Representing the Gaichi in Japanese Detective Fiction

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the relationship between Japanese detective fiction and the territories under Japanese colonial rule, areas such as the South Seas, Korea, and Manchuria known collectively as the “outer territories” (gaichi), during the early 1930s. It analyzes the works of three detective fiction writers: Yumeno Kyūsaku (1898-1936), Oguri Mushitarō (1901-1946), and Kim Nae-Seong (1909-1957). The colonial settings of their works have various functions. In Kyūsaku’s work, these are largely domesticated through the use of tropes and recognizable images. Through these tropes and images, he depicts colonial space as a site where community is lost, but can be recuperated through the violence of suicide. On the other hand, Oguri’s work depicts colonial space as completely unfamiliar, not only through the descriptions of a contaminating, foul landscape, but also by utilizing the conventions of a locked room mystery. In doing so, Oguri challenges the scientific conceit of this subgenre of detective fiction, a conceit also present in the story’s inclusion of eugenics discourses. Kim Nae-Seong’s detective fiction differs from those of Oguri and Kyūsaku by eliding the otherness of the colonial landscape. That is, his works portray Seoul and Pyongyang as extensions of the metropole, generic urban sites of mystery. Taken together, this set of texts illuminates the intersection of a popular genre with colonial discourses during the fraught period of the 1930s.
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Introduction

This dissertation examines the relationship between Japanese detective fiction and the territories under Japanese colonial rule, areas such as the South Seas, Korea, and Manchuria known collectively as the “outer territories” (gaichi), during the early 1930s. Many detective fiction writers of this period depicted colonial space as exotic, drawing upon older discourses of savagery to portray the colonies as spaces in need of Japan’s civilizing control. However, within the diverse field of detective fiction, some writers depicted these territories as extensions of the Japanese metropole. The varied representations of colonial space in Japanese detective fiction suggest the instability of colonial discourse and the different strategies writers used to render the colonies intelligible to the genre’s readership.

Readers of such detective fiction had been exposed to colonial spaces through earlier experiments with the form by writers like Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, but it was not until the 1930s that the representations of the colonies began to take shape in relation to the contemporary social and political situation. A lot of this work was considered as part of shina shumi (literally, a “taste for China” or chinnoiserie). Other writers like Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Satō Haruo were also considered part of this trend. Their writing on China was characterized by representations of—particularly southern—China as a fantasy space that drew upon classical Chinese literature.

The detective fiction genre had existed before such luminaries as Tanizaki, Satō, and Akutagawa experimented with it, mainly through loose translations and adaptations. Kuroiwa Ruikō, among others, initiated interest in foreign mysteries localized for a Japanese audience during the Meiji period (1898-1912), but it wasn’t until the 1920s with the publication of the mass magazine New Youth (Shinseinen) that detective fiction would gain a wide readership. This development needs to be considered alongside the social changes wrought by industrialization and mass urban migrations. The editor of the magazine, Morishita Uson, sought to target this new urban population. For more on the literary history of the genre, see Nakajima Kawatarō, Nihon suiri shōsetsu shi,
landscape from within the bounds of its generic conventions. But generic conventions alone do not account for the whole of these representations. Robert Tierney’s analysis of the trope of savagery reminds us of the centrality of tropes, stock characters, and clichéd images associated with these peripheral spaces. This dissertation tracks how Japanese detective fiction writers of the 1930s imbued these representations with literary allusions and stock portrayals of the colonies while also engaging with issues of their contemporary moment within the scope of the genre.

The three works of Yumeno Kyūsaku (1898-1936) that Chapter One examines the loss of community that the lawlessness of colonial space incites, as well as the possible recuperation of community through spectacular suicide. “Bottled Hell” (Binzume jigoku, 1928) narrates the suicide of two siblings stranded in a deserted island in the South Seas. They decide to die together to atone for breaking the incest taboo, a violation engendered by their isolation on the island. Drawing from classical love suicides, Kyūsaku’s depiction of their self-annihilation is also a way of aesthetically validating their illicit attachment. The murder-suicide via bomb in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” (Bakudan Taiheiki, 1933) functions as a Japanese fisherman’s retribution against the corrupt Japanese officials who exploited his comrades and him. The fisherman’s choice to end his life is a self-inflicted punishment for daring to assault those in power. However, his actions are in the mold of the heroic samurai of The Chronicle of Great Peace (Taiheiki, 1340-1371) referenced in the title, which casts him as a patriot. In The Ends of the Ice (Kōri no hate, 1933), the protagonist desires suicide with his guide, a “half-Corsican half-gypsy” woman, after being framed and escaping from his fellow soldiers to Siberia. Although this action conveys his desperation at becoming a traitor to his country, it is framed by the trappings of a classical love suicide tale. In these three cases, spectacular suicides gesture toward the threatening chaos of the colonial situation. Yet in alluding to tropes of love suicide and heroic suicide in Japanese literary tradition, these aestheticized deaths also reinforce national belonging. Recognizable images and tropes create a sense of shared national and cultural belonging.

Unlike Kyūsaku’s narratives, which emphasize intimacy between the readers and the text through such familiar elements of Japanese literary tradition, the work I analyze in Chapter Two creates a distancing affect. It does so through its critical engagement with scientific discourses in the form of a locked-room mystery, a subgenre of detective fiction characterized by crimes occurring in spaces that are (seemingly) hermetically sealed. In Oguri Mushitarō’s (1901-1946) “The Perfect Crime” (Kanzen hanzai, 1933), which is set in a remote part of southern China, science is pushed to its extreme, its objectivity yielding to near-religious fanaticism. The story uses the pseudoscience of eugenics and a convoluted, overly detailed narration to display the

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4 My project also draws upon Sari Kawana’s work, Murder Most Modern: Detective Fiction and Japanese Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) in which she notes that colonial space was one of the three “sources of modern mystery,” p. 10.
5 Tropics of Savagery: The Culture of Japanese Empire in Comparative Frame (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).
6 I have chosen Yumeno Kyūsaku and Oguri Mushitarō not only because they set their mysteries in the colonies, but also because they were well-known in detective fiction circles. While Kim Nae-Seong was not as well-known or as prolific in the Japanese detective fiction sphere, his example illustrates the diversity of the genre in the 1930s and gestures to empire through the movement and involvement of colonial elites to and from the metropole.
breakdown of reason. While the detective seems to be adequate to the task of taming the savage space and solving the mystery, he ultimately fails. His failure alienates an audience set up to expect a typical locked-room mystery where science and rationality conventionally explain events seemingly outside the bounds of reason. Critiquing discourses of science, “The Perfect Crime” also critiques the scientific conceit of the detective fiction genre itself.

