

Edogawa Rampo and Edgar Allan Poe

Qiushi Yu

The Education and Culture Brand Chapter of Chongqing Brand Association, Chongqing, 401331, China

Abstract: Taro Hirai (1894-1965), a Poe enthusiast who appeared as a detective in the late Taisho era with "The Two-Sen Copper Coin" (Shin Seinen, 1923.4) and took the pen name "Edogawa Rampo" after Edgar Allan Poe, first discovered Poe in the fall of 1914. It was a year after the outbreak of the First World War. At the time, Rampo was a second-year student (21 years old) in the Department of Political Science and Economics in the Faculty of Waseda University. He was busy with his professional studies and had little time for general education, but he still found time to read literary books in his spare time. During this period, Rampo wrote in his "Chronological Table" that he "read Poe and Doyle for the first time and discovered the delights of short detective stories." His discovery of Poe and Conan Doyle was a milestone in Rampo's reading career, and he was "first fascinated by Poe, and three or four years later, I was astonished to come across Dostoevsky."

Keywords: Edogawa Rampo, Allan Poe, Detective Literature.

1. Introduction

Rampo was struck by the freshness of Poe and Doyle and became interested in detective stories because "Poe and Doyle were in the school textbooks. He had no knowledge of Japanese literature, and the only book that remained in his mind's eye was Kyushiro Honma's "Meisho Shinran-translation" (New translation of famous books). However, he did not even know Ogai's famous "The Murderer of Hospital Yokocho" (1913.6). Rampo eventually read Poe's original with some difficulty, drawing on an English-Japanese dictionary instead of translations. Still, he said of his first reading of Poe's works, "The first of Poe's detective stories I read was The Gold Bag. When I read it, I was literally jumping for joy" ("My Taste for Detectives"). What did Rampo see in Poe's "The Gold Bug" excited him? What excited Rampo was the cipher itself. He was also attracted to the cipher in Doyle's "The Dancing Dolls" and began to go to the library to research the history of Western ciphers and other subjects.

Critics have mentioned that Rampo gained many ideas from Poe, but what he learned specifically from Poe or what he borrowed from Poe has not been discussed clearly. Rampo wrote "The Two-Sen Copper Coin." A close reading of this short story reminds me of Poe's work in many ways.

The story is about a man named Takeshi Matsumura and "I," the narrator, who are staying together in a room on the second floor of a shabby shoe store. They are talking about a recent theft at an electronics factory in Shiba Ward. The case is that of a man claiming to be a reporter for the Asahi Shimbun newspaper. A well-dressed man (a thief) had stolen a Chinese-style envelope containing the employee's monthly salary of 50,000 yen (a lot of money for the time). The only thing left behind was an Egyptian cigarette called "Figaro" that the fake newspaper reporter had smoked while in the manager's office. All they found were cigarette butts. The detective searched every store in the city that sold imported cigarettes but could find no one that matched the culprit's description. In desperation, he stumbled upon an Egyptian cigarette butt he had been looking for on the sewer cover in front of a particular inn in Kagurazaka, which finally led to the thief's arrest. The thief had stopped by the inn, which led to the arrest of the culprit. However, the criminal does not say

where he has hidden the stolen 50,000 yen but insists that he has spent it all and is thrown into prison.

