rampo, his publishers, and advertisers picked up on the grotesque and sexual themes in his works, and began billing him not only as a detective fiction writer but also as a writer of "*ero guro*" stories that were "seeking the bizarre" (*ryōki*).[6] Carried by the wave of the decadent aesthetic of the '20s and '30s, the themes in his literature became more and more extreme, and clever detective plots which initially caught the attention of readers and critics became the secondary element to shocking erotic and grotesque horror stories. Rampo's novels were still often comprised of complicated mysteries with unpredictable outcomes, but during this period they leaned heavily on themes of extraordinary or socially and bodily transgressive situations: for example, BDSM sexual affairs leading to accidental death (*D-zaka no satsujin jiken*, 1925), a man hiding inside an armchair for sensual excitement (*Ningen isu* ("The Human Chair"), 1925), or a man digging up a corpse of an acquaintance that strikingly resembles him to steal his identity and fortune (*Panorama-tō kitan* (*The Strange Tale of Panorama Island*), 1926-27). These novels hinged on deviance: it drove the plot and explained the mystery behind their strange happenings.

[6] For more on Rampo's shifts of authorial persona re: advertising, see Tsukiyama Naomi, "Kōkoku, goshippu no Rampo-zō - kaiki, ryōki, ero guro jidai," in *Edogawa Rampo to taishū no nijisseiki* (Tokyo: Shibundō, 2004), 141-148.

Most strikingly, around this period Rampo utilized numerous characters with what we see today as physically disabled bodies—dwarfs, wounded war veterans, hunchbacks, and visually- and hearing-impaired characters, to name a few—as integral pieces of the story. This clear dependence on physical disability is what David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder call "narrative prosthesis," or disability as the "crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality, and analytical insight."[7] The significance of physically disabled bodies in Rampo's works is echoed by scholar Yasu Satoshi, as he notes that in many of Rampo's novels of this period, the crimes and plot events are only able to occur because of the possibilities created by these irregular physicalities.[8] First, these bodily and socially transgressive characters are intertwined with grotesque and violent eroticism. Next, the solutions to the mysteries surrounding the characters' physicalities run so contrary to expectations that they create an atmosphere of shocking incredulousness. In this, disabled bodies' roles in Rampo's stories were skillfully used not only to drive the plot, but also to reflect the *ero*, *guro,* and nonsensical trends of the era. Physically non-normative figures in particular, given their place on the fringe of society, pulled twice their weight in support of the aesthetic of erotic grotesque nonsense. The physically extra-ordinary painted a striking indication of difference from the everyday, compounded by their social minority status. With the addition of criminal or perversely erotic depiction of these bodies, Rampo followed the trend of erotic grotesque nonsense in heightening the fascination and objectification of bodily difference through mass literature.

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[7] David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 49.
[8] Yasu Satoshi, "Edogawa Rampo ni okeru kankaku to shintaisei no seiki—avan gyarudo na shintai," in *Edogawa Rampo to taishū no nijisseiki* (Tokyo: Shibundō, 2004), 193.

While Rampo's commercial success shows that his stories revolving around depictions of bodily difference undeniably enjoyed popularity and appealed to audiences' tastes, they were also surely shocking and offensive to contemporary readers in their excess. For example, Rampo himself notes on the reception of *Imomushi* ("The Caterpillar," 1929) that "When my wife read it, she said, 'It's disgusting. Please stop with such cruel things.' There were more than a few *geiko* who confessed to me that they couldn't eat their food after reading it."[9] He also reflected that he was harshly criticized for "corrupting" the detective fiction genre with works like *Mōjū* (*The Blind Beast*, 1931) in their excess of perversion and *ero guro*. He went as far as to cut parts of the original text of *Mōjū* in the 1961 Tōgensha collection of his complete works because upon rereading it, he found them so grotesque that they made him feel nauseated.[10] Evidently, the audience and even the author himself were drawn to exploring depictions of deviant and grotesque bodies, yet were still at odds with and even revolted by the level of their transgressive presentation.

While the characters involved in *ero guro* plot settings such as *D-zaka*'s fatal BDSM, *Ningen isu*'s fetishized hiding inside furniture, or *Panorama-tō kitan*'s exhuming and identity theft of a corpse do not necessarily denote oppressed minority groups, characters with disabilities hold more representational weight. The controversial depictions of physically disabled characters in Rampo's novels have the potential to reflect negatively on real-life groups who identify as disabled. This issue of criticism specifically regarding the imagery of disabled people becomes prevalent particularly after the influence of post-WWII disability rights movements in the 60s

[9] Edogawa Rampo, *Edogawa Rampo zenshū*, volume 3 (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, 2005), 711.
[10] Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 5, 598.

and 70s,[11] after which disability as a term for many kinds of developmental and physical difference became a key concept in improving human rights and empowering identity of such people. Reading these works decades later, it is nearly impossible to ignore the negative imagery of Rampo's characters who were casually called what are now highly derogatory terms such as *katawa* ("cripple"), *fugusha* ("cripple/disabled") or *kikeiji* ("deformed child") and painted as murderers and criminals. However, it is important to question the social context and historicity foregrounding such characters' conceptions in literature, as indeed, at the time of Rampo's writing, the concept of disability in Japan was not recognized the same way it is now.[12] On this issue, Mitchell and Snyder categorize methods of interpreting the "narrative prosthesis" of disability in literature into five approaches: studies of negative imagery, social realism, new historicism, biographical criticism, and transgressive reappropriation.[13] While biographical criticism is difficult to apply to Rampo in that historically there is no record of him identifying as

[11] The first postwar disability rights groups began to form and gain notoriety in the 1960s and 70s, following the International Labor Organization's push for international guidelines and legislation for vocational rehabilitation for disabled people in 1955, and after a highly publicized court case of a mother killing her disabled child in 1970 brought into public debate the Eugenic Protection Laws' discrimination against disabled people's human and reproductive rights. Notably, the Japanese Society for the Rehabilitation of People with Disabilities (*Nihon Shōgaisha Rihabiritēshon Kyōkai*) was formed in 1964 by disabled WWII veterans, followed by Aoi Shiba no Kai (lit. The Green Lawn Society) formed in 1970 by people with cerebral palsy. Aoi Shiba no Kai's aggressively anti-norm platform is widely considered to have catalyzed modern disability studies in Japan. See Carolyn S. Stevens, *Disability in Japan* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2013) and Katharina Heyer, *Rights Enabled: The Disability Revolution, from the US, to Germany and Japan, to the United Nations* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

[12] Some historical perceptions maintain into the present, for example, the many anecdotes in both Shinto and Buddhist texts which illustrate the connection of curses, transgressions, and karmic relations with disabilities such as blindness, deafness, and physical impairment. However, the umbrella term now used for disability (*shōgaisha*) was not widely used until after WWII, and social welfare and accommodation was defined and dealt with separately by disability type if at all, with most attention focusing on blind people, deaf people, and injured war veterans.

[13] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis*, 15.

disabled or falling into a category of disability, the remaining four categories have been helpful tools in criticizing Rampo's works in regard to disability representation for many scholars.

Theorizing negative imagery of disability focuses on demonstrating the literary historical devaluation of people with disabilities, emphasizing the harmful nature of stereotype; it also asserts that the depictions are not realistic portrayals of human complexity.[14] As one example, Seki Yoshio in his article "Edogawa Rampo's 'Issun bōshi''Imomushi' 'Mōjū' – disabled people depicted in cruel taste"[15] criticizes the depiction of disabled characters in the three novels, asserting that the way they are written gives an image of disability which forces an even further negative effect on disabled people, adding "a twisted image of the disabled to the general public's deep-seated discriminatory consciousness like a final coat of paint on its surface."[16] Seki calls the novels absurd and unrealistic; to Seki, Rampo had no intention of writing these characters as people, but used them as tools for increasing the atmosphere of the bizarre to attract audiences. As Mitchell and Snyder note, "the negative-imagery school set out to establish a continuum between limiting literary depiction and dehumanizing social attitudes toward disabled people,"[17] as Seki does in his piece.

Mitchell and Snyder use the term social realism to describe a critical approach in literary disability studies that attempts to counter these inaccurate and misleading portraits of disability by considering fictional images in literature as a "barometer" for measuring how disabled people were perceived by society (however distorted those perception may be). These social realist

[14] Ibid., 17.
[15] Seki Yoshio, "Bungaku ni miru shōgaisha-zō: Edogawa Rampo-cho 'Issun bōshi' 'Imomushi' 'Mōjū' – zankoku shumi de egakareta shōgaisha." *Nōmaraizēshon* 26 no. 9 (September 2006): 49-51.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis,* 18.

interpretations, then, attempt to search not for positive or negative depictions, but for "accurate images that could effectively counterbalance this detrimental history."[18] Hanada Shunchō presents the possibility that Rampo's depictions of disabled characters such as the injured war veteran in *Imomushi* and the dwarf in *Issun bōshi* can be seen as symbols of people who were forced into living in the dark corners of society; this in turn could lead to earning empathy from the readers. To Hanada, these stories show the darkness and suppression that disabled figures were forced to bear, while also avoiding their depiction as simply weak or pitiful. On the contrary, they are depicted as "actively finding their own ways to live and die."[19] Hanada attempts to, as Mitchell and Snyder describe, "extract the social conditions of disability from the act of characterization itself."

According to Mitchell and Snyder, this form of social realism also has its shortcomings, such as the tendency to overlook the specificity of disability representation as a product of certain periods, and the tendency to project contemporary desires onto representations critics aimed to rehabilitate. In response, what Mitchell and Snyder define as the "new historicism" approach "sought to perform an anthropological unearthing of images that could help to reconstruct a period's point of view on human variation" and reveal supernatural and social explanatory paradigms found in literature of disability's appearance in the world. This is in order to recognize disability as a product of cultural ideology and not simply as reductive and stigmatizing.[20] In this vein, some new historicism critiques apply interpretation of historical reactions to disability to draw attention to "social institutions that authored disability as Other,"[21]

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[18] Ibid., 22.
[19] Hanada Shunchō, *Nihon bungaku no naka no shōgaishazō: kin, gendaihen* (Tokyo: Akashi Shoten, 2002), 154.
[20] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis,* 25-28.
[21] Ibid., 28.

theorize disability's relationship to these institutions, and point out the institutions' constructions of constantly shifting, flawed, and artificial norms.[22] Among this school of interpretation, Jim Reichert discusses the voyeuristic entertainment of deviant bodies in Rampo's *Kotō no oni* (*The Demon of the Lonely Isle*, 1929-1931) as representative of a preoccupation with eugenics and Social Darwinist thought. He argues that the text's "affiliation with these ideological fantasies (…) in which any deviation from accepted sexual, physical, and psychological norms is treated as a potential threat to the homogeneity and purity of Japanese society" makes the text readable as "a form of covert propaganda that impressed on readers the need to monitor both themselves and those around them for signs of deviance and freakishness."[23] Matsuyama Iwao historicizes *Imomushi*'s deviant physicality and ensuing isolation from society as a Proletarian critique of the exploitation of workers in regards to health, ability, productivity, and insurance liability. He furthermore interprets *Issun bōshi*'s murderous dwarf's apprehension as a confirmation of majority society's relief in the ability to contain "deformed" bodies and otherwise socially deviant street performers away from the majority.[24] Kobayashi Atsushi interprets the "touch art" (*shokkan geijutsu-ron*) theorized in *Mōjū*, which is inscrutable to sighted people, as a metaphor for the blind main character's terror toward the hyper-optic world of the 1930s, and his isolation from it.[25] These scholars attempt to historicize the cultural values surrounding disabled bodies in order to better understand what cultural and historical atmosphere Rampo's emphasis of difference may have been speaking to.

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[22] Ibid., 29.
[23] Jim Reichert, "Disciplining the Erotic-Grotesque in Edogawa Ranpo's Demon of the Lonely Isle," in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, ed. Alan Tansman (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 378-379.
[24] Matsuyama Iwao, *Rampo to Tokyo: 1920 toshi no kao* (Tokyo: Parco, 1984).
[25] Kobayashi Atsushi, "Edogawa Rampo 'Mōjū' nōto," *Ronju*, no. 14 (2000): 71-85.

Lastly, transgressive reappropriation recognizes the "transgressive narrative space" that disability creates: the "subversive potential of the hyperbolic meanings invested in disabled figures"[26] in relation not only to historical trends and phenomena as above but specifically to the social politics of oppressed minorities. Mitchell and Snyder note that this process originates in the subjugated figure embracing its deviance as potentially valuable. In

> perversely championing the terms of their own stigmatization, marginal peoples alarm the dominant culture with a canniness about their own subjugation. (…) Thus, the minority culture deflects the stigmatizing definition back on to the offenders by openly advertising them in public discourse. The effect shames the dominant culture into a recognition of its own dehumanizing precepts.[27]

This in turn uses transgressive otherness to question ruling values of the majority culture. In Rampo studies, this has only just begun to be explored in terms of disability identity. Yasu Satoshi writes on how physically different bodies in Rampo's works can be read as an expression of "avant-garde bodies" whose sensual and physical capabilities deviated in a way that made them spectacle yet individual, enabling them to rebel against the rational, policed, synchronized military body of Japan's imperial period.[28] Taguchi Ritsuo also considers *Kotō no oni*'s "cripple-girl's" discovery and questioning of the flexibility of social norms as a rebellious confrontation with the discriminatory power structures surrounding human bodies.[29] Taguchi and Yasu thus begin to consider depictions of physical difference in terms of their potential for reappropriative disruption of notions of physical difference.

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[26] Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis,* 35.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Yasu Satoshi, "Edogawa Rampo ni okeru kankaku to shintaisei no seiki," 191-198.
[29] Taguchi Ritsuo, "'Kotō no oni' ron - ningen wa iroiro na katachi ga aru no da," *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō: tokushū Edogawa Rampo no miryoku - seitan hyakunen,* 59 no. 12 (December 1994) 109-114.