In the hands of a colonial writer, representations of the periphery have a strategic use that differs from those of the writers discussed in Chapters One and Two. Chapter Three focuses on Kim Nae-Seong’s (1909-1957) detective fiction written in Japanese, “The Oval Mirror” (Daenkei no kagami, 1935) and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” (Tantei shōsetsuka no satsujin, 1935). These narratives are set in Kim’s native Korea, but in contrast to other representations of the peninsula, the urban settings of Pyongyang and Seoul are not depicted as exotic or distant. The urban spaces of these stories are primarily settings for the literary conventions of detective fiction, such as tailing and the anonymous crowd. In “The Oval Mirror,” Pyongyang’s modern landscape of cafes enables the detective’s epiphanies. Seoul in “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” is no different from Tokyo, down to its used bookstores carrying the latest works of Japanese detective fiction. Korea in Kim’s work is an extension of Japan—a generic urban setting for mystery that his metropolitan readership would recognize. This depiction of Korea invites critics to focus on the stories as part of the detective fiction genre, rather than the exoticism of the settings and, by extension, Kim’s identity as a Korean writer.

Taken together, this set of texts illuminates the intersection of a popular genre with the discourses of savagery, science, and assimilation that produced an image of the “outer territories” for Japanese readers in the 1930s. In these works, the colonies are sites where identity and belonging are constantly negotiated along a variety of axes, including detective/criminal, colonizer/colonized, and Japanese/non-Japanese. This negotiation in these narratives invites a response from its popular readership, be it through: a feeling of intimacy through a shared literary tradition, as in Kyūsaku’s work; one of alienation, as in Oguri’s work; or, recognition through generic conventions, as in Kim’s work. These largely forgotten writers and works give us a glimpse of the various ways Japanese popular culture engaged with and complicated colonial discourses in the 1930s.
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As humble as it is, this dissertation is the end point of a journey I began more than a decade ago when I set foot in Professor Carolyn Morley’s Japanese literature class at Wellesley College. I could not have completed this trajectory without the support and guidance of my committee. Professor Dan O’Neill and Professor Alan Tansman have been there since the beginning of my time at Berkeley, giving me invaluable advice not only on my work, but also on strategies to make the most out of my time in graduate school. Their patience and incisive commentary on my dissertation drafts in their different forms has been essential. Professor Donna Jones has broadened my view of the material. Her seminars and my interaction with her have aided me in thinking about my texts in a larger postcolonial frame.

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Chapter 1
Law, Suicide, and Community:
Yumeno Kyūsaku’s Detective Fiction and Colonial Space

Introduction

In Yumeno Kyūsaku’s\(^1\) (1898-1936) detective fiction, colonial spaces engender disorder and strife. Caught between the present and the past, proximity and distance, classical idiom and modern discourses, his colonial spaces are terrains of perpetual instability. In the face of this chaos, Kyūsaku’s narratives present death—particularly spectacular suicide—as a means to restore the characters’ ties to the larger community. In “Bottled Hell” (Binzume no jigoku, 1928), “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” (Bakudan Taiheiki, 1933),\(^2\) and The Ends of the Ice (Kōri no hate, 1933), characters commit suicide to make penance and draw attention to a wrong. While suicide places them outside the reach of the law, it functions as an acknowledgement that their transgressions strengthen their communities. Although it provides the impetus for these characters’ alienation, colonial space is a site where communal links can be renewed.

Kyūsaku’s use of stereotype, tropes, stock figures, and allusions further contributes to the imagination of the colonies as spaces of spectacular death, while also incorporating these spaces into a colonial grid of intelligibility.\(^3\) In his stories, stereotyped images and clichéd scenarios highlight the excess that underlies representations of colonial spaces: going savage in an unnamed island in the South Pacific threatens to lead to incestuous rape in “Bottled Hell,” patriotic suicide and murder is used to reveal corruption in Korea in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” and in The Ends of the Ice, the poison woman’s machinations lurk behind a tense political situation in Manchuria. That these stories contain such familiar scenarios indicates the extent to which Kyūsaku’s works are mediated by other texts. His stories are beholden to common, fixed images of the colonies that circulated in interwar Japanese commodity culture.\(^4\)

While his stories are set in exotic locales, they generate familiarity and immediacy in his readers, particularly those of popular fiction, through recognizable genre elements. All three stories use stock characters and plots, recast to comment on the contemporary present. Kyūsaku’s narratives appeal to their audience through both content and structure. Collectively, the first-person narrative, the letters in “Bottled Hell” and The Ends of the Ice, and the oral

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\(^1\)He was born Sugiyama Taidō; Yumeno Kyūsaku is his pen name. I am following Japanese convention in referring to him as Kyūsaku.

\(^2\)The Taiheiki (1340-1371) here refers to the epic chronicle, which tells of the internal strife in Japan between the Northern and Southern Courts.

\(^3\)Ann Stoler, Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 11. Her use of “grid of intelligibility” follows Foucault, it is “a hierarchy of distinctions in perception and practice that conflated, substituted, and collapsed the categories of racial, class, and sexual Others strategically and at different times.”

\(^4\)Homi K. Bhabha, p. 120. For him, the stereotype is a discursive strategy or form of knowledge that expresses ambivalence in the tension between what is known and what must repeat.
narration in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs”—as well as his allusions to other popular texts aimed at a mass readership—allow the stories to create a shared space that extends past the borders of the narratives.

The relationship that these stories establish with their community of readers is not just a strategy to gain mass appeal. The stories I will discuss also thematize the dynamics of belonging and community, demonstrating a concern with the characters’ relationships, particularly with the national community, after they violate its strictures or the law. Colonial spaces provide a compelling arena in which to explore these dynamics of belonging, because the rapacious self-interest unleashed in these spaces not only pits rival empires against one another, but also displays rifts within empires. In the colonies, characters find themselves embroiled in the unchecked desire and greed that characterizes these spaces. This all-consuming desire exposes the limits of national harmony. Pushed to the point of violating a prohibition as the siblings from “Bottled Hell,” or explicitly breaking the law as in the men in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” and The Ends of the Ice, the stories stage these characters’ alienation from their community, which culminates in their spectacular suicides.