One day, when "I" returned from the public bath, I noticed Matsumura, my housemate, pacing around the room, thinking about something. He went to his desk and read a piece of paper, then pulled another out of his pocket and placed it on the desk. Matsumura pensively reads the two pieces of paper, and before he knows it, the night is falling. The next day, Matsumura came home carrying a wrapping cloth and placed it in front of me, claiming it was the 50,000 yen the gentleman thief had snuck away. The next day, Matsumura returned with a wrapping cloth on his back. The night before, he had been looking intently at the two-sen coins he had put on his desk when he went to the bathhouse and at a piece of paper that had come out of the coin while he was fiddling with it. The piece of paper that had come out of the coin as he fiddled with it was a piece of paper with the words "Namo Amitabha" written on it. It seemed to be some kind of incomprehensible code. He could only guess that various combinations of "Namo Amitabha had replaced the 48 Iroha characters," but he could not find a way to solve the problem. Eventually, the variety of the six characters reminded Matsumura of Yukimura Sanada's banner seal, Rokuren Sen. From this, he realized that it was Braille, used by the blind. The meaning of the code for "Namo Amitabha" was "Receive a toy tag from Omoraya, a printing shop in Goken-Cho called Shoshondou Printing Shop. The recipient is Daikokuya Shoten. The criminal stole the 50,000 yen, broke into the Shojo-Do, and replaced the money with the toy money he had ordered. After successfully cracking the code for "Namo Amitabha."

Matsumura went to the Shojo-do and took the 50,000 yen. However, the money he received was a mere counterfeit. When the gentleman thief incident occurred, he decided to put on a play and took Matsumura along for the ride. The "Namo Amitabha" cipher was also created by "I."

In "The Two-Sen Copper Coin," Matsumura and "I" are poor and live together in a room on the second floor of a boarding house, where they "mope about, indulging in all sorts of strange fantasies" (Rampo). The two are the same characters in Poe's "The Murders in the Rue Morgue."

The "I" of the narrator is a relative of Dupin, who appears in the Rue Morgue (hereafter referred to as "Morgue Street"). Dupin, too, is thrown into prison with the sole insistence that

he has fulfilled his "I." He lives together in an abandoned house in the suburbs, "talking and dreaming" (Poe) and is seen by the world as a madman. Rampo may have had Dupin and "I" in "Morgue Street" in mind when he created Matsumura and "I" at the beginning of "The Two-Sen Copper Coin."

Furthermore, the following is a case in which a detective investigating the culprit discovers an Egyptian cigarette butt in front of an inn under Kagurazaka.

The detective stopped in front of an inn. In front of the inn, there was a cigarette butt that would have caught the eye of any but the most careful person.³(The Two-Sen Copper Coin)

The eyes of the detective, a careful observer, are focused on the paving stones of a passing sewer, and he accidentally discovers a cigarette butt. Still, Dupin in Poe's "Morgue Street" is also depicted as an observer who pays close attention to the paving stones.

You kept your eyes down on the ground with a miffed look, glancing at the holes in the weaving stone and your knowledge (so I knew you were still thinking about the stone). (The Murders in the Rue Morgue)

What Rampo and Poe have in common in their depictions is an observer whose gaze is fixed on the ground. Rampo may have had the "paving stone" in Poe's "Morgue Street" in mind when he brought up "paving stones."

After returning from the bathhouse, "I" watched Matsumura pacing around the room like a bear in a zoo, lost in thought.

Matsumura did so, pacing around the room, going this way and that way, for about 30 minutes. I watched silently and with a kind of interest. If a bystander had seen this scene, it would have been quite crazy. (The Two-Sen Copper Coin)

With the bizarre sight of a maniac pacing around a room, both Dupin and "I" in Poe's "Morgue Street" live an abnormal life from the point of view of an ordinary person.

If the world had known about our daily life in this place, we would have been regarded as lunatics, perhaps even harmless lunatics. (The Murders in the Rue Morgue)

The idea of the seeming madman I drew earlier seems to have come from Poe's "Morgue Street." "The Two-Sen Copper Coin" is a work mainly based on a cipher, and it is clear that it was inspired by Conan Doyle's "The Dancing Men" and Poe's "The Gold Bug," as Rampo himself mentions them in his work. However, Rampo did not borrow the idea of the cipher but digested it in a purely Japanese way, using braille codes, and invented a unique cipher code, "Namo Amitabha." However, even though the cipher in "The Two-Sen Copper Coin" got its hints from foreign writers, what was born was due to Rampo's originality, which is unparalleled.