Re-evaluating Rampo's works from our contemporary standpoint while considering the historical values that informed bodily norms at the time of their writing lends new insight into the socio-cultural consciousness surrounding disabled bodies in the 1920s and 1930s. Through this historicized examination we may draw out the significance of these depictions' connections to the aesthetic of the "erotic grotesque nonsense" era. Additionally, considering the stories as agents of transgressive reappropriation helps us to question the value of these depictions to audiences in both the 1920s and '30s as well as in the present, when disability theory has become an indispensable tool for the humanities, and adaptations of Rampo's works have seen a resurgence in popularity. As there is no record of Rampo having any disability, this complicates his voice as an ally for the transgressive reappropriation of disability specifically. As a member of the very majority which contributed to disabled people's oppression, he is not in the position to speak for disabled people directly. He too, on the surface level of his works, takes advantage of many negative stereotypes for the sake of plot and dramatic effect. What is essential in understanding Rampo's stance vis-à-vis transgressive reappropriation and disability is found not in his fictional voices of disabled people but in the voices of groups he could identify with: social outsiders. This includes those that know themselves to be outsiders (disabled characters) and those who believe themselves not to be but always hold the potential to become (the non-disabled majority). With the lack of "disability" as an umbrella term, Rampo's disabled characters are more broadly outsiders of the most immediately apparent and easily understandable degree. His emphasis is not on physical ability, per se—as we will see many of his physically disabled characters are quite healthy and able—but on exclusion, and the systems that perpetuate that exclusion. When characters who believe themselves to be part of the norm (non-disabled majority) interact with and are confronted with the social deviant or outsider

(physically disabled), they must either defend the tenuous basis of their position or face their own potential deviance, therefore challenging the socially constructed system of values that allows them to define themselves as one or the other.

With these problems in mind, I will examine Rampo's depictions of the physically disabled in the peak of the era of erotic grotesque nonsense through the approaches of historical critique and transgressive reappropriation of social outsiders in four representative works: *Issun bōshi* (*The Dwarf*, 1926-1927), *Imomushi* ("The Caterpillar," 1929), *Kotō no oni* (*The Demon of the Lonely Isle*, 1929-1931), and *Mōjū* (*The Blind Beast*, 1931). In the 1920s and '30s Rampo used these characters not only as a "freakshow" gimmick that mirrored the era's obsession with similarly non-normative, idealized, and/or foreign body types, but also as narrative prosthesis—potent culturally and politically rebellious symbols. As the characters in these works carry the trends of the era on their very bodies in the form of physically coded deviance, these depictions are used as a discursive space for transgressive reappropriation for all different bodies and forms of existence. First, I will trace each work's historical and cultural relevance in terms of each represented physical deviance. Then, I will outline the literary establishment of the disabled characters' non-normativity, which builds dramatic tension between them and the characters who assume themselves to be normal. Next, I will explore plot occurrences between the outside- and inside-the-norm characters which, in Snyder and Mitchell's words, "collapse[s] the distance between disability and the inherently social processes that mark bodies as falling outside acceptable norms." Then, I will analyze how this collapse in the space between the deviant and normative characters' values is used as a tool to confront and subtly challenge dominant cultural and historical practices, and the systems of subjugation and norm-construction they contribute to. This analysis shows how Rampo's literary process ultimately works to imagine and suggest

where recognizing and reappropriating the value of any perceived deviance could lead. Finally, I aim to trace the development of Rampo's own personal disability theory and suggest what it could mean for readers today.

II. Escape from the Freak Show: *Issun bōshi* (*The Dwarf*, 1926-1927)[30]

Rampo's *Issun bōshi* was originally serialized simultaneously in *Tokyo Asahi Shimbun* and *Ōsaka Asahi Shimbun* from December 8, 1926, ending in *Tokyo* on March 21, 1927 and in *Ōsaka* on the 22nd. The novel opens with the main protagonist, Kobayashi Monzō, pursuing a suspicious-looking dwarf who is carrying a human arm in Asakusa. The story moves on to concern the murder of Michiko, the stepdaughter of Yamano Yurie, an acquaintance of Monzō. Monzō solicits the help of the famous detective Akechi Kogorō. The next day, as Akechi begins to investigate the Yamano home, young women's severed limbs are discovered around the city, including a hand delivered directly to the Yamano home, the fingerprints of which match those found in Michiko's room. As the investigation deepens, Mrs. Yamano is tailed to a secret meeting with the dwarf, and Akechi finds that the house helper and secret child of Michiko's father, Komatsu, has also gone missing. He also discovers that Komatsu was involved in a love triangle between Michiko and the family chauffeur.

Meanwhile, the dwarf continues to wreak havoc in Asakusa through arson, and the police trail him as he navigates swiftly through the city, before falling and injuring himself to near-

[30] For the sake of clarification, I recognize that not all people with dwarfism identify as disabled, and some but not all forms of dwarfism are protected as disability and receive social welfare benefits in both the US and Japan. In the context of this novel, dwarfism is regarded as a "deformity" or "crippling." If "deformed/crippled" in 1920s Japan may roughly equal "disabled" in the present, in the following interpretations (beyond *Issun bōshi* as well) I will include the figures under the modern label "disabled."

death. Back with the Yamano family, Akechi unfurls his final explanation: the dwarf was hired to help dispose of what was thought by most to be Michiko's body. Mrs. Yamano came to believe Michiko was killed by her husband in anger for her lascivious behavior that the family tried to conceal. However, Akechi reveals the head of Komatsu's corpse found inside the head of a doll at the doll shop the dwarf patronized for prosthetic limbs. The young woman who was killed was actually Komatsu, and Michiko the perpetrator of the violence, all of which was attempted to be cleverly switched and concealed through fingerprints strategically left on Michiko's makeup products in her room. However, Akechi explains that while Michiko thought she killed Komatsu and then disposed of the body with help from her father and the dwarf, when disposing of Komatsu's body, Komatsu awoke, still barely alive. This led to a struggle with the dwarf in which he dealt the final deadly blow. Michiko, young and naïve, and in the words of Akechi, "a beautiful existence," is accidentally *not* the true murderer. As the dwarf is a known criminal with no regrets, and furthermore injured to a near-death condition, Akechi judges that the blame should rest entirely on the dwarf to save Michiko's future. The dwarf is manipulated into confessing for the crimes, and Michiko, the original perpetrator of the violence, goes free.

The character of a dwarf or *issun bōshi* is a well-known character in Japanese folk tales, comparable to the English fairy tale "Tom Thumb." The original story of *issun bōshi* was first compiled in the Muromachi period's (1392–1573) *otogi-zōshi*, a group of folk tales, fairy tales, and other similar short stories. The story has multiple versions, but generally all include *issun bōshi*'s abnormally small birth, him leaving his home, falling in love with a noble maiden, displaying his extraordinary strength, and eventually being rewarded with wealth, recognition, and/or marriage. Yanagita Kunio noted this story as one of the many folk tales which have the "abnormal birth" motif of a "small child" (*chiisago*), which "grows up suddenly (…) and then

accomplishes very difficult tasks that normal humans cannot achieve;"[31] other examples include Momotarō and Princess Kaguya. Rampo's modern *Issun bōshi* has a number of interesting connections to the original folk tale. First, this Muromachi period story was the origin of the use of the term "*issun bōshi*" as a derogatory term for people with below-average stature.[32] Second, Rampo's *issun bōshi* serves as a foil to the traditional success story of *issun bōshi*: unlike *otogi-zōshi*'s *issun bōshi* whose irregular appearance ends at his small yet proportionate size (like Momotarō and Princess Kaguya), Rampo's *issun bōshi* is a hideously disproportionate "deformed child":

> Beneath the thick, disheveled hair was an unusually wide face. Its complexion was deathly pale, and the eyes were absurdly large, out of proportion with the mouth. (…) His arms were folded, but because they were extremely short in relation to the breadth of his shoulders, his fingers did not reach his upper arms and met just in front of his breast, as if he were grasping a sword. It was as if his whole body was made up of head and torso and he wore his limbs merely by way of apology.[33]

Third, like the original *issun bōshi*, Rampo's dwarf shows extraordinary strength and dexterity despite his size, but in a terrifying, criminal, and desperate way painted as animalesque, demonesque, and inhuman. According to Akechi, "He's a cripple, but he's also a villain like a demon come crawling out of Hell. He's truly inhuman. Despite being a little person, he is terribly fast, and he's as skilled as a monkey when it comes to climbing trees."[34] On another occasion, the narration notes: "he held his victim with still greater strength. Deformed child or not, against the strength of desperation there was nothing Yurie, a feeble woman, could do to

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[31] Kawamori, Hiroshi, "Folktale Research after Yanagita: Development and Related Issues," *Asian Folklore Studies* 62, no. 2 (2003): 237.
[32] Kyōgoku Natsuhiko and Katsumi Tada, eds., *Yōkai gahon Kyōka hyaku monogatari* (Tokyo: Kokusho Kankōkai, 2008), 229.
[33] Edogawa Ranpo, *The Early Cases of Akechi Korogō*, trans. William Varteresian (Fukuoka, Japan: Kurodahan Press, 2014), 73. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 502-503.
[34] Ibid., 160. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 623.

resist."[35] Furthermore, like the original *issun bōshi*, Rampo's dwarf falls for a noble woman, but is rejected for his physical deformities: "when Yurie realized that the man was a dwarf she could endure no more. A cold shudder went down her spine when she thought that she had felt a queer fascination for a monster like this even for a moment."[36] Nor does he achieve recognition or wealth; on the contrary, he is pressured into taking the blame for crimes he did not commit, and dies. His narrative runs contrary to almost every part of the traditional story; herein the pressures of modern Japan and the replacement of traditional values are reflected on Rampo's *issun bōshi*. Irregular birth, in this case, is not the beginning of a fantastic tale showing the possibility of success through persistence and effort, but the story of a cursed child who turns his back on society the way society averts its eyes from him. Here lies the foundation of Rampo's dwarf as a figure that will disrupt the assumption of where his body belongs in the various spaces of story, freak show, and modern cityscape.

As the reader is often reminded in the course of Rampo's novel, dwarves were commonly included in *misemono-ya* ("spectacle show"), or freak shows. These shows were particularly popular in Tokyo's Asakusa park, and were documented in Japan back to the late Tokugawa and early Meiji periods. The frequent inclusion of these shows in Rampo's stories, as well as his general "taste for the bizarre and fantastic" can be attributed in part to the "visual violence of the *misemono* (sideshows) that [Rampo] enjoyed attending as a youth in Nagoya."[37] This was not the first nor the last time Rampo depicted these types of shows in his works: previously, he wrote about another murderous circus dwarf in *Odoru issun bōshi* ("The Dancing Dwarf," (January

[35] Ibid., 126. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 577.
[36] Ibid. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 577.
[37] Elaine Gerbert, in the introduction to Edogawa Rampo, *Strange Tale of Panorama Island*, trans. Elaine Gerbert (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), xiv.

1926)) and would center an entire story around the concept of a panorama theater (*panorama-kan*) in *Panorama-tō kitan* (*The Strange Tale of Panorama Island*, Oct 1926- April 1927). Rampo had been among one of the peak generations of audiences for these Asakusa leisure shows for the masses, full of various forms of oddities, exhibits, sideshows and peep shows. These were "private exhibitions of unusual items, individuals, or skills, conducted for a limited span of time inside a temporary enclosure for the purpose of financial gain,"[38] and included were things such human prodigies or freaks, exotic and strangely behaving animals, animal hoaxes, and novelties of craftsmanship such as basketwork, wax figures, and dolls.[39] Foreign entertainers were also documented as early as 1864, including those such as Barnum's "celebrated midget couple General and Mrs. Tom Thumb."[40] Markus writes that "exhibits of freaks and deformities are among the oldest and most universal, if least laudable forms of entertainment. In Japan, however, the exhibitor of freaks not infrequently presented his subjects as object lessons in the Buddhist doctrine of karmic causation."[41] While *misemono-ya* declined around 1870 with the Meiji government's regulations on displaying hoaxes, fraudulent exhibits, and deformities, this did not completely eliminate the *misemono-ya*, but rather caused most of the remaining ones to reorganize into other types of theaters.[42] The fact that our title's namesake is first spotted in the opening scene in Asakusa park, as the main character sees him and "felt like he was looking at

[38] Andrew L. Markus, "The Carnival of Edo: Misemono Spectacles from Contemporary Accounts," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45, no. 2 (1985): 501.
[39] According to Markus, some documented examples of these attractions included: "strong-man" babies or women, giantesses, dwarves, acrobats, "natives," "demon girls", "testicle girl," a child covered in scales, "bear boy," a girl with no arms but able to dexterously use her feet; parrots and parakeets, snakes, porcupines, camels, tigers, a charcoal-eating ostrich; unicorn horns, "mermaids"
[40] Markus, "The Carnival of Edo," 537.
[41] Ibid., 529.
[42] Ibid., 540.

some *misemono*"[43] is a nod to this Asakusa culture of freak shows, dance revues, panorama shows, cafes, and movie theaters which so often serve as the backdrop of Rampo's works. Mrs. Yamano, when prompted by Monzō for comment on the suspicious character of the dwarf, responds that she had "only ever seen dwarfs in freak shows as a child"[44]– a believable assertion given dwarves' stereotyped position as *misemono* freaks. This characterization further reinforces the dwarf's displacement from "normal" society as he navigates outside of his prescribed space of the freak show, disrupting the assumption that the modern cityscape is able to keep those unbefitting of the norm shut neatly away until they are needed. Mrs. Yamano and Monzō are reminded of the variety of deviant bodies in the public sphere that would go unnoticed had it not confronted them personally.

The dwarf's bodily difference is played up in a number of ways in order to further titillate the reader's interest in his bodily difference and position him as an outsider from the perspective of the physical majority. Initially described as a "deformed child" with a child's body and a man's face, he is also super-humanly fast and animalesque. He is wickedly cunning and smart, against expectations voiced by the other characters; Akechi comments that "he's no mere cripple. Most of those born deformed like him are idiots or feeble-minded children, but he alone, rather than a feeble-minded child, is a truly terrifying genius."[45] This reflects not only persisting ideas of physiognomic assessment of outer deformity to approximate interior qualities, but also the societal situation that compulsory education was not extended to people with disabilities until 1948.[46] This contributed to a cycle of lower socialization, literacy, marriage and job prospects,

[43] Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 503.
[44] Ibid., 554.
[45] Edogawa, *Early Cases*, 159. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 621.
[46] Karen Nakamura, *Deaf in Japan: Signing and the Politics of Identity*, (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2006), 3.

and kept many disabled people isolated from the rest of society. To Akechi and the rest of the non-disabled characters in the novel, as well as in terms of stereotypical literary depictions of disabled characters, a deformed body is the sign of a deformed or undeveloped mind, in both physiognomic and societal, educational terms. This emphasis on the dwarf's uncanny and deformed body, then the turning of stereotype on its head in terms of both physical and intellectual ability, builds a feeling of uncomfortable confusion for both the characters and the readers. This allows the dwarf to test the limits of the main characters' and readers' preconceived ideas of normalcy. The ensuing confusion is confirmed in the main character's discomfort in looking at him and incredulousness at his cunning.