The choice to self-annihilate evinces the alienation the characters feel after being contaminated with the corrupting desire in the colonies. As a result, they position themselves as victims of the colonial situation. Nevertheless, going against the strictures of community, be it by breaking the law or violating a prohibition, has already transformed these characters into criminals. Suicide places them in an ambivalent position: they are victims as well as criminals. In “Bottled Hell,” siblings marooned in an uninhabited island in the South Seas face the temptation of breaking the incest taboo now that they are distant from civilization. “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” portrays Korea as a site where, far from the mainland, corrupt Japanese officials prey on their own citizens out of their unending greed, forcing them to do illegal work to maximize the officials’ plunder. Similarly, The Ends of the Ice shows how the wrangling between empires for control over Manchuria allows for traitorous ambitions, in which the main character is framed for having stolen public funds. The characters of these narratives see themselves as victims and depict themselves accordingly, while those around them view them as criminals. The choice to commit suicide does not completely erase their culpability. In

6 In her compelling analysis on “narrative mortality” or the discourse of death in narrative film, Catherine Russell finds that death functions as an allegory of the limits of representation that unhinges death with closure. While responding to a different historical and political context, Kyūsaku’s spectacular suicides function in a similar manner, undermining closure in favor of ambivalence. Central to this ambivalence, however, are the vicissitudes of colonial space, which raises questions about national belonging in the midst of law breaking violence. See Narrative Mortality: Death, Closure and New Wave Cinemas (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 118.
7 The openness of these deaths contrasts with the way death is often depicted in Western classical detective fiction, suggesting some of the divergences in the way Japanese writers engaged with the genre. Death in Western classical detective fiction frequently differentiates victim and criminal; it is knowable, objectified, and ultimately rationalized. See Robin W. Winks, Modus Operandi: An Excursion into Detective Fiction, (Boston: David R. Godine, 1982), p. 5. Although characterized as “detective fiction” (tantei shōsetsu), the narrative openness that suicides yield in Kyūsaku’s narratives derails any attempt to fit them within the puzzle-solving ratiocinative format of Golden Age era detective fiction; in Japan, these works would be closer to what would be called the honkaku or “orthodox” mystery. By contrast, Kyūsaku’s stories exemplify the henkaku or “unorthodox” mystery subgenre, which was pervasive in Japanese detective fiction during the 1930s. These works, whose lineage can be traced to the aestheticism and experimentation with the detective fiction form by canonical writers of the earlier decade (Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Satō Haruo, and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke), focus on atmosphere and extreme mental states over the deductive process of interpreting clues and eventually solving the mystery.
fact, suicide suggests an acknowledgment of a measure of guilt. It also affirms authenticity in the characters’ suffering, leading them to straddle the line between criminality and victimhood.

The ambiguity that surrounds suicide in these contexts lets the protagonists reestablish their frayed ties with their families or national community. The spectacle of these deaths invites witnesses, sometimes even within the text as with “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” where it is most theatrical. More often, the assumed reader takes the position of witness. The interpellation of the reader into this role occurs through the first-person narration in the stories, be it through the epistolary form or oral narrative. Not only do these works address the reader directly, but they also gesture toward shared references and experiences, creating intimacy between the narrator and reader. The moments of self-annihilation are adorned with lavish descriptions and poetic language meant to appeal to readers and communicate that the characters who chose to commit suicide are exceptional figures in the mold of noble warriors, as we will see in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” or romantic idealists of classical love suicides like the siblings of “Bottled Hell” and the army private from The Ends of the Ice. In their narration, characters stress suicide as a claim to the community that the reader is to validate. Suicide, operating as penance, protest, or both, and drawing upon superficial resemblances to other literary representations of suicide, reestablishes the character’s belonging to the community.

“Bottled Hell,” “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” and The Ends of the Ice are concerned with the loss of community that occurs when characters violate a prohibition or break the law in the fraught space of the colonies. Drawing upon images and stereotypes associated with the different territories of the Japanese empire, Kyûsaku’s narratives portray how the opportunities offered by these territories are tempered by the chaos and alienation they unleash. With no way out of their increasingly dire situations, characters choose self-annihilation as a way to return to the fold, depicting themselves as exceptional figures in their appeals to the reader. In contrast to the tumultuous space of the colonies, the space projected by the first-person narration is harmonious. The reader has already been incorporated into the community through the intimacy that the texts engender. For this reason, the reader can validate the characters’ claims for belonging to the collective, be it that of the family or, more frequently, the nation. While colonial space provides the impetus for alienation, it also sets the stage for refashioning communal ties.

Growing up Savage: The Modern Primitive of the South Seas

Published in the detective fiction magazine, Curiosity Hunting (Ryôki) in 1928, “Bottled Hell” has the hallmarks of what came to define the henkaku, or unorthodox subgenre of detective fiction: a depiction of a strange land (ikyô) and even stranger psychology. The tale is told

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8 Literary critic Nakajima Kawatarô traces the appearance of the terms honkaku (orthodox) and henkaku (unorthodox) in his history of the genre in Japan. Through his discussion, we see that impulse towards subcategorizations first with relation to Western works of detective fiction, but that the continuation and persistence of these labels had much to do with Japan’s perception of itself and its artistic production vis a vis the West. Japanese writers and fans of the detective fiction genre were aware of diversity even within the Western works of detective fiction. Even before these terms appeared, Satô Haruo had distinguished “pure” (junsui) detective fiction in Western works such as Edgar Allan Poe’s (1809-1849) “Murders at the Rue Morgue,” and writers such as Arthur Conan Doyle (1892-1930), from “mystery stories and fantastic stories” (misuterii sutorii fantasutikku sutorii) by writers like E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822) in Nakajima’s Nihon suiri shôsetsu shi. vol 3. The article he references is Satô Haruo’s “Tantei shôsetsu shôron” in Shinseinen, Aug. 1924: pp. 262-265. The engagement of Japanese writers with the genre would imbue it with the ambiguities and contradictions of its Japanese context.
through three letters prefaced by a foreword, itself a letter.9 “Bottled Hell” lacks both a crime and the process of investigation many critics saw as constitutive of the genre.10 Yet, the story does not lack a mystery; in fact its elliptical nature, namely the arrangement through letters, invites the reader’s effort to reassemble it. While not having a distinct crime to solve, the reader becomes an investigator, uncovering the circumstances that led to the events described in the letters.