Furthermore, the "Two Sen Copper Coin" makes use of what seems to be borrowed not only from Poe's "The Golden Bug" but also from "The Purloined Letter." There is a case in which Matsumura deduces where the culprit hid the stolen gold.

I imagined this," he said. And fortunately, it turned out to be true. The gentleman thief must have prepared the safest hiding place for the stolen money in advance, just in case. The safest way to hide something in the world is to hide it without it. The safest way to hide something is to hide it in full view of the public so that no one will notice it. The fearful one realized this." (The Two-Sen Copper Coin)

In Poe's "The Purloined Letter" story, documents (letters) are stolen from the court. There is no doubt from the outset that the culprit is Minister D. The minister is a poet and mathematician and quite a wise man. The Bali Police and

Superintendent G. search the Minister's residence in secret, but the letter in question is nowhere to be found. However, Dupin, an amateur detective and psychologist, appears on the scene, and by matching his intellect with the murderer, he quickly discovers the letter. The letter was found in a cardboard card holder in the minister's study. Poe's cleverly exploited the blind spot that no one would hide something so important in the most conspicuous place in the world. In "The Purloined Letter," Poe wrote that street signs and placards with large letters are so evident that they go unnoticed. The culprit minister placed the letter right under the nose and behind undercover agents' backs to deceive every human eye.

But the more I thought about D-'s bold, drastic, and astute ingenuity, the fact that he had to keep the document close at hand if he wanted to make good use of it, and the conclusive testimony of the official that it was not hidden within the usual scope of the commissioner's investigation, the more I realized that the minister had taken the far-reaching and wise measure of hiding the letter and not trying to hide it at all. The more I considered that the letter had not been concealed within the usual scope of the commissioner's investigation, the more I realized that the minister had taken the far-reaching and wise measure of not trying to conceal it at all. (The Purloined Letter)

In other words, Poe's idea is that the best way to conceal a stolen letter is to keep it hidden from the world. Rampo wrote in one of his works, "The safest way to hide a letter in the world is to hide it without it."

Another work that reminds me of Poe is a short story titled "The Dancing Dwarf" (Shin Seinen, 1926.1). In a large tent, a group of light entertainers is drinking after the day's performance, celebrating a big win or something. In the corner of the stage, leaning against a log post, Midori, a one-dimensional monster with the body of a child and the face of a 30-year-old man, is watching them. Mr. Midori does not drink a drop of alcohol. But when his friends force him to drink, he says, "Ola, I can't drink."

He was still refusing to drink. Before long, he is seized by a purple satin, and before he knows it, he is dunked head first into the sake. The one-dimensional man's companions watch on, giggling. After being drenched with sake, the one-dimensional man is thrown out of the barrel and lies down limp. As Ohana, a beautiful ball-riding woman, straddles her body, and she falls flat on his face. Crushed by Ohana, the one-dimensional man struggles under her buttocks, moaning in pain. He cannot breathe as Ohana mounts him, and he suffers the agony of being half-dead. When he is finally released after a while, what awaits him next is a cruel game of catch, in which the one-dimensional man's body is tossed about like a ball.

After the performance, the entertainment began with the "Great Magic of Bijin Gokumon," in which Ohana placed her shiny body in a box like a coffin. One by one, Mr. Midori, the one-dimensional man, passed a Japanese sword through the small holes in the front, back, left, and right of the box, and from inside came the screams of "Oh my God, help me, help me, oh my God, oh my God! I can hear the screams of "Oh my God, help me, help me, oh my God! Mr. Midori continued to stab one by one with his sword. Then he said, "Now you know, you son of a bitch. How dare you mock me? Do you understand the will of a disabled person? The Ohana in the box still cries out, "Hurray, Hurray, help me, help me, help me," but the one-dimensional man does not try to stop her. And when he finally stabs her with the fourteen-eyed

sword, Ohana's screams turn into groans like a mortal man.