The dwarf also displays uncanniness in his sexuality. This becomes apparent in a scene where Mrs. Yamano secretly meets with the dwarf, unaware of his true identity but knowing he is part of a blackmail plot over the coverup of what she then believes to be her husband's murder of his daughter Michiko. In this scene, the dwarf is initially disguised as a taller man, in prosthetic limbs that fall away when he attempts to seduce Mrs. Yamano into a physical encounter. The disguised man confesses his love to her, and she is initially "won over by the man's violent emotion, and before she knew it she had abandoned one hand to the man's mercy and was listening to his sobbing voice in silence, feeling a mysterious arousal. The sensation of tears falling onto her hand like rain softened her fear just a little."[47] However, when he physically advances on her, his limbs detach, and she realizes his true form. She reacts: "A cold shudder went down her spine when she thought that she had felt a queer fascination for a monster like this even for a moment."[48] This disgust is only prompted after the dwarf's congenital disability

[47] Edogawa, *Early Cases*, 125. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 575.
[48] Ibid., 126. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 577.

becomes apparent. While she can seemingly get past her fear of his blackmail and criminal connections because of the pity and curiosity she feels over his desperate and emotional love confession, the fact that he is revealed to be a "monster" repels her. And indeed, even the dwarf laments in his confession of love that his body "is not a body capable of ordinary love" and pleads for pity on his situation.[49] He is aware that disabled sexuality is necessarily labeled as queer to begin with in its deviation from assumptions about "normal" physical and sexual ability. Nevertheless, the dwarf is able to infiltrate Mrs. Yamano's most personal space, but is ultimately foiled by the discovery of his bodily abnormality. Her shock shows her assumption of compulsory bodily normalcy with all she encounters, and the threat to that normalcy his true body presents her. The assumption is that in the majority society she resides in, all bodies are strong, healthy, clean, ideal specimens, and any otherwise are denied, pushed out of sight, and not allowed to mingle. The dwarf's presence and his almost-successful seduction challenges Mrs. Yamano's assumptions about what bodies are regularly around her and whom she would be sexually interested in; he is a threat to her tenuous sense of physical normalcy earned through the contrast of viewer/viewed in the *misemono-ya*, and triggers anxiety when he so easily infiltrates her space. Once again the dwarf, while saliently aware of the assumptions placed on his body that deem him unfit for love, has shown his ability to cross the invisible line between two worlds divided by the values of a perceived norm.

The title character also attacks the norm- and ideal-building institution of commodity culture through his mischievous interaction with department store mannequins and doll parts. Department stores, their displays, and mannequins are a representation of a beautiful, ideal consumer image, and consumers look to these symbols for guidance in attempting to achieve the

[49] Ibid., 124. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 574.

socially constructed image of consumer culture's normalcy, prosperity, and/or luxury. The dwarf, with his deviant body and connections to the lower class of vagabonds and street performers, is farther from this ideal and less able to approach it to the same extent as the majority. However, the majority too can only attempt to come close to this ultimately unachievable, nonhuman image. The dwarf, both a foil to this idealized beauty and a freakish imitation of a mannequin, wreaks havoc upon the consumer ideal, and mocks and threatens the high regard for the unattainable image of consumer culture's nonhuman perfection. One such example is a scene set in a department store emblematic of the booming consumerism of the period. Night guards are patrolling the store when they come upon the "living doll" (*iki ningyō*) display, a type of lifelike mannequin which had also been displayed in *misemono-ya* in the Edo period. The narrator notes their uncannily lifelike appearance, and recounts anecdotes of store employees who fell in love with the dolls, and others who snuck into the store at night to talk to them; the narrator notes how the mannequins are so beautiful that it's understandable that someone might fall in love with them. The mannequins, in their beauty and realism, are personified enough to be worthy of human love; even a lifeless mannequin is more worthy of desire than the dwarf. As the guards approach the display in the dark, they notice what appears to be a new mannequin of a child they did not know had been recently added to the display. When the two men inch closer to investigate, they realize it is the dwarf, posing as a store mannequin:

> Large eyes and a large nose were set in a large face, and thick wrinkles were carved around the cheeks. It was what is commonly referred to as a dwarf. Although an adult, it had only a child's stature. (…) The combination of the beautiful dolls and the deformed child was so exceedingly strange that anyone who beheld it would probably let out a great burst of laughter if they saw it in the daytime, under the light of the sun. But at night, the composed expression of the deformed child floating in the electric torch's dim

circle of light, looking all the more insane by virtue of its composure, was felt horribly.[50]

In the light, the strange contrast between the dwarf and the beautiful dolls becomes apparent. As the guards call him out the dwarf flees, but "they had no means at all of pursuing the dwarf, who was shorter than the tables, as he fled between them"[51]—his short stature gives him advantage as he ducks out of sight in the maze of displays in the massive department store. The next day in the department store, customers admiring the mannequin display and its extremely lifelike features notice something different about one of the hands, noting the sickly color of the skin and the detail of the wrinkles and downy hair. A child crosses the barrier and pulls on it, revealing it to be an actual hand, which was covered by the mannequin's kimono, cruelly hacked off and red with blood.

The scattering and swapping of limbs, along the dwarf's hiding amongst the mannequins and his wearing of false limbs made for him by a doll-maker, put the dwarf, the mannequins, and the young woman's corpse in a similar position. The dwarf, the only living entity of this triad, is wedged in between healthy and deformed, desirable and abhorrent, and the sentient human and non-sentient object world; navigates this intermediate and indeterminate status to carry out his trickery and revenge. His briefly successful attempt to hide with the mannequins as an equal among the idealized objects of consumer culture—a goal shared by fashionable, "beautiful existences" like Michiko—disrupts the assumptions of who belongs within this consumer ideal. His discovery and flight show the strange contrast that occurs when imperfect humans try to blend in with the consumer ideal, and conversely suggests the horror of mannequins coming to life. Just as the child mannequin/dwarf comes alive to wreak havoc in the department store and

[50] Ibid., 102. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 543-544.
[51] Ibid. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 544.

smash the consumer ideal, the mannequins themselves appear to grow human limbs. The dwarf's tricks emphasize the contrast between actual humans and the mannequins and dolls: just as he cannot successfully disguise himself amongst the mannequins or blend in with the use of prosthetic doll limbs, neither can the human limb he places on the mannequin pass as part of the mannequin. Nor can a human limb make the mannequin human. Edogawa's emphasis on this contrast between human bodies and the idealized non-sentient objects highlights the ridiculousness of striving for a consumer ideal that is based off the influence of a non-human object fantasy. In his imitation and installation of actual flesh on the mannequins, and installation of doll parts on himself, the dwarf mocks and defiles the nonhuman perfection of the mannequins who were elevated to a position of social worth higher than the dwarf. On the other hand, the dwarf successfully shows that he himself, the mannequins, and the non-disabled human body all reside within a fragile system that promotes a consumer culture image impossible for any human body, disabled or non-disabled, living or dead, to approach.

The controversial ending of *Issun bōshi* also illustrates the exclusionary attitudes of this era, where suspicion and dismissal of non-normative bodies like that of the dwarf was typical. As stated above, while the daughter Michiko was the true perpetrator of the murder, her young, naïve, beautiful existence is given a pass, and the blame is put on the dwarf, who is only partly responsible, but also a known criminal, in near-death condition. To Akechi, and certainly to the other characters, the choice is clear; the silent consensus is that the dwarf does not belong in their world. Michiko's family lives in a Western-style house, she dresses in fashionable western clothes, and she has a "shocking quantity of various cosmetics" which she "collects indiscriminately without any fixed principles or opinions."[52] She and her family represent

[52] Ibid., 147. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 604.

healthy bodies that live and consume according to the trends of the Westernized and capitalist "modern" trends of the era. In contrast, the dwarf comes from an underground, *misemono* space with a deformed body, and masquerades with false limbs to sneak into the space of the consumer culture norm. Aware of his difference, the dwarf openly resents "normal" society and vows to exact revenge on it through his crimes, stating, "I have to do it. (…) I was born with this fateful body, and I'm going mad from the jealousy (*higami*). I can't help hating the contented, healthy people of society (*seken no manzoku na yatsura*). It's natural for them to be my enemies too."[53] He severs the victim's limbs and scatters them in public places, playing into the non-disabled majority's fear of the deforming and degradation of the body. Clearly influenced by the dwarf's vow of revenge, Akechi comments on the woman's body: "Both her hands and both her feet have been half cut off, and she looks just... yes, just like a dwarf."[54] Whether or not this particular effect was intentional, Akechi, from the position of the physical majority, recognizes the dwarf's position of societal slight and the potential desire for revenge by making other bodies more like his own. His actions are not only an attempt to infiltrate the majority's social space and to have difference recognized by the world of the norm, but also a reminder to "normal" people of the fragility of socially constructed normalcy. He constantly pursues and confronts them with the possibility of their own bodies dying or becoming disabled, and the possibility that they themselves could slide into this position of lower social status despite their current consumer comforts. Not only can he invade their space, but as they reside in the same spectrum of

[53] Ibid., 152; I changed Varteresian's translation of *higami* from "prejudice" to "jealousy" to avoid confusion of prejudice of others with the dwarf's inborn prejudice. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū,* vol. 2, 612.
[54] Ibid., 186. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 657.

humanity caught up in social and consumer norms, they may eventually fall from their coveted position and enter his outcast space as well.

The social values of these two parties and the spaces they occupy are certainly depicted as unbalanced: Akechi comments on the dwarf's evil, demonic qualities and the "curse of a vengeful cripple."[55] The dwarf, and similarly congenitally disabled people, are naturally cursed in Akechi's eyes; they are a curse upon society especially in their resentment of the majority, though this resentment is in reality entirely perpetuated and constructed by the majority. In contrast, a criminal like Michiko is simply "unfortunate. She is certainly at fault for her looseness, but considering that she is also an only daughter raised in a complicated home, she is not solely responsible for it having come to this. Besides, she now deeply regrets her past folly."[56] Akechi and the dwarf both call the dwarf's "curse" of his birth and the ensuing drive for vengeance unavoidable in light of able-disabled social power structures, and when given the choice between Michiko and the dwarf, Akechi deems the dwarf irredeemable in comparison to Michiko; in this judgment, Akechi perpetuates the structure that makes the dwarf's desire for vengeance seemingly "unavoidable" in the first place.

Once the dwarf is captured, as Matsuyama Iwao notes, the reader can finally confirm that the outsider has been safely eliminated from their familiar reality and sent back away to the world of the strange, the world of street performers.[57] Despite being the title character, the cursed dwarf, after being finally captured, is not present in the final scene. Displaced out of this society, he is pressured into confessing from offstage and dies from his injuries to save the beautiful woman from punishment for her crimes. The reader cannot help but be shocked at this

[55] Ibid., 159. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 621.
[56] Edogawa, *Early Cases*, 189. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 662.
[57] Matsuyama, *Rampo to Tokyo*, 175.

development. Is not Akechi Kogorō a master detective, devoted to the logical solving of crimes and the righteous serving of justice? How could he, with the consent of his associates, allow the full blame to rest on the dwarf when it is not his, and let the true instigator of the crime go free? The reader must face an uncomfortable realization: that Michiko, Mrs. Yamano, Akechi, Monzō, and the others are as twisted and menacing as the dwarf, if not more so, in their willingness to take advantage of their position as the powerful majority over the oppressed minority. In fact, Akechi hypothetically insinuates that the resolution of the case could all have been part of his own plot to save a guilty Michiko.

> "Even without breaking the Kewpie doll, I may have known beforehand that Komatsu had been strangled to death. And, in order to save the remorseful Michiko, I may have persuaded the dying dwarf to make a false confession.... a cleverly constructed one-scene drama. I wonder if something like that is entirely unimaginable. Understand? Shifting blame. Depending on the circumstances, it's not such a bad thing. Especially if it's done to avoid removing a beautiful creature like Michiko from this world. She is, you see, entirely remorseful."
>
> Amateur detective Akechi Kogorō sounded refreshed as he took long strides through the spring twilight.[58]

Not only does this ambiguous ending obscure the truth of who the murderer is, but it also serves to delegitimize the assumed righteousness of our protagonists and emphasizes the subjective nature of "detection." Any evidence, in the hands of people with power (in this case, the non-disabled majority, or Akechi and the police), can be manipulated to procure a desirable result. In this case, Akechi argues the dwarf is "many times worse than the real criminal"[59] and irredeemable in the eyes of the same system that perpetuates his vengeance. This is despite the fact that his crimes are not necessarily any worse than those of the true perpetrator, the beautiful yet criminal Michiko. With this judgment handed down to the dwarf and the girl criminal

[58] Edogawa, *Early Cases*, 193. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 666-667.
[59] Ibid., 159. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 622.

excused for her healthy, beautiful body worthy of life in the societal norm, the true antagonism in the story shifts from what the reader assumes in the beginning to be the menacing dwarf, to the values that allowed the characters occupying an empowered normalcy to judge him as a disposable scapegoat. Even if the reader is not likely to identify or sympathize directly with the dwarf himself, they may identify with his embroilment in this rigged system—one that attempts to subject and control countless other forms of deviance. These values which situate the dwarf in the "underground" are undoubtedly sinister in their subjection of the dwarf, and undoubtedly benefit the majority as the dwarf carries out the criminal Yamano family's dirty work and takes the fall for it.

As established by the narrative of the story, the dwarf is being driven mad by the forces of a lower social position he was born into. In the scene in which the dwarf confesses his love to Yurie, he sobs in what is described to be a "broken, miserable voice." "I won't ask for something so impossible as for you to give me your love. Please have pity on this man of unfortunate birth. (…) Surely you can feel a little compassion for me."[60] Here we are given glimpses into the dwarf's human interiority. Despite his evil deeds and trickery, he shows an emotional, broken side that is able to feel and desire love and compassion, and is highly aware of the social connotations of his difference. We may argue that were he not the subject of these discriminatory values he may have never become a villain or sought any revenge. After drawing out the antagonism of this value system, the dwarf's potential as an intelligent, emotional, able, and equal member of society among or above the ranks of the Yamano family, regardless of his physical difference, becomes clear.

[60] Ibid., 123-124. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 2, 572-574.

Read in the context of 1926 Japan, when interest in physically different *misemono* bodies persisted and even increased through printed image culture, and when consumerism grew in tandem with imperialistic government controls, *Issun bōshi*'s dwarf's physical difference can be interpreted as more than an audience-catching freak show. His clever flexibility and movement between social spaces is also a projection of anxiety over boundaries such as the one between bodies viewed as entertainment for their difference, and bodies that are to be coveted as healthy and normal. The events surrounding the dwarf of *Issun bōshi* can also be read as an attempt at subtle transgressive reappropriation of the rights of difference. The narrative alienates the dwarf for his physical difference and ensuing corruption, then collapses the space between his deviance and the corruption of the physically normative. This brings the process' alienation into a spotlight and forces the norm to confront the violence of its oppression. As I have outlined, the dwarf, first marked as the titillatingly different outsider, shows his ability to invade the physical majority's personal and social space. When confronted with this infiltration and closing of distance, the majority must compensate by exercising its power to maintain control over the social system that is threatened. If and when the reader realizes the animosity of this process, this newfound recognition and visibility brings the process of oppressing difference one step closer to questioning and change.