The central story concerns two shipwrecked siblings, Tarō and Ayako, who are the writers of the letters. It chronicles their loss of innocence, coded within the trope of “going native”—that is, regressing, falling into an instinctual state. “Bottled Hell” uses colonial space to unveil the savagery that is kept at bay through community and law, the narrative’s primary indexes of civilization. The conflict that emerges on the island where the children are marooned suggests that the issue of savagery the text illuminates is not an exterior but an interior condition. Robert Tierney, working within Marianna Togovnik’s framework of the primitive, argues that Japanese colonial discourse shifts from a rhetoric of control to a rhetoric of desire in the 1930s with the incorporation of indigenous populations into the Japanese empire.11 According to him:

In the early years of colonial rule, the savage was an external foil against whom the Japanese affirmed their status as civilized. As the Japanese acquired experience as colonial rulers, the savage became a domesticated foreigner, an otherness resituated

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9 Yumeno Kyūsaku has written various works where letters play a pivotal role, such as “The Eerie Hand Drum” (Ayakashi Tsuzumi, 1926), “The Wonder of the Raised Cloth Picture” (Oshie no kiseki, 1929), “Nothing At All” (Nan demo nai, 1936), and “Murder Relay” (Satsujin Relay 1936). Akutagawa Ryūnosuke used it in his proto-detective fiction “Murder in the Age of Enlightenment” (Kaika no satsujin, 1918) and “Two Letters” (Futatsu no Tegami, 1917). Edogawa Rampo used this form to great effect in “Ningen isu” (The Human Chair, 1925) and Injū (Beast in the Shadows, 1928), among others.

10 The story demonstrates the type of detective fiction that detective fiction writer and critic Kōga Saburō (1893-1940) was alluding to when he argued that henkaku detective fiction was not detective fiction at all.

11 Tropics of Savagery, p. 55.
within the self. Repressed by civilized modernity, this long-lost but familiar “other”
became the object of a nostalgic desire, a need to recover the purity and original nature of
the Japanese people. The Japanese had lost this “other” in their race to catch up with the
West, but they remained connected to him at a deeper level, by hereditary ties and by
repressed unconscious desires left in their psyches. For that reason, the figure of the
primitive that appears in literary works has as much to tell us about the dissatisfaction of
Japanese writers with their own society but actually tells us little about the realities of
indigenous society. Nor was there anything coherent about the idea of the savage in this
rhetoric of desire: often the savage is an amalgam composed of the exotic, the erotic, the
archaic, the utopian, the transgressive and the unconscious.12

The short story foregrounds this rhetoric of desire through prohibition. The figure of the savage
therein does indeed give form to the elements that Tierney describes, particularly the
transgressive and erotic. This figure, as it appears in “Bottled Hell,” also has very little
connection to the real indigenous populations in the territories of the Japanese empire. Rather
than emphasize nostalgic desire, as Tierney suggests, a return to purity or national origin,
“Bottled Hell” depicts the siblings’—particularly the boy’s—“going native” as a descent into the
depths of transgressive desire. This transformation yields a new existence at the liminal bounds
of community. The figure of the savage allows Kyûsaku to explore his ideas of degeneration
through its marriage of colonial discourse with deviant psychology. We might think of savagery
as a descent into the unconscious, a movement that echoes Kyûsaku’s interest in probing the
depths of modernity.13 For Kyûsaku in “Bottled Hell,” modernity stands as civilization, signified
by community and self-mastery. The colonial discourse underpinning this representation is
oriented towards fixity, representing the dyads of (among others) colonizer/colonized,
civilization/barbarism, and modern/premodern as a priori, it is nonetheless fraught with
contradictions and fractures. When the figure of the savage is interiorized as it is in “Bottled
Hell,” that is, when the lens shifts from a literal savage to an image of the primitivism lurking
within modern man, these polarities become all the more visible. This conception of an inner
primitive fits easily into Freud’s thought in Civilization and its Discontents, where he states that
instinctual impulses and desires are never cleanly abolished: “In the realm of the mind, on the
other hand, what is primitive is so commonly preserved alongside of the transformed version
which has arisen from it that it is unnecessary to give instances as evidence….”14

The fractured quality of the assemblage of letters gestures to these fractures in colonial
discourse. Varying in author, tone, and style, each depicts a different position within this colonial
milieu. The story consists of four letters. The first, written in the official language of formal
correspondence, states that three letters in bottles have been discovered and enlists its addressee
for their analysis. The following letters are in reverse chronological order; the first of these
announces the impending suicide of siblings Tarô and Ayako, shipwrecked on a remote tropical
island. The second chronicles their life in the island and Tarô’s growing incestuous desire, and
the last, though chronologically earliest, simply asks for their quick rescue. The first two letters
are written by the eldest of the siblings, Tarô, and the last letter is written by his sister, Ayako.

12 Ibid.
“Bottled Hell” opens with an official letter composed in a formal epistolary style (sorōbun), briefly narrating the circumstances under which the bottles were found and appealing to the reader for his opinion on the matter.\(^{15}\) This official letter, sent from the town hall of an unnamed island village, is addressed to an institute for oceanic research and states that three beer bottles with letters sealed in them have been enclosed for the institute’s perusal. From this opening, the framing device begins raising issues of investigation and scientific study. We are placed in the position of the researchers of the institute attempting to piece together the origins of these bottles. The role of science here cannot be separated from the South Seas island setting, recalling how the South Seas were rendered as sites of scientific study for empire.\(^{16}\) As part of such concrete considerations, we are quickly informed of a spatial gap between the first bottle and the last, which were found in different places. With their implicit claim to represent the interiority of the writers, the letters provide an entry point to examining the mind.