After a while, Mr. Midori opened the box's lid and cut off Ohana's head with a blue dragon sword. Bright red blood was pouring out from the cut. Eventually, he took a couple of steps toward the table and placed the new head on it. At that moment, "Ho-ho-ho-" The sound of Ohana's laughter could be heard from there. Then the one-dimensional man hid his head in his sleeve and disappeared behind the curtain. Smoke billowed from inside the tent, which immediately caught fire and set the tent ablaze.

Whether Ohana's laughter was one-dimensional ventriloquism or not could be determined, but on a hill near the tent, a child-like figure was west. They were dancing around, dangling a round thing that looked like a gourd. The story of "The Dancing Dwarf" is as follows.

According to Rampo, the inspiration for "The Dancing Dwarf" came from Poe's Hop-Frog.

As for the "The Dancing Dwarf" idea, there are two of Poe's short stories that I have wanted to use for a long time. One is "Hop-Frog," and the other is "The Sphinx." Although I have yet to deal with "The Sphinx." The story of the "Hop-Frog," namely, "The Dancing Dwarf," is one I have wanted to use for a long time. It is a little too far away to be an adaptation or imitation, but it was created because it had the flavor of a "Hop-Frog," or because it was a target for a target, and so on.

On the other hand, Poe's "Hop-Frog" has the following rough outline. Once upon a time, the king of a country had a clown. The clown was a dwarf, and because he could not walk normally, he was nicknamed "Hop-Frog." One day, there was a big celebration in the country, and the king decided to hold a costume ball. The frog and his fellow dwarf (a girl named Tripetta) were summoned to the hall on the night of the festival. The king was drinking with his seven ministers at the time, but his mood was not good. The disabled cripple would become agitated and mad at the mention of liquor, and the king knew that Hop-Frog did not like to drink. But the king, out of mischievousness, took pleasure in forcing him to drink. That night, when the king ordered him to drink a cup for his absent friends, tears rose, and he dropped large drops of tears into the cup. When he was told to come up with new entertainment, he wanted to perform the "Eight Orangutans on Chains," which he had often performed at masquerades in his hometown. So the king and his seven ministers, dressed in shirts and tights made of miracle, tarred them profusely. At

the suggestion of the flying frogs, they attached hemp threads to them to make them look like orangutan hair and wrapped a chain around each of their waists.

The excitement in the hall was great, and the king was delighted. The eight orangutans stumbled around and finally reached the center of the hall. Hop-Frog, following close behind, seized the crossed links of the chains that connected them and hooked the hooks that always hung from the chandeliers. The people in the hall laughed at the sight of him when suddenly the frog whistled. Suddenly, the orangutans were suspended in midair. Hop-Frog stared at the eight suspended orangutans with a look of maniacal fury and said, "Now I've finally figured out who these people are." The linen threads immediately burst into flames, the fire spread to the seven animals, and all eight were burned to a crisp.

The echoes of the Hop-Frog had been fulfilled spectacularly. After throwing the torch on the eight corpses, he climbed up to the ceiling and disappeared through the lighted window. This revenge seemed to be a fellow girl (Tripetta) who had a hand in the play.

The main characters in "The Dancing Dwarf" and Poe's "Hop-Frog" share a common trait: they are both housewives, and everyone always laughs at them. Depending on one's point of view, these two works may be seen as a reflection of the lives of the weak on the margins of society.

The work depicts a sense of sadness. However, the pent-up frustration and anger of people who are usually in a weak position sometimes explode and cause them to act in unexpected ways. It can be said that the works of these two artists have successfully turned such emotional outbursts into works of art. Going back to "The Dancing Dwarf," the setting of the clown who cannot drink is familiar to both Rampo and Poe, and the trick of the prison gate, which is also a haunting scene in this revival, seems to be similar to the "suspended in midair" scheme described by Poe.

References

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