III. The Nightmare in the Shadows of Imperialism: *Imomushi* ("The Caterpillar", 1929)

"The Caterpillar" was originally presented in the January 1929 issue of *Shinseinen* (*New Youth*) under the original title *Akumu*, or "nightmare." "The Caterpillar" is a short story about Lieutenant Sunaga, a war veteran who returns from conflict abroad, likely the contemporaneous

Shandong Expeditions (*santō shuppei*),[61] after losing his arms and legs, his hearing, and his ability to speak. Now back living together with his wife Tokiko, his eyesight and sense of touch are his only connections to the outside world, and he communicates through either grunting, banging his body against surfaces, or writing with a pencil in his mouth. His last remaining pleasures in life are sex, food, and viewing his medals and laudatory newspaper articles about his military service. Tokiko struggles with her position as caregiver to her husband who has become like a caterpillar, writhing helplessly on the ground. However, she is also strangely aroused by his condition and the power she can now exert over him, and soon begins exploring her newfound sadistic tastes. Increasingly confused and frustrated, Tokiko's frenzy reaches a head when she gouges out Lieutenant Sunaga's eyes, robbing him of his final window to the world around him. Tokiko is wracked with guilt as she wonders what she will do next, but then discovers her husband missing, and a note left behind: "I forgive you" (*yurusu*). Lieutenant Sunaga is found to have crawled away and thrown his body down an old well to end his life.

While *Issun bōshi* and *Imomushi* are sometimes grouped together when criticizing Rampo's negative depiction of disability, it is important to note the stark differences in the contexts of the stories and their depictions. While both characters fall under the umbrella term of disability today, the natures of the dwarf's and the war veteran's disabilities could not be more different. The dwarf is congenitally below average height, but still has complete physical independence. He is treated as an outsider because of what is perceived as a defect from birth, and his congenital "defect" carries the connotation of karmic transgression. The war veteran, Sunaga, however, was formerly non-disabled and therefore does not carry the taboo connotation

[61] Suggested in Hirayama Yūichi, Shinpo Hirohisa, and Yamamae Yuzuru, *Edogawa Rampo shōsetsu kīwādo jiten* (Tokyo Shoseki, 2007).

of abnormal birth—he became disabled through injuries in military conflict. He now has extremely limited physical ability, and his identity is shaped by the fact that he has changed from non-disabled to disabled while serving his country.

Thematically, we also shift away from the Asakusa *misemono-ya* to a different historical context: Japanese military involvement in Asia. Beginning in 1895, Japan's military had participated in the First Sino-Japanese War, the Boxer Rebellion, the Russo-Japanese War, and World War I. Japan established colonies in Taiwan, Korea, and the Guandong Lease in southern Manchuria, and attempted colonial campaigns in German-controlled Tsingtao, China as well as the Siberian region of Russia in the Taishō Period. At the same time, Japan expanded its economic reach into China and Southeast Asia and continued to attempt to protect, solidify, and expand its influence abroad through the First and Second Shandong Expeditions/Jinan Incident of 1927-1929. While no specific conflict is mentioned in the story, the lieutenant in *Imomushi* was likely conceived to have been involved in one of these expeditions in Asia, the most recent at the time of publication being in Shandong.

The over-the-top, grotesque body image of the disabled lieutenant mirrors a genre of sensationalist publishing that emerged during the heyday of interwar imperialism and *ero guro* nonsense. For example, Umehara Hokumei's *Hentai shiryō* (predecessor to his *Gurotesuku*) reprinted portions of Ernst Friedrich's 1924 book *War Against War* (originally *Krieg dem Kriege* and *Sensō ni tai suru sensō* in Japanese) in 1926 and 1927. The original purpose of Friedrich's book was to disseminate powerfully negative images of the destruction of World War I. It depicted brutally graphic photos of human bodies being piled into mass graves, corpses charred from bombings, bodies of those killed in gas attacks, soldiers lined up for execution by gunshot, hanged corpses, the raped and murdered bodies of women, soldiers now disabled through lost

limbs carrying out various tasks, and so on, in order to bring attention to the cruelty of modern warfare. Akita Masami writes that at the time the photos served to confirm and record the shaping of a new level of brutality inflicted on human bodies in the new era of modern warfare; to the sensitivity of the *ero guro* media pioneers, they could feed the newly publicized trends of sadomasochism and erotic-grotesque. Reproduced in the gravure section of Umehara's founding issue, as well as in the 9th issue of the notoriously *ero guro* publication, these images were presented as morbidly voyeuristic and eroticized through the blasé tone of their captions, softening the effect of Friedrich's original somber and shocking presentation. In the first reproduction, the magazine published four photos of war captives before and after their execution. The first set, of three people being hanged, was captioned "These photos show how self-indulgent the German army was in its killing spree (*ika ni satsuriku wo hoshiimama ni shita ka*) during the Great European War. [Before photo:] The heavy pronouncement of 'sentenced to hanging' echoes… [After photo:] And, well, there you go. (Woman in center) (*Zatto, konna guai* (*chūō wa fujin*))" A second set, of firing squad execution photos, is captioned as follows: "[Before photo:] Here is another form of amusement for the German army. They snatch up anyone who reeks of the Bolsheviks (*Boru-kusai yatsu*), tie up their hands and feet, and [After photo:] …Thud!! (*Dosun!!*)" In yet another example, a photo of an injured war veteran with a large part of his mouth area missing, with a feeding tube in his mouth, reads, "What an artful way to eat! It takes some effort, but his lifestyle rivals that of a prince." These photos (and the woman's presence) were further trivialized and eroticized by their reproduction side by side erotic watercolors, woodblock prints, and photos of semi-nude women and other erotic, grotesque, or violent fare. Akita notes that while Umehara's light-hearted captions changed the effect of *War Against War*'s anti-war propagandist tone, behind his dismissive captions was a

subtle yet sharp political nuance.[62] While pushing the limits of censorship and *ero guro* aesthetic in his incongruously casual captioning and placement, Umehara also drew out the absurdity of the situations surrounding the photos themselves.

The parallels between this kind of imagery and the imagery in Rampo's *Imomushi* are clear. The appearance of these kinds of images in print in the first place was one factor in the newfound curiosity about the limits of the human body and the cruelty exercised against it. To *ero guro* voyeurs who were constantly discovering new ways to shock and rebel with fetishization and taboo sexuality, mutilated bodies of those involved in military conflict were fair game for viewing and consuming; the same applies to Lieutenant Sunaga's body. One can also draw similarities in the ways these images were reproduced; that is, neither Rampo's nor Umehara's presentations were explicitly anti-war. Rampo's novel did not go the route of Umehara's lighthearted captions, but he alleged that he did not intend for his images to be read as reflecting anti-war ideology. Rampo was adamant that the story was not intended to be anti-war, though most readers, critics, and censors agreed it was. Rampo commented: "I hate war, but it's not like [the story] had an ideology tied to it; I wrote it just for my interest in the bizarre and things that make one shiver."[63] Nevertheless, while Rampo originally submitted it to the socialist-leaning general-interest magazine *Kaizō*, he claimed it was rejected for being too radically left-wing. "On top of being anti-war, it had passages that made light of the Order of the Golden Kite, so *Kaizō*, who the government was especially keeping its eye on because of their left-leaning critiques, said it was too dangerous to publish no matter how much they censored

[62] Akita Masami, "Zangyaku no gurafizumu," in *Rampo no jidai: shōwa ero guro nansensu*," (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1995), 88-89.
[63] Edogawa, *Zenshū,* vol. 3, 705.

it."[64] Thus Rampo had it published in the modernist general-interest magazine *Shinseinen*, even then heavily censored. Rather than use the story of the mutilated soldier as an anti-war message, Rampo further explained years later that he wrote it with entirely different motivations: to write the horror of the human condition, to depict and push the limits of the human senses, and even to question God's creation of man. He reflects, "More than war, there was a stronger resistance (*rejisutansu*) crawling within me. For example, the resistance of [asking] 'why did God create man?' is one hundred times more fundamental than war or peace or left-wing politics, and a hundred times more intense."[65] We can track this idea of resistance regarding the fundamentals of human existence as a development of Rampo's ideology surrounding his literary usage of deviant bodies. Therein we are encouraged to look deeper into Sunaga and Tokiko's story and see them not as victims of war, but as victims of the human condition, and as an exaggerated reflection of the physical and emotional violence the human condition inflicts upon all bodies.

As in *Issun bōshi*, the text wastes no time in establishing the horrific and inhuman shape of the veteran's body. As indicated in the title, the Lieutenant's wife likens him to a caterpillar in his lack of arms and legs and his inability to speak, which necessitates his squirming around on the ground to move or communicate: "In every respect, he was like a large, yellow caterpillar—one of the type known as a hornworm. (…) [H]e would spin round and round on the tatami like a top, letting the four stubs that were the relics of his arms and legs wiggle in the air. These fleshy protuberances were like the legs of a caterpillar."[66] He is even referred to as an "unidentifiable

[64] Ibid., 710.
[65] Ibid., 711.
[66] Edogawa Rampo, "The Caterpillar," trans. Michael Tangeman, in *Modanizumu: Modernist Fiction from Japan, 1913-1938*, ed. William J. Tyler (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 412. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 687.

species."[67] *Imomushi* and many of Rampo's works in this period compare humans to animals in some way, first alienating the animalesque from the human, and then raising the question of what defines humanity from the rest of the animal world. [68] As many if not most of these animalistic works center around characters that have physical disabilities, one can assume that these bodily impairments classified today as disability were frequently associated with an animalistic (at times read as inhuman or uncivilized) image. This tenuous arena between animal and human that Sunaga represents eventually extends to Tokiko as she begins to recognize the animalistic tendencies in herself through her exposure to Sunaga's liminality, and they both become, in her mind, "like two beasts living out their years in a cage."[69] As I will argue, this development begins to question not only the animalism of the disabled body but all human bodies.

The text further questions Sunaga's positionality in his larval form; the narration notes that Tokiko "came to think of the pathetic freak of her husband (a man so pitifully maimed that the word "cripple" was inadequate to describe him) as an object that existed solely to satisfy her carnal desires. This man, who had been a brave and loyal bulwark of the nation, was now like a kept animal or perhaps even a kind of tool."[70] To her, he was "no more than a lump of yellow

[67] Ibid., 411. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 741.
[68] Hamada Yūsuke refers to what he calls Rampo's "animal series" (*dōbutsu shiriizu*), which includes *Injū* (*Beast in the Shadows*, August - October 1928), *Imomushi* ("Caterpillar," January 1929), *Kotō no oni* (*The Demon of the Lonely Isle*, January 1929 – February 1930), *Mushi* ("Insects," June – July 1930), *Kumo-otoko* (*The Spider-Man*, Oct 1929 – June 1930), and *Mera hakase no Fushigi na Hanzai* ("Doctor Mera's Mysterious Crimes," April 1931). In Hamada's figuring, this trend had much to do with Rampo's fascination with Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory outlined in *On the Origin of Species*, which was revolutionary for its blurring of the line between humanity and animals. Hamada Yūsuke, "Rampo to shinkaron" (Presentation, International Symposium 'Modernity of Edogawa Rampo,' Rikkyō University, Tokyo, Japan, November 25, 2018).
[69] Edogawa, "The Caterpillar," 416. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 694.
[70] Ibid., 408. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 680.

flesh, shaped like a deformed top."[71] His condition is so extreme that he defies description, displacing him even from the usual category of disability, "cripple." Not only does Sunaga reside in the liminal space between animal and human, but his loss of certain powers of sensual reception and his complete dependence on others also force him to reside between life and death in an uncategorizable mode of existence. Rather than seeing Sunaga's remaining faculties of desire, sight, thought, and so on as signs of his remaining humanity, Tokiko and the others see all his remaining faculties as unbefitting, uncanny, and freakish due to his uncategorizable standing. To them, he should either look and act human, or look and act as a cripple, and yet he is beyond crippled and still acts with the traces of his former self.

Again in contrast to *Issun bōshi*, Lieutenant Sunaga does not pose any immediate threat to the people around him, at least in the most basic form. He is disabled so severely that he is unable to speak, is barely mobile, and is completely dependent on his wife. Lieutenant Sunaga's inability to move nor speak leads to his objectification as a symbol of a soldier that was willing to sacrifice everything for his country, who now reposes in quiet retirement staring satisfied at his medals—at least, that is all we may glean from his actions. His lack of ability to potentially rebel and dissent about his treatment makes him into a sacrificial symbol representing an ideal devotion to the militarism projected onto him. In this, his particular story becomes irrelevant after he has finished serving his purpose for his country. Rampo nevertheless holds a steady gaze on the part of the story that is usually omitted from narratives of war heroes: the persistence of life after being mentally and physically traumatized by war, and the dilemma of those who care for them in the aftermath.

[71] Ibid.

Tokiko, as Sunaga's wife, is expected to care for him, and is praised for it, but at the same time few others are directly involved with Sunaga's care. In the immediate aftermath of Sunaga's return, he is celebrated, but "Once the fever of victory subsided, (…) society forgot about this couple. Nobody came to pay sick calls on the wounded soldier as they had in the past. (…) Even his relatives reached the point where they almost totally avoided setting foot in Tokiko's house, be it out of revulsion at the sight of a cripple or fear of being asked for material support."[72] Struggling to survive solely on a "meager" government pension, they ask General Washio, Sunaga's former army superior, if he would allow them to live on his property for free, and he agrees. However, Tokiko continues to struggle with her new role, and the isolation and avoidance of others. Exemplifying Tokiko's assumed stance as a self-sacrificing sole caretaker, Washio comments, "I never cease to be impressed at the way you've cared for that invalid over the past three years. Why, you have completely neglected your own needs without showing the slightest sign of resentment."[73] This expectation of care by Tokiko in the home is romanticized by others, but ultimately functions to shut them out of society. While government monetary and institutional support had begun to grow in the late Meiji and Taishō periods,[74] and Tokiko and Sunaga's monetary compensation would have probably been far from "meager,"[75] the emotional

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[72] Ibid, 415. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 692.
[73] Ibid., 407. I changed Tangeman's translation of *haijin* (a derogatory term for a disabled person) from "boy" to "invalid." See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 679.
[74] There was increased military/disability pension system for injured veterans in place since 1890, and government-sponsored institutional support for injured veterans without household support began in 1906 with the Crippled Soldiers Institute Law (Haiheiin hō), Haiheiin being Japan's first national facility for disabled veterans. The Military Relief Law in 1918 and Servicemen's Pension Law in 1923 further increased state-funded military relief for disabled veterans, especially for high-ranking and veterans with certain types and degrees of injury. See Lee K. Pennington, *Casualties of History: Wounded Japanese Servicemen and the Second World War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015).
[75] According to Pennington, the average annual living expenses for a working-class family was 450 yen by the start of 1918. After the 1923 pension reforms, the baseline military

toll of being seen as Sunaga's ideal caretaker (despite not necessarily being qualified in any way), compounded with the avoidance by their community (beside Washio) is too much for Tokiko to bear. The narrative suggests the problematic nature of these attitudes surrounding cases of disability such as Sunaga's, and suggests that money and spousal love are sometimes not enough. In this, the two are the victims of a structure that takes advantage of a person who made a public sacrifice (in war), then funnels their aftercare into familial privacy, assuming the pressures of caregiving to be private, isolated business.