The first letter written by Tarō invites such an investigation by drawing the reader in with its shift in tone, from the seriousness of a formal inquiry to a desperate, personal account that suggests the narrator’s mental instability. The contrast in tone between the first two letters also alludes to the question of space. Sent from within the mainland, the first letter is framed by a formal bureaucratic apparatus, while the second, sent via bottle from an island in the South Seas, uses a more emotional register. Nevertheless, it shares with the framing letter an appeal to the reader. The letter writer, Tarō, begins with a vision of a ship coming to his and his sister’s rescue from the solitary island (hanarejima). However, this turns out to be an illusion. Upon the ship’s disappearance from his vision, Tarō sees signs of an imminent divine judgment and expresses his plan to commit suicide with his younger sister Ayako by leaping from a precipice. In heavily religious—specifically Christian—language Tarō expresses his desire for repentance for a wrong committed by both his sister and him. “If we don’t punish our flesh and spirit (nikutai to tamashii) in this manner,” he declares, “we cannot atone for the sins we have committed (okashita tsumi).”\(^{17}\)

As we read through the letters we discover that the wrong committed by the siblings is incest; in the characters’ minds, there is no coming back to civilization and community from that transgression. The violation of the incest prohibition is not only a wrong between the siblings, but also a wrong against their family and civilization as a whole. By civilization in “Bottled Hell,” I mean that repository of “regulations which distinguish our lives from those of our animal ancestors and which serve two purposes—namely to protect man against nature and to adjust their mutual relations.”\(^{18}\) Civilization is, in other words, a repository of order; suicide then becomes a means to keep the disorder at bay. The suicide the narrative opens with is a response to the narrator’s loss of control and descent into savagery in the transgressive space of the island. It is after seeing the mirage of a rescue ship, representing a return to community that the siblings resolve to jump from the precipice from which they had seen the ship. Tarō frames this suicide as a punishment for their wrongs and a way to atone for their sins:

\(^{15}\) Sorōbun epistolary style refers to a mode of writing prevalent during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, particularly for official correspondence. The style takes its name from the auxiliary verb sorō, a humble form frequently used by the writer.

\(^{16}\) Tierney, p. 82.


\(^{18}\) Freud, p. 42.
As for us, from here we will climb up the tall cliff right in front the big ship. Holding each other tightly, while can see our mother, our father, and the sailors that are coming to save us, we will throw ourselves into the deep abyss and die. That done, the sharks we always saw swimming there will eat us. Then the bottle with this letter will float up and the people on the boat will discover it. Perhaps they will pick it up. 19

By voicing his choice to punish himself alongside his sister, Tarō reasserts his self-mastery. Theirs is a decision to uphold a system of transgression and punishment (incest and suicide); as such, death needs to be performed for a witness: the reader. Without a witness, their suicide would have no expiatory value.

Tarō offers the readers the image of their embrace as they plunge to their deaths. This image recalls a type of love suicide, which alludes to the incestuous desire that provides the text’s central conflict. For Yura Kimiyoshi, such a reading, though easy to make, attributes too much power to the Bible, which at this point has been burned by Tarō, as the figure of authority. 20 Yura stresses that the mind should be placed as central in our reading of the text. His point allows us to contrast how classical love suicides (shinjū) are represented as an attachment born out of feeling (ninjō), which collides against societal duty (giri). 21 This framework does not fit “Bottled Hell” because the focus is not on feeling, but on the transformation of the space into a personal hell in Tarō’s mind due to his internalization of the Bible’s authority.

While my reading aligns with Yura’s, I would add two points. First, that another difference between the suicide in “Bottled Hell” and love suicide is the emphasis on instinctual desire, not feeling. Second, reading the story through the trope of savagery—that which is alluded to through this instinctual desire—allows us to link the psyche and society, civilization. I would expand Yura’s end point of the mind transforming the natural state (shizen jōtai) into hell. This transformation occurs because the Bible as an agent of external, communal authority—of civilization—has been internalized, it “obtained mastery of the individual’s dangerous desire for aggression by weakening and disarming it and by setting up an agency within him to watch over it…. 22” Nevertheless, the aggression “is introjected, internalized; it is, in point of fact sent back to where it came from—that is, directed towards his own ego…. 23” This is what results in Tarō’s internal conflict and what he seeks to resolve through suicide.

Their death is couched as atonement, presumably for breaking the incest taboo, and oriented towards the community to which their belonging is at risk. The final letter is directed to the siblings’ parents and to “everyone.” In this sense, the reader is being called upon to witness the siblings’ self-annihilation. By its occurrence at the opening of the siblings’ story, we can see how the suicide organizes the text. We read the letters that follow with the awareness that this suicide constitutes the end point, and our curiosity is meant to be sustained by a desire to know what events lead to the decision.

Tarō also writes the second and longest letter. The events he narrates occur before those communicated in the first. This letter maintains the first’s religious language, referring to the cliff of the previous letter as “God’s footstool” (kamisama no ashidai) and describing how the siblings lost track of time. According to the letter, the island is a pristine, idyllic space. Most of

21 Love suicides or shinjū became popular in the 1700s with the puppet plays of Chikamatsu Monzaemon (1653-1724).
22 Freud, p. 84.
23 Ibid.
the letter narrates Tarō and Ayako’s arrival to this uninhabited space as children a number of years before when their boat was swept away. The narrator mentions that the island’s year-long invariably tropical climate, without the markers of the seasons, makes it difficult to tell how much time has passed, though he speculates it must be close to a decade since they arrived. The description of the island resonates with the ponderous religious language, since this space stands outside time.

While children, they came armed with a pencil, knife, notebook, magnifying glass, three bottles, and a Bible, all accoutrements of modernity and civilization. These objects recall another child explorer, the protagonist of the popular boy’s manga—*The Adventures of Dankichi* (Bōken Dankichi) serialized from 1933 to 1939—Dankichi, who happens upon an island in the South Seas after falling asleep while fishing. Upon his arrival, he carries with him a Japanese schoolboy’s cap, shorts, shirt, leather shoes, and wristwatch, but he divests himself of everything but the shoes and wristwatch, then proceeds to conquer and modernize the island’s native inhabitants. The child protagonist as conqueror also reminds us of the *Momotarō* (Peach Boy) folktale reinterpreted through colonial discourses. In these, a boy born out of a peach to an elderly couple subdues demons in a distant island. 24 However, in “Bottled Hell” the island is unpopulated and lacks any threatening fauna. The island is not only beautiful and safe, but also rich in sustenance.