Echoing the intelligent, physically able, and arguably thriving dwarf of the previous section, in this microcosmic world of care, Sunaga and Tokiko manage to thrive in a certain sense, against expectations. Sunaga, "despite the fact that his body was in such horrific shape, strangely enough, his appetite was good, and he maintained his health as well as a cripple could. (Old General Washio, attributing this to Tokiko's ministrations, did not forget to include this fact in his litany of praise.)"[76] With the loss of his mobility and hearing, Sunaga has grown more sensitive to and dependent on touch, which leads to him finding "no amusement in anything but corporeal desires."[77] He is overall generally healthy, and he still has a voracious appetite for food and sex. He furthermore retains his ability to communicate through writing, asking cognizant questions such as "do you hate me now" and "where were you, three hours?" He communicates his thoughtfulness and emotion to Tokiko through his powerful gazes, which, are noted as

discharge/retirement pension for a lieutenant was 567 yen a year, plus a disability increase of 1800 yen a year for what would be considered a grade 1 combat injury of a commissioned officer. If Sunaga fully qualified for these benefits, combined, that would cover more than five times the average cost of living. See Pennington, *Casualties of History*, especially pension charts on pages 42-44.

[76] Edogawa, "The Caterpillar," 412. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 686.

[77] Ibid., 412. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 687.

vividly expressive and the only part of him that "retained a vestige of his former humanity."[78] Tokiko, too, learns that she finds pleasure in Sunaga's new situation. While she is initially frightened by Sunaga's body, movements, and remaining desires, she begins to open up to his new physicality, as she "slowly became a 'hungry ghost'—a demon of desire who fed on physical pleasure," whose "desires were so insatiable that even her husband found himself unable to keep up with her."[79]

Whether due to Tokiko's successful care or not, Sunaga unexpectedly continues to express his health and humanity through desire, thoughtfulness, and expressiveness, and Tokiko discovers a new yet confusing aspect of her sexuality in continuing to be attracted to Sunaga. Their sex is at first apparently consensual though he cannot verbally consent—Sunaga shows signs of enjoying her affection through facial expressions. This sexual relationship is even an affirmation of hope for his disabled sexuality after his bodily change, until she starts to take pleasure in exhausting him to the point of pain. Here Sunaga's inability to express clear consent becomes problematic as Tokiko escalates the violence and advantage taken over Sunaga's body. Throughout this development Tokiko convinces herself that Sunaga has become mentally dull because of his injuries, and if all he ever wanted was food and sex she would be able to justify him as an animal or a toy—that is, she convinces herself that he is no longer an autonomous being capable of consent. But persistent signs of his humanity remind her that he is still sentient. Herein the expectations of how "cripples" should be, how they should be regarded, and their abilities to consent or dissent are brought into question. Especially given that these expectations were what pushed Tokiko and Sunaga into their present situation in the first place, their

[78] Ibid., 418. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 698.
[79] Ibid., 416. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 694, 743.

disruption causes Tokiko an internal conflict over her inability to come to terms with her expected role and Sunaga's new form of existence. She has to learn to live with him in a way she did not expect him to be—human—causing a crisis she cannot come to terms with.

This crisis is best represented in Sunaga's persistent gaze, and the climactic violent outburst it triggers in Tokiko. In the climactic scene, Tokiko sees Sunaga staring thoughtfully into space and notes that "There was something uncanny about the look in his eyes. But more than that, she hated the way he seemed to sink into deep and purposeful thought even though for a cripple there was nothing in the room to look at."[80] Unable to bear the incomprehensible disconnect between the expectations of his crippled body and his remaining intelligence and humanity, she is thrown into violently shaking him and asking him the meaning of his gaze. His eyes like a "powerful rebuke" that "glared at her," she loses control and thrusts her hands into his eyes. After regaining her senses, she realizes that her actions were no accident, and that she knew her motivation for it:

> What she remembered most vividly was how her husband's eyes had rudely intervened, and in their expressiveness, they had inhibited the two of them from pursuing the uninhibited life of two beasts. (…)
>
> Of all of the parts of the cripple's body, only his eyes retained a vestige of his former humanity. And, because they did, they left her feeling as if her work was somehow incomplete. He had yet to become, she felt, her true toy top.[81]

Sunaga's gaze is not only the last vestige of his humanity, but also his last tool of dissent. He uses his last method of communication to remind Tokiko of his persisting autonomy. For Tokiko, it became easier for her to think he is no longer who he used to be—to completely break from their past and accept their new simplified realities as total cripple and caretaker, a toy and a

[80] Ibid., 417. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 696.
[81] Ibid., 418. See also Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 3, 697-698.

player, or two animals in a cage—rather than have to deal with the difficulty of accepting the change that they both have undergone, and accept the new life that comes along with it. While she attempts to simplify their roles so that she is no longer burdened by the need to consider his humanity, autonomy, and consent, Sunaga's gaze intervenes, forcing Tokiko to reconsider the weight of her actions.

In the ensuing events of the story, Sunaga leaves the note "I forgive you" and breaks out of the space of private familial care, crawling off to hurl his body into an old well and plunge to his death. Given Sunaga's difficulty with communication, the exact motivations for his actions are obscured. It is unclear whether he is acting out of self-pity, pity toward his wife's burden, feelings of guilt upon surviving military conflict, or a combination. The importance lies in his exertion of autonomy, namely, escaping the isolated space of private care. After experiencing the height of Tokiko's frenzy at the expense of his vision, Sunaga exerts the agency to move freely enough to take his own life. This could tell the reader that his life truly is unsustainable outside of the space of care. Alternatively, it could tell us that outside that isolated care space, he is able to do what he wants, which just happens to be to kill himself.

While the dark and grotesque way in which Lieutenant Sunaga is depicted follows the trend of erotic objectification of war-torn bodies as seen in *Hentai shiryō*, his body's presence goes beyond exploiting the reader's curiosity for the sake of *ero guro* aesthetic. His physical otherness isolates him from society, even raises the question of whether he is fully human, or even fully alive. He is then shown to be persistently human and alive through his actions, his gaze, his desires, and desirability. Nearly stripped of his autonomy in all of these situations, and likened to a caterpillar, a helpless sex toy, and a lump of flesh, even when deprived of his remaining window to the world, he still retains health, autonomy of movement, choice, and the

humanity to offer his wife forgiveness. His unexpected position between these categories problematizes the issues his body represents: the question of autonomy and exploitation of not only bodies in war, but also the autonomy of and exploitation of deviant bodies in erotic grotesque consumer imagery of the 1920s. Reflected against *ero guro* image consumerism and militarist exploitation, the text symbolically highlights the importance of recognizing the autonomy and humanity of all othered bodies despite the erasure that occurs when humans inflict physical and systemic violence and exploitation upon each other. From *Issun bōshi* to *Imomushi*, Rampo's personal ideology surrounding his usage of transgressive human bodies evolves into one of resistance. Retroactively considering *Issun bōshi*'s dwarf alongside *Imomushi*'s Sunaga in these terms, in both portraits of persistent humanity and struggle for recognition, Rampo questions "God's creation of man" in humanity's various forms, and highlights the pathos of an existence in which all bodies are persistently human yet fail to always be recognized as such.

IV. Manufacturing Disability: *Kotō no oni* (*The Demon of the Lonely Isle*, 1929-1931)

Kotō no oni began serialization in the monthly magazine *Asahi* from January 1929 (Shōwa 4), the same month *Imomushi* was released, and ran until February of the next year. *Kotō no oni*'s protagonist and narrator is a man named Minoura Kinnosuke (hereafter Minoura), an employee at a trading company who becomes enamored of another employee, the beautiful Kizaki Hatsuyo (birth name Higuchi Hatsuyo; hereafter Hatsuyo). Hatsuyo is an orphan, found abandoned in Osaka with nothing but a bundle containing a book with her family lineage and other notes written within, such as an illustration of a beach which she has faint memories of sitting at and staring out onto with a baby at her side. Minoura and Hatsuyo soon become romantically involved and plan to marry. One night after Hatsuyo voices an ominous feeling

about a strange old man with a cleft lip[82] who passed her near her home, the next morning she is found dead, with a knife in her heart. The room was locked from the inside, and there were no signs of struggle. Mysteriously, the only thing of value on her body, her pocketbook, still contained her monthly pay, but Hatsuyo's notes on her family lineage were stolen. Minoura hires an acquaintance, the detective Miyamagi Kōkichi, to help solve the mystery. His old friend Moroto Michio (hereafter Moroto), who had recently been trying to come between Minoura and Hatsuyo, also joins the investigation. Moroto is a gifted medical scientist and homosexual man who Minoura knows from having lived in the same boarding house during their school years. During that time, Moroto also romantically pursued Minoura. In the process of investigation, Miyamagi is also killed, and picking up where he left off, Minoura and Moroto trace a number of clues back to a young, "feeble-minded" contortionist called Tomonosuke. Luring Tomonosuke into a trap, they confirm that he was able to smuggle himself into the crime scene through hiding in a vase in the neighboring antique store, then crawling through the connected floor space between the houses, into Hatsuyo's room to kill her. They also confirm that he is an underling of the man Hatsuyo saw with the cleft lip, whom he calls "Daddy" (*ototsan*)."

Through a series of investigatory events into the mystery of "Daddy's" identity, Minoura and Moroto come back into possession of both Hatsuyo's family lineage notes as well as a journal written by a girl called Hide-chan. After deciphering her writing's "thick provincial dialect," (*hidoi inaka namari*) the main characters deduce that Hide-chan lives imprisoned on an island whose inhabitants are ruled over by Ototsan, whom she calls "a cripple with a scary

[82] The text reads "his lip was split in two just like a rabbit's" (*kuchibiru ga chōdo usagi no yō ni wareteite*), which indicates in context would be called a "harelip," but which is no longer considered a PC term.

face."[83] On this island, everyone is "crippled." She refers to Kit-chan, her "other face" and "other name," and it soon becomes apparent that Hide-chan and Kit-chan are artificially conjoined, created by an experimental surgical procedure to connect a male and female into one. In the journal, she describes her life, her strained relationship with Kit-chan, and her self-discovery as different from "regular" humans, and even from other "cripples." In the end, Minoura and Moroto take the journal as a cry for help as well as a decisive clue into solving the mystery of Hatsuyo's murder and heredity.

Soon after Moroto opens up to Minoura about his past—he too was raised by Ototsan, who also goes by the name Jōgorō, and everyone in his home was somehow "crippled" except Moroto himself: his hunchbacked (adoptive) parents, blind and nonverbal house attendants, and many other people living in his house with an unusual amount of fingers and toes, low mental ability, or one "with no bones, like a jellyfish, who could not stand."[84] He tells how Jōgorō sent him off to learn and advance the technology of surgery which would then be used to improve Jōgorō's experiments. Jōgorō plans to create a race of "manufactured cripples" to export back to freak shows and circuses until he can eventually overtake "normal" society as revenge for his own shunning. Moroto also explains how he was sexually abused by his mother, a hunchback like Jōgorō, which caused him as an adult to abhor all women and become homosexual. Once on Jōgorō's island, the pair are able to locate Hide-chan and release all of the manufactured cripples, as well as discover Jōgorō's intention to use Hatsuyo's (who, it turns out, is Hide-chan's sister, and Jōgorō their great-uncle) family lineage notes to find a hidden fortune on the island. The pair race to find this fortune before Jōgorō and are led into catacombs where they

[83] Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 4, 149.
[84] Ibid., 190-191.

face danger at every turn, but not enough to stop them from eventually succeeding and defeating Jōgorō, who is captured by a police investigator.

In the final section, Minoura and Hide-chan are married, and Hide-chan begins her transformation into a proper lady. She is surgically separated from Kit-chan, learns to dress in kimono, fix her hairstyle in the latest fashion, and speak with a Tokyo accent.[85] With Hatsuyo and Hide-chan's family fortune, Minoura brings the experiments from the island to live in a home and medical facility especially for them, the goal of which is to surgically re-make them into "normal humans" (*seijō na ningen*).[86] Minoura wanted Moroto to become the head of this new hospital, but Moroto mysteriously and abruptly dies of sickness after going to meet his true parents; he dies calling Minoura's name, holding his letter.

As in *Issun bōshi* and *Imomushi*, physically different and disabled characters are narrative prostheses used as plot devices to advance the story, and indeed the majority of characters are shown to have some form of physical or mental disability. Both Jōgorō's and *Issun bōshi*'s dwarf's raison d'être is getting revenge on "normal" people. Their bodily difference and disability, or, the prejudice against it leading to the desire for revenge, is what motivates the acts that become the crux of the entire story. However, again, the nature of the "crippling" of many of the main characters in *Kotō no oni* is essentially different from *Issun bōshi*'s dwarf and *Imomushi*'s Sunaga. While Jōgorō is congenitally disabled by his hunched back and cleft lip, the main focus of the story is not congenital disability, nor disability as an effect of war, but a forcibly inflicted disability from a third party. The fantastic nature of this set-up, and Rampo's progressively diverse cast of physically different characters, distances the reading of the

[85] Ibid., 329.
[86] Ibid.

narrative from association with any particular or actually existing group (such as little people or disabled war veterans). It instead showcases Rampo's further development of the literary use of physically transgressive bodies as a discursive space about difference, ideas surrounding deviance and cure, and the conceptual and literal construction of norms.

The characterization of the manufactured-disabled in *Kotō no oni* follow similar patterns as the previous two works I have discussed, further demonstrating Rampo's habit of describing disabled bodies as on the fringes of acceptable humanity or as animalistic figures, yet also as complex human beings affected or traumatized by negative forces outside of their control. From the point of view of the "healthy" characters such as Minoura and Moroto, they are depicted chiefly as animalistic, frightening, mentally underdeveloped, and distinctly different. Jōgorō, the main antagonist of the story, is both hunchbacked and has a cleft lip, his body an external manifestation of his internal self: per Moroto, "Just like his body, he's twisted right down to his soul,"[87] again reflecting the common physiognomy-inspired literary trope that represents inner corruption as manifested on the physical body. Well-put by Mitchell and Snyder, "In literature this mediating role of the external body with respect to internal subjectivity is often represented as a relation of strict correspondence. Either the 'deviant' body deforms subjectivity, or 'deviant' subjectivity violently erupts upon the surface of its bodily container.'" In Jōgorō's case, his body (or, the prejudice against it) deformed his subjectivity, and then cycled back to express itself not only in the surface of his own body, but the surface of his victims' bodies as well. They are depicted as not belonging to majority society—both figuratively and literally—as the physically deviant characters live isolated on an island or else in a freak show on the mainland. Their "underdeveloped" mental status and lack of social education contributing to the extremity of

[87] Ibid., 303.

their deviance from the norm makes them easily manipulated by Jōgorō, who, twisted in body and soul with a vengeance against society, naturally falls into the role of a villain. However, like *Issun bōshi*, Jōgorō became twisted and cruel only after being rejected by society for his physical difference. Jōgorō was the illicit child of a fleeting affair of "sudden impulsive curiosity"[88] between his father (of Hatsuyo's same true Higuchi lineage; Jōgorō is technically the head of the Higuchi household by being his father's first-born son) and a hunchbacked maid, by the family name of Moroto. Once he was born, he and the mother were abhorred by the father for their deformity, and sent away from the Higuchi mansion's island. Off the island, his mother teaches him to hate "ordinary" people: "Jōgorō was raised for those years with the voice of his mother's curses (*noroi*) as his lullabies. They feared and detested ordinary people (*atarimae no ningen*) just as if they were otherworldly beasts."[89] When Jōgorō is an adult, he returns to the island and falls in love with his recently-deceased half brother's (his father's legitimate son) wife, who would be the grandmother of Hatsuyo. When he is rejected by her as well, told by her that she "would rather die than give in to the will of a cripple," he descends even further into hatred, turning into a "demon that curses the world."[90] He then decides to marry someone "even more terribly crippled than himself" (*jibun ijō ni hidoi kawawa-musume*), and thus begins his mission to take revenge against physically normative society. He begins bringing cripples back to his island home to raise them, with the hopes that they will reproduce to make more and more crippled children.

As in other stories, it is not only physical difference that acts as a plot-driver, but also the social pressures exercised against it. Had Jōgorō not been rejected by his father and a woman

[88] Ibid., 299.
[89] Ibid., 300.
[90] Ibid.

he loved for his physical deformity, he would not have felt the rejection of his otherness, and would not have sought to create a space for himself in which he would be accepted. Nor would he have sought revenge on the people who shunned him by creating a separate space and inflicting experiments upon his victims. While this pattern in Rampo's stories suggests the negative image that disabled bodies are more often than not traumatized and vengeful, it is still notable for its acknowledgment of trauma as a product of a harmful value system enforced by the majority rather than an innate quality of disabled bodies.

Hide-chan, however, does not follow such a clear pattern of the animalistic, mentally inferior, or vengeful "cripple." This surely has much to do with the fact that she is physically beautiful female and an easy target of bodily objectification and fetishization. Furthermore, she was born non-disabled but was made that way against her will; Minoura's first impression of her beauty despite her physical crippling strikes him as shocking, and he soon finds he has fallen in love with this beautiful "cripple girl" (*katawa musume*)." Her normative physical beauty and her disabled body as a product of victimization redeems her as an honorary or former member of the physical norm and gives hope that she can possibly be "fixed" or "saved." This beauty is also heightened by her contrast to Kit-chan, with whom she has been forcibly conjoined. Kit-chan becomes increasingly filthy in his hygiene as the pair grow older, in contrast to Hide-chan's efforts toward cleanliness. Furthermore, Kit-chan begins making romantic and sexual advances on Hide-chan, becoming increasingly perverted against Hide-chan's attempts to deflect him. In these binaries, Kit-chan and Hide-chan are a walking combination of both male and female, dirty and clean, innocent and perverted. Indeed, Hide-chan's "crippled" sexuality is further tabooed by Kit-chan's pseudo-incestual, pseudo-masturbatory advances. While this complicates Hide-chan's redeemability as a beautiful and charming potential romantic partner, her contrast as feminine

against Kit-chan's masculine brusqueness, her cleanliness against Kit-chan's filthiness, and her attempts at chastity against Kit-chan's perversion, characterize her as an innocent damsel in distress to be saved from victimization.

In tying *Kotō no oni*'s premise to a historical context of the time in which it was published, we can see a connection between *Kotō no oni*'s medical manufacture of disability as a reversed play on the growing trend of the late 19th and early 20th century eugenics movement in Japan. The Japanese eugenics movement was "a 'biological' approach to [the] comprehensive modernization/Westernization plan"[91] of the Meiji period, and pushed for a strengthening of the Japanese nation through preventing procreation of those with hereditary diseases, mental and physical disabilities, and in some cases, even temperaments such as excessive drinking and criminality. Eugenic ideas, intermingling with new ideas about health and fitness, were pushed in "networks of modern institutions and industries, such as the army, schools, hygiene exhibitions, immigration training programs, the press, fashion, advertising, popular genealogies, and so forth." This led "the Japanese people […] to think in totally new and different ways about their bodies,"[92] as moldable vessels for the betterment of their race and society. Eugenics was not only heavily embroiled with imperial goals of modernization and Westernization, and problems of "Yamato" ethnic purity in a time of colonialism of other races in Asia, but also held heavy implications for the treatment and reproductive rights of any and all people considered harmfully "deviant," especially physically and mentally disabled people.

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[91] Sumiko Otsubo and James R Bartholomew, "Eugenics in Japan: Some Ironies of Modernity, 1883–1945." *Science in Context* 11, no. 3-4 (1998): 547.
[92] Jennifer Robertson, "Eugenics in Japan: Sanguinous Repair," in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, ed. Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (Oxford University Press, 2010), 437.

In the narrative of *Kotō no oni* we certainly can hear the echoes of Japan's eugenic trends. Consider the importance of Hatsuyo's family lineage information as one of the driving forces of the entire story. The only key to her mysterious orphaned history, it is stolen or nearly stolen on numerous occasions, and is the most valuable clue to finding the buried treasure. With Hatsuyo and Hide-chan's extraordinary beauty as proof of exceptional breeding, the secret of their pure heredity is the key to genetic and financial prosperity, and the key to a harmonious ending to the story in which we can finally solve the mystery, confirm Hatsuyo and Hide-chan's lineage, and allow Hide-chan to marry the protagonist Minoura. In contrast, Jōgorō's physical deformity leads to him being disowned by his family and rejected in his romantic pursuits. While technically the first-born son of his father and therefore the head of the Higuchi family, what is seen as his genetic corruption (in the form of physical difference) leads to the denial of his right to prosperity under the ideals of Japanese eugenics.

Reichert reads the connection with eugenics in Rampo's story as a kind of nationalistic propaganda representing deviant figures' threat to Japanese society, which endorsed the need to "to monitor both themselves and those around them for signs of deviance and freakishness."[93] However, this idea is complicated by the narrative's ambivalence towards the norm against physical deviance, and the viewpoints expressed by the characters residing outside of that norm. If the true goal of eugenics was to weed out traits perceived as detrimental to the purity of a group through selective reproduction and sterilization, Jōgorō is carrying out a kind of reverse-eugenics, sending his underlings (specifically, Moroto) off to acquire the advanced medical knowledge to engineer the opposite: attempting to flood the population with manufactured cripples. While Jōgorō and his similarly congenitally disabled and socially shunned proponents

[93] Reichert, "Disciplining the Erotic-Grotesque," 378-379.

are clearly characterized as villainous for their forced mutilation of otherwise healthy bodies, held up to the context of 1920s eugenic history in Japan, another critical possibility of the narrative becomes apparent: is Jōgorō's reverse-eugenics any less justifiable than standard eugenics itself? On his island where deviant bodies are the norm and the idea of the ideal body isn't shaped by the same majority, these bodies could, in theory, live normal lives (were they not imprisoned). This is simply eugenics under an alternate idea of progress. The reversal of ideals in Jōgorō's reverse-eugenics forces the reader to confront the value system that underwrites the reasonability of any eugenics.

This reversal is further supported by Hide-chan's diary and her realization of her identity detailed therein. First living in almost complete isolation from others, Hide-chan slowly becomes aware of socially constructed disability through contact with others. In her journal, she describes her initial self-constructed idea of the human physical norm in isolation:

> For a long time, I didn't know that other people are all called humans, and are living things different than fish or insects or rats, and that they all have the same shape. I thought humans were all different shapes. Because I hadn't seen a lot of other humans, I had a mistaken idea like that. […] Because no one ever told me anything, I didn't clearly understand the shape humans are supposed to be.[94]

Her body, as well as the physical variation between herself and her two attendants, comprise the physical norm to her because she lives in almost total isolation and has only ever seen two other humans before (her attendants, who are mentally but not physically disabled). When Hide-chan looks outside her barred window with the help of an attendant (who in retrospect Hide-chan notes was "probably the kind of cripple that is called an 'idiot'"[95]) and sees a third human, she begins to realize a pattern: that the man outside has the same kind of body as her attendants. Now

[94] Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 4, 151-152.
[95] Ibid., 152.

realizing her difference from them, she becomes afraid, but still is not aware of the concept of "cripple." Years later, a new attendant, Sukehachi, teaches her that "cripples have something different about them from ordinary (*atarimae no*) humans."[96] At first not understanding what constitutes "ordinary humans," she bases "ordinary" off of herself and assumes that Sukehachi and her other attendants are "cripples." However, after beginning to have further contact with ideas of the wider world through smuggled literature and picture books, only then does she learn what constitutes the physical norm for the majority off the island, and that she is considered different: "I finally understood what Sukehachi had told me; it was not Sukehachi and the others who were cripples, it was me."[97]

Eventually, she begins to feel the full weight of the system she and the rest of the disabled residents of the island have been forced into. She realizes the power of socially constructed norms and boundaries, and begins to show the same resentment toward the oppressive majority as Jōgorō. She vows to begin constructing her own consciousness of what a "cripple" is: "I had a thought recently, that if I'm going to be hated so much outside the island, that I'll hate and despise them from here, too. To myself, I'll call ordinary people who are different shapes than me cripples. I'll call them that when I write, too."[98] Hide-chan's gradual realization that being "crippled" is constructed by the norm one is faced up against again complicates the idea of constructed disability and norms to begin with. What constitutes *atarimae* to Hide-chan and the others on the island is "crippled" in the eyes of majority society; to those on the island, various bodily deviations are seen as the norm. While Hide-chan's realization eventually rests in acceptance that her body is abnormal in the eyes of "normal"

[96] Ibid., 153.
[97] Ibid., 154.
[98] Ibid., 155.

society, the process of her realization exposes the mechanics of how social disability consciousness and other non-normative minority consciousnesses are constructed, laying them bare to be questioned by herself and the reader.

However, given the brutal antagonism associated with Jōgorō's mission, and the fact that Minoura's mission is essentially to restore as many of the "cripples" to as "normal" as possible once they are rescued, we can assume that in the end the reigning attitudes about physical difference are not necessarily meant to be proven wrong or reversed in the end. Even after the antagonism of socially constructed norms are exposed, and even though the majority of "cripples" in the story are artificially and forcibly manufactured, the story does nothing but reinforce the sentiment of loss and defect from "normal" humans in the ensuing plot points. While Hide-chan laments the attitudes toward cripples like her, she feels at times that there is no solution but to either conform or die; "There's no doubt that cripples are terribly hated by people. If I am to be hated so much, I think it would certainly be better to die."[99] This is reinforced by the denouement of the novel, in which Hide-chan becomes a proper lady, while the others will be offered services at a hospital founded by Minoura:

> After some negotiations, we built a magnificent home for cripples on the coast at Shōnan Katase. To overturn the wrongdoing done to the Higuchi family by demons like Jōgorō, there we plan to widely take in cripples who can't support themselves, and let them live out the rest of their lives enjoyably. […] Connected to the house for cripples, we built an orthopedic surgery office. Using the best in surgical techniques, our goal is to change cripples into normal humans.[100]

In the end, we see that Hide-chan and the others were able to be saved through "cure" and reintegration, as is expected of them to want. As reinforced by Hide-chan's laments in her

[99] Ibid., 155.
[100] Ibid., 329.

journal, the choices seem to be to remain isolated among other deviant bodies, to be "cured" and reintegrate as a "normally shaped human," or to die. While the premise of the novel presents an alternative reality for deviant bodies under reverse-eugenics and alternative norm-building, it is no more than a fleeting fantasy. In the end, the protagonists' world is reinforced as the dominant setting for civilized society and the social dynamics of the island as an aberrant microcosm unsustainable outside of the island.

The case of Moroto brings up yet another issue in the vein of deviance. Moroto, while not physically disabled in any way, harbors a different form of deviance that is stereotypically seen as incompatible with able-bodiedness: his homosexuality. Sexually abused by his adoptive mother in childhood, Moroto develops intense misogyny which manifests itself in homosexuality. Treated in this way like an emotional disorder, Minoura seems to fear Moroto's sexuality more than anything. When trapped in the underground catacombs together, facing possible death and outside the laws of moral society, Moroto practically becomes a monster, a sexual predator no longer able to control himself from his object of lust, Minoura. However, once back above ground, Moroto regains his restraint. Unlike the physical disabilities of the manufactured cripples, this is treated as a disability of the mind that cannot be cured with a simple surgery. In the context of eugenics, Moroto not only harbors a pathology that makes him unfit for reproduction, but furthermore, his attempted homosexual seduction of Minoura is an obstacle in Minoura having a "normal" or "healthy" love life. And so, Moroto's unruly existence must be tidied: in the last page of the novel, it is explained that he dies of a sudden and mysterious illness while happily reuniting with his true parents in a faraway town, calling his love Minoura's name while clutching his letter. This sudden ending has a whiplash effect on the reader: just as the main character and his newly cured wife are settling into their life in a

comfortable norm, we think, but what of Moroto? The supporting character whose homosexuality threatens to disrupt this idealized norm is snuffed out. Yet, the nature of his final moments nevertheless causes us to flinch at the sad cruelty of Moroto's fate, still thinking of his long-pursued Minoura on his deathbed. Despite his sometimes menacing advances on Minoura, the reader is sure to feel that he did not deserve sudden death. Nevertheless, it seems that his sins are irredeemable in the face of a modern society pushing toward a healthy and wholesome country in body and mind, and all's well that ends well as long as the protagonist and his (heterosexual) love interest can live happily ever after.