The new environment strips them of some of these markers of modernity, foreshadowing their transformation. According to the Tarō, “In the end, our outer and interior garments torn by the edges of stone, the wind, and the rain” make them “naked like true savages (honto no yabanjin). And yet, morning and night both of us always climbed that cliff, God’s footstool, read the Bible, and prayed for our father and mother.” 25 The state of being a savage (yabanjin) at this point is an external state brought about by the space of the island. It is one the siblings attempt to keep at bay through the use of the Bible and the maintenance of ritual, which is also the maintenance of their ties to community and civilization.

Although this new environment has erased some markers of civilization, the siblings’ turn to religious ritual attempts to hold at bay continuing degeneration. The Bible, and Christianity itself, in the short story function not as a specific belief system, but as an all-encompassing structure (ritual and feeling) that is intertwined with notions of the private, individualized subject who is accountable for his or her transgressions. It is, in other words, an agent of authority and law. That the protagonists’ subjectivity is molded around Christianity is clear when the narrator mentions that “[w]e thought of the Bible as our god, our mother, our father, and our teacher, and we treated it with more care than the magnifying glass or the three bottles. We put it away in the topmost ledge of an opening in the cliff wall.” 26 Separated from the communal structures they know, the children anchor themselves to the Bible as a repository of ties to family, community, and knowledge, which are then subordinated to the structure of religion. The children treat the Bible as more precious than the bottles carrying their messages to the outside world, or the magnifying glass that they use to make a fire to cook. With the certainty

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24 Kawamura Minato discusses the importance of the watch as an instrument of modernization that revealed and legitimized Dankichi as colonizer. He argues that Japan constructed itself as modern through the discovery of “savages” outside its borders. See “Taishū orientarizumu to ajia ninshiki” in *Kindai nihon to shokuminchi* vol. 7, (Tokyo: Iwanami kōza, 1992), pp. 110-111. This refers to the dynamic Tierney locates in the early period of colonial rule. Engagement with tropes of savagery took different forms depending the genre and audience to which these were deployed.


26 Ibid.
supplied by this authority and subsistence guaranteed by the island’s rich resources, the children find temporary happiness.

Such idyllic happiness does not last, for Ayako becomes the narrator’s object of forbidden desire, which alienates him from the community that he longs to return to and threatens him with absorption into the island’s dizzyingly lush and exotic landscape. At the same time, his appeal to authority for deliverance is fruitless, leading him to burn the Bible. Such an act, however, does not mean that he is free from its authority. Rather, from this point on we see that its authority has been completely internalized, something the narrator perceives as the opposite:

Perhaps it was because this was my punishment for burning the Bible. When it became night, the light from the stars, the sound from the waves, the cries from the insects, the wind between the leaves the sound of a fruit falling, one by one seemed to surround us and encroach upon us, whispering the Bible’s words….

In this manner when the long, long night grew light, there came this time a long, long noon. Then the sun that shone on the island, the singing cockatoos, the dancing bird-of-paradise, the jewel beetles, the moths, the palm trees, the pineapples, the colors of the flowers the fragrance of the grasses, the sea, the clouds, the wind, the rainbows all of them became muddled with Ayako’s radiant figure and the fragrance of her breathtaking skin. Coiling round and round while shinning, they attempted to assail and choke me from all sides. From within all that, Ayako’s melancholy eyes seized by the same agony, holding both divine sadness and a demon’s smile, stared at me fixedly without end.  

In his perception, the narrator’s forbidden desire—his interiority—has been wholly exteriorized encompassing not only Ayako’s body, but also the island’s enchanting environment. The island’s exotic landscape in its totality blends with Ayako’s body. The brilliance around him turns his desire into dread as it becomes increasingly threatening and violent, “attempting to assail and choke” him. At the same time, being aware that this account is from Tarō’s perspective, it indicates that the prohibition itself has been internalized and now conflicts with these impulses. Tarō’s conflict takes the shape of a feeling of victimization within this overpowering space.

Another sign of how much this authority has been interiorized by Tarō is suggested by the surface of the text itself. As Tabata Akeo notes, Tarō’s two letters are laden with unfamiliar kanji and phrasing that even during Kyūsaku’s time was not in common usage. This unfamiliar kanji and phrasing is drawn from the Bible’s style, which serves as the only “teacher” the siblings have while on the island. As such, Tarō’s incorporation of that style in his letters shows his incorporation of that authority, creating a hybrid voice, that of the Bible, of civilization and law all intermingling with Tarō’s.

That tension, born out of the pained coexistence of desire and prohibition that even the surface of the text suggests, takes the form of an encompassing darkness the narrator perceives within himself. This alludes to the figure of the savage lurking within. The brilliance Tarō sees in Ayako’s body and the island is nothing more than incestuous desire, which simultaneously conjures a sense of loss and obscurity:

27 Ibid., p. 18.
I don’t know from when, but with the passage of time, it appeared clearly to my eyes that Ayako’s flesh had grown lustrous, as beautiful as a miracle. Sometimes, as radiant as the spirit of a flower or sometimes as seductive as a demon….When I saw that, for some unknown reason my feelings became dark (mōmai glossed as kuraku) and sorrowful.29

Not only does Ayako’s body attract the narrator, but also he himself realizes that this attraction is a sign of a lurking primitivism. The narrator refers to his feelings as momai (unenlightened) which is glossed as kurai (dark). His words depict the tension between instinct and prohibition through the interplay between light and dark, clarity and obscurity. Innocence constitutes brightness: Ayako’s eyes are described as gleaming with purity (kegaremonai me wo kagayakashite). The overpowering luminescence of Ayako’s body appears as lustrous, radiant, and clear to the narrator. However, in contrast to her and the island that stands as her analogue, Tarō himself is rendered opaque and unknowable—even to himself. This, too, is underscored by the opacity of the text in its chronological disorder and stylistic strangeness.