Here again, Rampo's depictions of deviance, this time manifesting as manufactured disability and pathological homosexuality, paint a cruel and unusual picture of physical and mental deviance. At the same time, he ultimately creates nuanced figures whose struggles, self-discovery, and snuffing out lead to a questioning of eugenics, societal norms and the ways they are constructed, and the potential effects those norms have on the people they apply to. Questioning the impact and moral validity of reverse-eugenics ultimately forces us to question the impact and moral validity of the reality it mirrors. However, Rampo does not stop at eugenics and his well-versed medium of physical disability as narrative prosthesis in order to problematize social deviance. He builds from the stereotypical character of the vengeful congenital cripple rejected by society (Jōgorō), to fantastically artificially manufactured bodies alternately ideal or flawed depending on social context (Jōgorō's creations), to the openly homosexual Moroto, who passes as physically able yet is sexually deviant and pathological as a result of sexual trauma. If, as in Moroto's case, we extend our lens past physically visible deviance and disability, even our main protagonist Minoura confesses to acting "like a madman" away from the eyes of others. After Hatsuyo's death and cremation, he engages in blatantly socially deviant and mentally

pathological cannibalistic act. He narrates, "I stole a handful of her ashes, a piece of my lover that had been so brutally altered. (Oh, I've written out such a shameful thing.) Then, I stole off to a nearby field, and I, like a madman, moaning all my words of love, I put that, those ashes, into my stomach."[101] Even Minoura, the protagonist and "hero" of the story, who rejects the temptation of homosexual advances, finds hidden riches, and rehabilitates cripples, is capable of engaging in highly deviant behavior. Everyone has the potential to exhibit deviance and be shunned as an outsider. As Minoura's case shows, the problem of recognition essentially comes down to deviance's visibility and the ability to "pass" as normal.

From *Issun bōshi* to *Imomushi*, Rampo began to develop physical disability as narrative prosthesis as a tool for resistance against the pathos of the human condition and social dynamics of his time. By first establishing the alienation of the physically different, then collapsing the social space between "difference" and "normalcy" and the values that define them, the narrative transgressively attempted to deconstruct these values as flawed and reappropriate the value of deviance. *Kotō no Oni* establishes a similarly structured narrative of physical difference versus the oppression of majority society, and the attempt to reappropriate the value of deviance. However, it loses direct specificity in the fantasy of manufactured-disability and becomes a more symbolical problematization of social norm construction. In the process, the narrative slowly reveals that Rampo's concerns and sympathies lie not only in the suppression of the physically deviant, but also the suppression of other, less visible social deviances (homosexuality) and pathologized psychological states (trauma, madness). In short, in *Kotō no Oni*, Rampo begins to more broadly question the nature of deviance outside of the direct symbolism of physicality; he shows the subjective nature of deviance and problematizes the process of norm construction, and

[101] Ibid., 55.

shows the concept of deviance's insidious relationship to visibility. In this sense, Rampo's work *Mōjū* picks up where *Kotō no Oni* leaves off: with the critique of vision as the reigning judge of deviance, and an exploration of the value of a world without it.

V. A World Beyond Vision: *Mōjū* (*The Blind Beast*, 1931)

Mōjū, like *Kotō no oni*, was serialized in *Asahi*, from January 1931 to March of the next year, skipping releases in February, August, November, and December of 1931. *Mōjū*'s narrative revolves around a character simply referred to as *mōjū*—the blind beast—a blind man who serially kidnaps beautiful women, dismembers them, and incorporates them into sculpture. This sculpture is conceived as "touch-art" (*shokkaku geijutsu*) which is enjoyed solely through the sense of touch, and can only be fully understood and appreciated by people whose senses are not biased by sight. The first half of the novel focuses on his entrapment and seduction of Mizuki Ranko, a music hall actress in Asakusa. After a series of encounters with the blind beast, whom Mizuki assumes is another strange fan of hers, she is lured by the man and kidnapped to his atelier. After extensive mental and physical struggle, Mizuki is seduced by the man and eventually accepts her fate. The two then fall into a captor-captive love tryst; Mizuki comes around to the ideas of her captor, and she herself soon begins to go blind, deprived of light and isolated in the blind man's selectively touch-sensitive environment. Eventually, the blind man grows weary of her, and, provoked by their escalating sadomasochistic sensual play, he cuts off her arm and she dies of blood loss.

The ensuing scenes outline a series of incidents of people discovering severed limbs in unusual public places. In each scene, the blind man is not far behind, acting as an innocent bystander to witness the reactions of each limb's discovery. Once he has accomplished this, the

blind man goes on to capture and murder another series of beautiful women. After the narrative excessively and grotesquely outlines the events of each luring and murder, it shifts to a scene of a newly erected museum exhibit—a bizarre sculpture of a nude woman's body, with three faces, four arms, and three legs. In terms of traditional visual aesthetics of artistic beauty, the piece is a disaster, but it surprisingly attracts the patronage of groups of visually impaired people enthralled by it. The piece was not meant to be appreciated by sighted people, but was meant to be appreciated as "touch-art," in a way that only blind people could truly understand. In a final gesture, the blind man and creator of the sculpture kills himself atop his final masterpiece, the sculpture of the women he killed.

The main character's blindness, as opposed to a strict physical disability as we see in the previous three stories, holds its own particular set of connotations. In Japan, blind people have historically been at the forefront of disability rights issues. The first semblances of social policy protecting the differently-abled began with blind people. Blind people were encouraged to enter professions such as music (particularly *biwa hōshi*, blind biwa performers) and massage, and by the Edo period, blind musicians had gained a considerable level of organization and shogunate patronage. The first school for blind people was established in 1878, and around 1893, groups began petitioning the local government to allow blind people to monopolize their traditional industries of massage, acupuncture, and moxibustion through job protection legislation. The early 1900s saw further movements for the spread of Braille publication and education, and schools for blind, deaf, and nonverbal people were protected by the Ministry of Education. Despite all this, a survey conducted in 1931-32 revealed that 60 percent of blind people were

jobless, and those who were working were in the above-mentioned occupations.[102] Historically, we can see that in regards to disability the visually impaired were one of the better-treated and better-accommodated groups (or perhaps just more easily accommodated groups) in comparison to the physically disabled, many of whom did not see considerable accommodation until post World War II. This could further suggest that less visibly obvious and more freely mobile disabilities were historically more welcome to participate amongst the majority masses in society.

The Blind Beast's main character carries this history with him; he comes off as a relatively fit, though ugly, well-educated, employed middle-aged man, and does not immediately stand out as disabled. His occupations are in the fine arts and massage, though he uses them as a scheme for seducing women. In these regards, he fits into the place where he is expected to be; he is a blind man doing blind man things, and this affords him a level of comfort shown by the people he interacts with, in the way he is able to temporarily blend in as non-disabled, and the way his massage business flourishes with customers with let-down guards. However, though at first appearance he is not physically abnormal in any way, when he shows himself interacting with the world around him, his unnatural movements give him away as atypical. In an opening scene where he is seen caressing a life-size marble statue of his first victim of the novel, the narration notes:

> The gentleman was blind. The way his head was lowered, his gaze as if falling on his chest and his head slightly tilted to one side, both hands caressing the statue with a fluttering, eerie touch—it was obvious he was blind. […] Indeed there was no other way a blind man could have appreciated the statue besides touching it like that. […] There was something chillingly terrible about watching a person with only the sense of touch admiring a nude statue of a woman he loves. His five fingers crawled creepily over the

[102] Sugimoto Akira, *Shōgaisha wa dō ikitekita ka: Senzen sengo shōgaisha undōshi* (Tokyo: Gendai Shokan, 2008) 15-16.

smooth marble skin like a spider's legs.[103]

Thus while his blindness is not a "physical disability" per se, his disability is nevertheless irrevocably attached to his physicality. His posture and the disturbing movements of his fingers creeping like "spider's legs" examining the clean beauty of the marble visually code him as different. The same as our physically disabled characters discussed in the previous three works, he is also referred to as *katawa-mono* and *fugusha*, outdated and derogatory terms for "cripple." It is through these kinds of "crippled" movements that the blind man gets the animal treatment and becomes part of Rampo's disabled animalesque. The primate *issun bōshi*, the caterpillar Sunaga, the myriad animalesque manufactured cripples of the lonely isle, and the beastly blind man are all characterized as animal—his hands are spiders, his tongue a slug, he a dog, caterpillar, or snake. The Blind Beast's patterns of movement afforded by his disability and the ways people see him for it force him into a liminal space between human and animal according to the eyes of the non-disabled majority.

On the other hand, the adherence to this stereotype of movement and posture lets him literally get away with murder. When scattering the dismembered limbs of his victims around town, the blind man always shows up at the scene of the incident to witness the reaction of the innocent bystanders, and easily blends in with them. Each time, he witnesses the discovery of the body part, slips into the center of the commotion to ask what it is all about (for he cannot see for himself), and leaves informed and satisfied, completely unsuspected. While one repeat customer of his massages does begin to suspect and fear him by simple "intuition" from his chilling touch, she is met by the friend she confides in with a baffled response: "Do you mean to say this blind man is the homicidal maniac everyone is talking about? You are out of your mind. You can't be

[103] Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 5, 442.

thinking that a visually impaired man (*me no fujiyū na otoko*) could be capable of such stunts!"[104] The man's obvious disability, which is surely to an extent over-performed by him, is connected to the idea that he is so seriously impaired (*fujiyū*) that he is incapable of committing such a crime. However, this over-performance does not go unnoticed by the woman and future victim: "It is because everybody is too soft-hearted, like you. They assume a blind man is not capable of doing such a thing. And that is exactly what that evil blind man is taking advantage of. You could say there is no crime as dangerous, yet in fact, so safe."[105] The Blind Beast is dangerous not only because of the acts he actually carries out, but because of his ability to perform both within and without the stereotype of his ability. This inscrutability and ability to deceive those around him into believing him incapable and harmless lends him an autonomy that is confusing and dangerous to non-disabled eyes. Through these actions he silently disproves and punishes the social structure that labeled him as such. In contrast, characters such as the dwarf or the hunchbacked Jōgorō raise immediate suspicion for their visually apparent physical disability. The blind man not only "passes" this judgment due to his semi-hidden disability, but the fact that he lacks sight itself, the sense that discriminates the other disabled characters' suspiciousness, is ironically what pegs him as incapable of crime. This further accentuates the all-encompassing bias of the visually-oriented and visually discriminating society they navigate. Those who can see and be seen have the discriminatory powers to judge and be judged as good and bad merely by sight, and those who cannot see are not eligible to be equally judged by that system.

The blind man also oscillates between being sexually desirable and abhorrent at the whims of visual discrimination, hinging on his partner's ability to see. One of his massage

[104] Ibid., 558.
[105] Ibid.

customers, "Lady Pearl," repeatedly comes back for the blind man's massages, which are so skillful that they bring her close to ecstasy. This is until her personal ecstasy is spoiled by what she perceives as a romantic advance by the blind masseuse. Putting his next murder plan into action, the blind man persistently writes a message into the woman's back with his massaging fingers until she is able to decipher it:

> "I will wait for you tonight at one, behind the Mitsukoshi department store"—When she realized the meaning of what he was writing, she wanted to burst out in laughter at the ugly blind man's shamelessness. "This crippled man had dared to request a secret meeting with me. How ridiculous! […] What could this man want with me? He certainly wouldn't try anything horrible. He must be truly enamored with me, with that persistence of the disabled. I bet if I said one sweet word to him, he would grovel at my feet like a slave."[106]

To this beautiful and privileged woman, being pursued by a blind man is unthinkable and ridiculous, except for its potential for her own self-gratification in humiliating him. She further associates his pursuit not only with romantic desperation but with a kind of socially inappropriate "persistence" that she associates with that disability. In short, her preconceptions of the disabled man make it a completely absurd attempt, for they are not on equal social or perhaps even human ground. However, this imbalance is ultimately what piques her curiosity. She entertains the idea of making him her slave or making him cry, which leads her to meet with him, and follow the same fate as the first victim, Mizuki Ranko. Here we may reflect back on Ms. Yamano's rejection of the dwarf in *Issun bōshi* for his physical deformity, Tokiko's confusing sadistic urges toward her husband Sunaga in *Imomushi*, Jōgorō's rejection, and Hide-chan's rehabilitation to become a proper wife in *Kotō no oni*. The repeated trope of disabled bodies being both rejected and sexualized was certainly in part an attempt to feed the *ero guro* nonsense

[106] Ibid., 522.

appetite by establishing the uncanny difference between two bodies then testing the limits of deviant sexuality through the erotic encounter with that difference. While it serves in part to heighten the contrast built on visual stereotypes, it also serves to negate those arbitrary barriers, and show how easily they are crossed or erased when the two parties are lost in the animalistic haze of eroticism, regardless of the actor's original motivations.

In contrast, the narrative describes the blind man's first victim, undergoing a transformation in which the blind man kidnaps and gradually seduces her. He then deprives her of her sense of vision through darkness and introduces her to the sensual world of touch as her main perceptual sense. Confined to the darkness of the blind man's lair, she begins to lose her sight, or rather, cease to use it: "She was not suffering any illness of her eyes. They were healthy, but she barely used them. Her memory of colors and shapes gradually faded away. She didn't lose her sense of vision—she had totally forgotten about it. That was how much she grew to love the tactile world of the blind, and her eyes got in the way. How much better it was not to see!"[107] Now enlightened to a world without sight, she begins to "truly understand the deep and mysterious pleasures of touch."[108] After losing her sight, the visual markers of the blind man's disability and his ugliness no longer apply. In a world of touch, these markers give way to evaluation based outside of the reign of sight: "Without her sight, living only through touch, her husband's blindness and ugliness were meaningless. She simply enjoyed the touch of his hands. In the world of touch, her husband was not ugly in the least. On the contrary, he was endowed with a strangely pleasurable muscular beauty that she had never felt before."[109] Under the judgment of sight, the blind man is seen as someone who is not even worthy of consideration on

[107] Ibid., 485.
[108] Ibid.
[109] Ibid., 487.

a romantic or sexual level due to his disability. However, when his partner is equally blind, the blind man's visually-based sexual uncanniness shifts to tactile prowess, which foregrounds the power of sight in sexualization, and more broadly, social value.

The "Blind Beast's" mobility between physically coded disability and "passing" as non-disabled, along with the variability of his sexual desirability depending on visual judgment, call out the flawed mechanics of the way non-disabled and vision-oriented societies perceive and construct disabled identity. The mobility between the expected and unexpected social position of the Blind Beast causes others conflict and confusion over its lack of predictability. This in turn embodies a critique of the dominance of vision in determining his sexual attractiveness and disability. The Blind Beast's changing social value and "passing" problematize not only the flawed action of visual discrimination of bodies, but also the visually-centered society itself which carries out such discriminations. The Blind Beast does not partake of vision as the conduit for understanding and judgment. And he displays an ability to evade the system of vision through his extremely able mastery, mobility, and enjoyment of the world around him independent of a sense of vision.