The shift from Ayako’s body to the narrator’s thoughts (omoi) draws readers away from the bright aesthetic realm to one of prohibition. The narrator’s thoughts are now murky; he states that he does not know the reason for his change in disposition, but his thoughts grow gloomy nonetheless. That movement towards obscurity and darkness is echoed later when the narrator describes a rift growing between him and his sister due to the tacit knowledge of their desire. This vacillation has contaminated Ayako as well. “Before our eyes,” the narrator confesses about both of them, “our faces quickly darkened like a shadow.”30 Thus, as desire gains visibility, becomes known, the subject of that transgressive desire becomes obscured. Consequently, when Tarō assaults Ayako, his self-reflection is interrupted. He describes himself as having fallen into an unthinking state, “dazed” (bonyari) and “in a trance” (muchû) before he accosts her, as if he is unaware of the violent struggle he has unleashed, even as they both emerge wounded.

In “Bottled Hell,” it is not simply a fall into savagery that is at stake with transgression; savagery appears as an irreparable break from community: “If by any chance a rescue ship was to arrive after we committed such a thing?” Tarō asks. “What then?”31 The injunction takes shape in the realm of the spiritual with the invocation of God and, more importantly, with relation to the civilized world outside the island represented by the rescue ship. To violate the incest taboo for the narrator would be to renounce ties to the civilized world outside the island.

With no way to overcome the painful teetering between desire and prohibition, the narrator pens the letter, intending to bottle it and send it the next day “while we resist succumbing to the demon’s temptation…while at least our bodies are pure…”32 Even if the body remains pure, Tarō makes clear, their minds are not. His last remarks bemoan his current conflicted state in light of the island’s perfection, which transforms it from a paradise to hell. Taking this statement alongside the title “Bottled Hell,” what we see is Kyūsaku’s interest in the unknowability of the mind vis-à-vis the “darkness” of colonial space. The island has been turned into a space of suffering for the narrator, and has been internalized through his incestuous desire. The bottle here works analogously to the mind, containing this hell of desire and prohibition that cannot be overcome, and thus leads Tarō and Ayako to their spectacular suicides.

31 Ibid.
32 Ibid., p.19.
The letters do not end there; there is still one more. Written in childish *katakana* syllabary with few Chinese characters, its writer is Ayako herself. She mentions them getting along and being in good health before appealing to the parents to rescue them soon. What are we to make of this moment, this letter whose casual tone differs so much from the desperation that preceded it? The last letter brings the reader back to the opening of the previous one, when Tarô mentions sending out a letter from “God’s footstool” shortly after prayer. This would make Ayako’s letter the one that Tarô sent and the oldest of the three. The contrast between the visible childishness of this final letter and the events that have been narrated before it, including the suicide, give it a poignant echo. Yet is it not possible to tease out a circularity in the innocence embodied by this letter with the instinctual state that underlies the conflict in “Bottled Hell”? We are reminded of the contradictions in the figure of the savage, characterized by both deviant lusts and childish naiveté. The savage permits us to see how the “chain of stereotypical signification is curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse, an articulation of multiple belief.”

Savagery lurks within the siblings; it is latent until the isolated, distant space of the island permits it to take shape. When savagery does emerge, it does so through an uncontrollable desire in conjunction with an exotic space that similarly presses on and threatens the narrator. Blinded by his own instincts, Tarô’s knowledge of himself falters. Although it might seem so at first, it is not colonial space that is ultimately unknowable, but Tarô himself. For most of the story, he vacillates between appeasing his baser instincts and his own self-image as civilized. In essentially ending the story at the beginning, Kyûsaku reinforces the indeterminacy of the narrative with respect to a return to community and, thus, civilization. The readers are left to ponder whether the suicide that structures the narrative reincorporates the siblings into the community and civilization through its punitive dimension, or if their self-annihilation represents a rupture from the same through allusions to a classical love suicide. What does stand is that the suicide functions as self-sacrifice to reinforce a system of transgression and law, even while maintaining the siblings at its boundary line.

**Making Waves: A True Patriot in Corrupt Korea**

If Yumeno Kyûsaku’s “Bottled Hell” imagines the South Seas as an isolated space where we are fated to descend into savagery, his “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” set in Korea, takes a different approach but is no less invested in conjuring order where there is disarray. The narrative illuminates how the colony is the battleground for competing interests within empire and alludes to a global context where Korea is a key foothold for Japan’s competition with other imperial powers. Here disorder comes from the rapacious self-interest that Korea enables in Japanese subjects who are overly engaged in ruthless competition with one another at the cost of the nation’s wellbeing. Through a suicide and its narration, order, the restoration of national interest, is reestablished. The conflict here has moved from the primal mind to national boundaries.

“A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” first appeared in the magazine, *All Reading* (Ôru Yomimono) in 1933, serialized in two installments. Like “Bottled Hell,” “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” is also told by a first-person narrator, but this time it is as a monologue, not a letter, although this account, too, appeals to the reader for judgment. The story is set in the

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33 The *katakana* syllabary, which is used for emphasis and with foreign words, is learned first in Japanese schooling, so it is also associated with children’s writing.

34 Bhabha, p.118.
1920s and unfolds through the narration of Todoroki Naruo, who recounts the circumstances that led to his dismissal from his position as a fisheries engineer and his subsequent exile in a remote island near the southern coast of the Korean peninsula. According to Fujita Tomohiro, the basic premise of the story was something Kyûsaku had heard from his uncle, Hayashi Komao who had first-hand experience with the fishing industry in Korea at the time.35

Todoroki’s story concerns his conflict with powerful Japanese colonial authorities over the lives of the settler fishermen and the security of the Japanese nation. If the concern in “Bottled Hell” was with civilization and its authority, “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” charts a more specific course, depicting national community as the final authority. Nakajima describes “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” as a “populist tale of valor (minshûteki gôtaitan) without any signs of letting up.”36 This evaluation is significant: despite the sympathies towards the “common people,” the text blatantly eschews any sort of socialist sympathies, which were taboo, particularly in the charged atmosphere of the 1930s. Kyûsaku himself is known for his anti-leftist tendencies. In “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” he turns to the fishermen, not as laborers, but as common people, and more importantly, true representatives of nation, wronged by rapacious colonial officials.