The concept of "touch art" also works to dethrone vision as the dominant and definitive sense. A form of art created by someone without sight, and best appreciated by people without sight, it serves as both an exploration of the flip side of negative valuations of disability and as a critique of a hyper-visual society. In the 1920s, Japan was flooded with new commodities and new media, many of which were connected to vision. In this era of increasing visuality, Rampo's novel suggests value in the opposite—the lack of the visual. In the final section of the novel, the blind man's touch art masterpiece is on display: a composite statue of the bodies of all the women the man has murdered in the course of the novel, with extra and multiple parts of each

bodily section. The narration comments that "If the basic principles of beauty are harmony and symmetry, the sculpture could only be considered the complete opposite of beautiful."[110] That is, coming from the basis of visual aesthetics, the piece was a complete mess. However, the art piece soon begins to gather a crowd with different value judgment: blind people, "paying no attention to the other works, only gathered around this curious sculpture, and enjoyed caressing the statue of the woman's body endlessly."[111] It becomes clear that the piece of art was not made to be enjoyed by the eyes, but by touch. One commentator even theorizes that sighted people were not truly capable of experiencing the touch-art the way that blind people are:

> Impaired as we are by having a sense of vision (*shikaku aru ga yue ni samatagerarete*), there is another world that we have never been able to notice. This work could only have been created by a blind person. And it can only be truly appreciated by a blind person. Now many blind people are crowding around the blind man's sculpture every day, enjoying its beautiful touch. (…) These blind people do not care in the least to touch sculptures that we visually deem masterpieces, yet the works they flock to look ridiculous to us.[112]

The commentator ponders sighted people's inability to fully appreciate the work as a form of impairment—in this case, sight is a disadvantage. Not only does it not lend itself to the development of a keen sense of touch, but strong visual bias invades to mark the piece as "ridiculous." In this way, the blind man's touch art is not only an invitation for sighted people to attempt to experience art through the underappreciated sense of touch, but also considers the possibility that the overuse of sight, or the ability to see at all, could be an impairment in its own. First and foremost, this brings out the subjective nature of what qualifies as "impairment," and flips conventional understanding by assuming blindness has an advantageous side, challenging

[110] Ibid., 590.
[111] Ibid., 591.
[112] Ibid., 594.

the definition of disabled to "differently-abled." Beyond disability, the concept of touch art suggests that those who rely heavily on sight may be missing something, critiquing 1930s society which was becoming increasingly addicted to visual culture.[113]

Mōjū, while suggesting a perspective critical of the dominance of visual culture, and hostile to vision-centered values of beauty and ability, also invites us to reflect upon the intertextual relevance of Rampo's disabled characters up until *Mōjū.* While the main character in *Mōjū* carries the weight of words denoting disability in the 1920s and '30s such as *katawa* as the physically disabled characters in the previous three stories did, his situation is in some ways opposite. The first three examples center on characters who have visible physical disabilities yet have the power of vision, whereas the Blind Beast's disability is an invisible visual disability. That is, he lacks the primary sense which gives the ability to distinguish and discriminate physical disability, and while still disabled, falls less victim to this sense in regards to his own disability. This overturns the visual value judgment of otherness and villainy so central to the previous three stories. Unlike the previous three works, rather than simply attempt to reappropriate the equal value of deviance against the majority or call out the violence of an arbitrarily constructed norm, the Blind Beast takes a step further to argue that his different ability could in fact be more valuable than the sighted majority. Firstly, this leads us to further question the fates of the characters of *Issun bōshi*, *Imomushi*, and *Kotō no oni,* who were rejected based first and foremost on visual judgment, while others around them who were similarly deviant

[113] This was not the first time Rampo had played with the idea of forgoing sight for one's own comfort and/or pleasure. We may compare the critique in *Mōjū* to the themes of *Ningen isu* (The Human Chair, 1924) in which an ugly man hides himself inside an armchair in the complete darkness to enjoy the human interaction of those who sit upon him solely through the sensation of touch. Overwhelmed by visually-oriented society, the man who becomes the human chair recedes into a less stimulating space in which he can forget the pressures of the visual.

visually passed as part of the norm. Secondly, the Blind Beast's transgressive and rebellious affirmation of a non-visual world invites similar consideration of the other differently-abled characters' situations: there could be something in the life of each differently-abled character that, given the opportunity to express, they could call advantageous over the physical majority. While *Mōjū* is nevertheless filled to the brim with over the top, erotic-grotesque, strange, and violent sex and murder, ironically, through the evasion of suspicion and apprehension by his sightless antagonist and the realization of a world of pleasure beyond vision, Rampo highlights the superficial boundaries of the norm, and imagines a way to advocate the value of deviance in his most direct way yet.

VI. Conclusion

In 1953, more than 20 years after the publication of these four stories, as part of his serialized autobiographical writings *Thirty Years of Detective Novels* (*Tantei shōsetsu sanjū nen*) (what after 10 years of serialization would eventually be collected as *Forty Years of Detective Novels* (*Tantei shōsetsu yonjū nen*)), Rampo wrote the following as an aside on *Imomushi*, on the matter of his confidence in the reception of his work:

> Ever since I was a child, I thought I was an "outsider" (*ihōjin*) in my own way. I always felt like I was being cast out because I was so different from the kids around me in terms of the way they thought about things and their likes and dislikes. It is the same in adulthood, and in order to interact with society, I had no choice but to hide my true self and live under a mask. I turn 60 next year, and I often forget my true face because I got so used to the mask, but a mask is still a mask.
>
> That is why I have a preconceived notion that a novel written by such an "outsider" would not be popular with the public, and I cannot feel confident in writing mainstream novels (*seken aite no shōsetsu*). The mainstream and I think differently, so I cannot possibly understand the good and bad of a novel to be read by them. (...)
>
> But then again, we can say this. Because I was an outsider, I had no better way of doing things than writing novels. Because I wrote novels, I was rather welcomed as an

> outsider. If I hadn't, I may have just died by the wayside. And here again, I would be an outsider.[114]

While Rampo may not have been physically disabled, he certainly identified with a kind of "outsider" consciousness. He was able to get by in society by wearing a "mask," but continued to keenly feel the pressure to conform. In his works, he was able to express the sentiment of the outsider specifically under the conditions of fiction—both through characters whose outsider status could not be hidden by a mask, and through characters whose encounters with the outsider forced them to notice they too had been wearing a mask after all. Rampo was aware that the fictionality of his works was important in being able to express this outsider consciousness. Novels allowed him to present his ideas outside of the stage of reality, and allowed him to fantastically imagine the possibilities of the outsider in a way that did not directly threaten their position in society yet could still appeal to society as *ero guro* fantasy.

Issun bōshi (*The Dwarf*, 1926-1927), *Imomushi* ("The Caterpillar," 1929), *Kotō no oni* (*The Demon of the Lonely Isle*, 1929-1931), and *Mōjū* (*The Blind Beast*, 1931) have come to be seen as some of Rampo's most extreme and excessive works, and for good reason. While mostly still implementing Rampo's signature complicated mystery plot, (*Issun bōshi* and *Kotō no oni*), they also begin to shift toward the implementation of bodily difference of disabled bodies as plot-driving motifs, which sometimes overshadowed these mystery plots themselves, leading to an entirely different kind of gothic- or slasher- horror vignettes (*Imomushi* and *Mōjū*). While these stories stand out today because of the characters' recognized positions as disabled minorities, these figures were part of a larger trend Rampo exhibited: a fascination and sympathy with all kinds of different, strange, modified, and transformed bodies and minds. In short,

[114] Edogawa, *Zenshū*, vol. 28, 386-387.

Rampo's overarching interest was not in difference in ability—as proved by his persistently able yet physically different characters—it was in deviance itself. Physical difference was a convenient narrative prosthesis to represent the idea of deviance and bring attention to imagined boundaries surrounding it. Rampo used physical difference to develop his ideas around the value of deviance versus the norm throughout his works: from *Issun bōshi*'s drawing out of the villainous advantage taken by the majority, to *Imomushi*'s "resistance" of pushing the limits of the human body and questioning of the pathos of the human condition, to *Kotō no oni*'s challenging reversal of social norm construction, to *Mōjū*'s affirmation of differently-abled value judgments and questioning of visual bias.

It is clear that the "*ero guro* nonsense" period was the perfect timing for Rampo to depict social outsiders as physically deviant bodies. The 1920s and 1930s were wracked with the intensifying situation of militaristic colonialism, industrialization, and advances in capitalism, and in turn, visual culture. Bodies were increasingly objectified, subjectified, and commodified in a plethora of ways. Soldiers went off to sacrifice their bodies for Japan's imperialism or often came back with severe physical disabilities. Human bodies' labor became more and more obsolete as they were slowly but surely replaced by machinery that displaced the worth of the bodies' labor and exhausted and sometimes maimed it. Influences of global capitalism flooded into Japan and sold images of novel, shocking, and/or unachievable body types to the everyday Japanese audience: healthy, strong sportsmen and women, exotic nudes of foreign women, grotesquely presented indigenous peoples, the extremely large, small, and otherwise differently shaped in *misemono* freak shows, and even bodies in conflict-torn areas, being executed, hung, burned, or piled. Above all, there was an ever-present oscillation between images of the ideal, healthy, obedient body, and the newly fetishized, different, and deviant bodies. This depiction of

extremes served to both reinforce the imagined norm of the Japanese subject, as well as tease the potential for its disruption.

This contrast, or more importantly, the invalidation and disruption of the dividing line between the two ends of the spectrum, is echoed in our four works, in relationships with the disabled figures and their counterparts representing the bodily norm—the dwarf against Mrs. Yamano, her daughter, or Akechi; Lieutenant Sunaga against his wife, or against his former, non-disabled self; Jōgorō against Minoura and Moroto, or pre-op Hide-chan against post-op Hide-chan; the blind man against all of his beautiful modern female victims or against the sighted spectators of his touch-art. All of the disabled characters represent deviance, but not as one coherent "disability" entity as we see it today; in this nascent period before concrete definitions of disability and how to accommodate it fairly and equally began to congeal, disabled bodies were seen as just another extreme variance to be compared against an idealized norm. Their bodily differences all serve as a foil to their norm counterparts, but each in a unique discursive way in accordance with their condition—they are not all simply disabled; they carry the historical context of their bodily difference and liminal position as outsider with them, as each acts uniquely as an agent of attempted change: an escaped *misemono* running wild, a war veteran disabled beyond comprehension by combat, forcibly constructed "freaks" of reverse eugenics, and a blind sculptor in a visually-obsessed world. Through their respective struggles to reach, disrupt, or pass within the norm, and the unsuccessful endings these efforts lead to, the reader is indeed left with a neatly solved mystery and a captured baddie, but there is always some aspect that leaves the remaining characters and the reader feeling ambivalent with the outcome. We are always left with a twinge of shame or sympathy for the way the majority has escaped danger, served justice, or been relieved of their burdens. Here, the demise of each physically

disabled character—read, outsider—is a physically coded symbol of rebellion against a norm that they cannot overcome, at no fault of their own. The majority then thwarts this rebellion for the sole cause of protecting the norm for the sake of their own privileged position. In turn, each disabled character uniquely forms a relationship against their counterpart to criticize the validity of the norm itself, and of the tenuous façade of 1920s and '30s Tokyo culture, built on commodity, productivity, pure breeding, and visuality.

Given the fictionality of Rampo's literary medium and the consistent dramatic exaggeration of disability as narrative prosthesis, it is unlikely that these novels accurately depicted the way that people with physical disabilities were actually treated, or that they were an indication of the types of lives they actually led. Rather, they may have been a "barometer" for society's perception of disability. Nor should we simply villainize these depictions from a modern standpoint; while the depictions certainly were and are offensive and problematic, they are a product of the trends of the time. Rampo was surely aware of how outrageous his depictions were, but attempted to use them as a way to push the limits of depiction and bring attention to the outrageous ways in which deviance and its connotations, represented by bodies, were conceived in the 1920s. As the beginnings of an attempt to confront societal attitudes regarding difference and deviation, Rampo's disabled figures can also be read as empowering. This lies in their attempts to disrupt the very mechanics of oppression that these figures bore, and in their effort to present difference as valuable while dethroning normalcy.

Rampo's struggle between the desires to control, objectify, pity, and fear difference signifies a modern struggle to redefine how these differences should be treated in society as a whole; it is the struggle to understand what it means to be human, and the different ways to physically and mentally be human. In the rapidly modernizing and globalizing society of the

1920s, the speed at which the masses were pushed to understand the different types of bodies and minds newly revealed to them through advancing technological mediums forced people to develop new ideas about what it means to be Japanese, as well as what it means to be human. Rampo's stories grapple for control over freaks escaped from the context of the freak show, and force the reader to question if the freak himself truly is more dangerous than the beautiful young murderer. They compare docile dismembered bodies to barely living lumps of flesh yet reinforce their pleasure and the uncannily aware humanity in their eyes before they escape to their own demise. They question what it means to be a "cripple" in a setting where it is the norm, when one is made that way against one's will, or when they are able to be surgically "corrected." They question the very concept of ability in the creation of a form of art and pleasure only fully experienced when not impeded by a sense of sight. The stories work against stereotypes of ability and agency, and challenge them while gaining new awareness of their veracity, or more commonly, acknowledging their lack of veracity. The struggle between these stereotypical structures and a disproving of them is part of what makes the depiction of Rampo's disabled bodies uncanny and grotesque, but it also is a way in which we are able to challenge the foundations on which they are based. Of course, these stories still hinge upon the dehumanization and objectification of disabled bodies, and end with the death or un-disabling of each disabled character. However, the challenge posed between the value judgment of deviance versus the majority and the struggle to control them nevertheless can represent the beginnings of new awareness of the outsider. Rampo's depictions argue that difference is not necessarily in need of control, and that difference is a natural condition of humanity to be accepted. Further, they represent the struggle to reconcile stereotypical ideas about deviance, visible and invisible, with what it means to be a part of modern society. These stories of Rampo's *ero guro* period use

disability as narrative prosthesis to fashion hyper-concentrated depictions of the tumultuous interwar era and rebelliously champion the outsider in a glorious blast of the grotesque. This unique time capsule of *ero guro* aesthetic and puzzling exploitation-yet-reappropriation of the outsider is certainly part of why modern audiences and film, manga, and television adaptations continue to gravitate to and find value in this period of Rampo's oeuvre.

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