In Todoroki’s account the fishermen are naïve, simple, albeit rough (arakure) folk. Within them we find echoes of the primitive we saw in “Bottled Hell.” The fishermen have been fallen into the destructive practice of blast fishing, precisely due to their innocence. Todoroki even thinks of them as similar to his children (wa ga ko dôzen), a fact that reinforces the ambivalence of the figure of the primitive, where brutality and innocence coexist. The stress in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” however, is in the heroism that the fishermen attain for their claim to authenticity through affect. The representative of these humble fishermen, Hayashi Tomokichi is “heroically in touch with the true sources of value that the community has forgotten or corrupted.”37 In his confrontation with his enemies, Tomokichi makes visible a harmonious national collective, while showcasing the precariousness of law. He is, in Walter Benjamin’s words, “the figure of the ‘great’ criminal,” which arouses admiration, not so much for the actual deed, but for the nature of violence that it lays bare.38 While presenting the flimsiness of the state’s legal apparatus through his law-breaking murder and suicide, Tomokichi demonstrates that there is a higher law—that of authenticity, which the story presents as the crucial building block of national community. Through this authenticity, “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” can critique Korea’s colonial administration. The story is also mediated by literature on heroic exploits by Japanese patriots, which contributes to its populist, nationalist outlook.

It needs to be stressed that it is not imperialism per se which is critiqued but rather its handing by self-interested, traitorous elites. Its corrective does not come from only Todoroki, himself another elite, but mainly from Tomokichi, and, later, his son.39 The story thus showcases

35 “Yumeno Kyûsaku to Chôsen” in Shuka vol. 2 no. 13 (October 30 1999), p. 33.
39 We may recall Andrew Gordon’s analysis of “imperial democracy” as a framework to describe the period from 1905 to 1932. What his analysis underscores is the participation, contradictions, and continuities that operated under the imperial ambitions of both elites and common people during the period. Gordon describes the complexity of the period as emerging from “a movement and then a regime committed to national glory and widened participation;
colonial bureaucracy as cowardly, deceitful, and unscrupulous; the visible violence of
Tomokichi’s mass murder and suicide counters these qualities. The authenticity of this act lies in
the way it renders Tomokichi’s passion visible and transforms him into a patriotic hero.

Todoroki, in turn, transforms into the narrator of his exploits. The interaction between the two
men in the narrative cements a harmony between the “wild” (and yet more authentic) members
of the Japanese community, and the “correct,” truthful Japanese official, who cannot speak
unless he is supported by these more authentic members of the community.

Violence and law, particularly the corruption thereof, frames the conflict, which is waged
over the illegal practice of blast fishing, which uses of explosives to disorient the fish in order to
make them easier to capture, a practice that carries great risk to the person using it and the
environment. As an enlightened official Todoroki opposes such a practice for the harm that it
does to the industry and the fishermen themselves, since in destroying these areas, blast fishing
directly threatens the fishermen’s livelihoods. Having come to Korea before its annexation,
Todoroki follows the mold of modern colonizer. Not only had he attained success for himself,
but also for a number of Kyûshu fishermen that he eventually brings with him to Korea’s “virgin”
fishing grounds. He paternally seeks to protect this group since, according to Todoroki, they
are easy targets for exploitation. While he attempts to educate other colonial officials like him to
ban blast fishing, he discovers that these, along with capitalists and other men of influence, both
condone the practice and actively enable it through the illegal smuggling of explosives. In the
attempt to persuade them, Todoroki enlists the help of mainland officials and continues his
lectures with little success. In one important lecture, his audience appears unconvincing, and in
the efforts to feign innocence, requests a demonstration. At a loss, Todoroki asks Tomokichi, a
former blast fisherman who carries a grudge against the authorities for sanctioning an attempt on
his and his son’s life, for help. While performing blast fishing as an example for the officials,
Tomokichi, unable to restrain himself, causes an explosion as revenge, killing several members
of the audience. In the aftermath, the narrator and the other members of the party lose track of
the two geisha that were contracted for the event. These women’s bodies are never found and the
colonial government establishes a cover up of the event, firing Todoroki.

Like “Bottled Hell,” “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” at first glance, has very
little in common with the conventions of detective fiction and thus fits within Kyûsaku’s
henkaku (unorthodox) body of work. It does, however, have a central mystery: Todoroki’s
dismissal. The relationship between his firing and Tomokichi’s revenge is what the reader is
compelled to uncover. Here, as in “Bottled Hell,” what marks the narrative as a detective fiction
or tantei shôsetsu is the reader’s sensibility, the way the narrative utilizes suspense and involves
the reader in a reconstruction of the events. While not reversing the chronology in the manner
of “Bottled Hell,” “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” employs the monologue form to

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40 Blast fishing is a compelling example of the way regimes of biopolitics and necropolitics may align. “Liberated”
to Korea, Japanese fishermen and capitalists join forces to make profit at the cost and eventual destruction of the
very resources they use. Mark Driscoll does not foreclose the possibility of there being strains of both regimes, even
if the historical contours of his argument privilege the dominant tendencies of one over the others at given times.

41 Kyûshu is the southernmost island of the Japanese archipelago.

42 In Japan, the genre had more flexibility than its Western counterpart. In her study of the mass magazine New
Youth, Kyoko Omori has noted that the translations of “detective fiction” (tantei shôsetsu) that appeared in the pages
of the magazine would not be of works categorized as such in the West See pp. 69-72.
include digressions and secondary accounts, which complicate a linear reconstruction of the events.

Todoroki’s idiosyncratic narration is in Kyūshū dialect, adding to this complexity, as does the high number of fuseji or markers of deleted words (such as an x, o, or a comma), usually for place names throughout the text. These also point to the intrusion of the state and the status of law in the text. The deleted words gesture to the discussion of something forbidden, which is also explicitly linked to colonial space through the omission of specific place names. At the same time, unlike the letters, the oral quality grants the narrative an even greater immediacy and intimacy, which reinforces its themes of community and authenticity. Todoroki’s monologue addresses the reader directly as a listener who knows him well but is also in a position of power. The reader occupies the position of his interlocutor (and old acquaintance), Chief Public Prosecutor Sanky. As such, the reader is being asked to sympathetically evaluate the account, which it is interpellated as part of the national community.

From the summary, we see that story makes much of the corruption of the colonial government in Korea and their creation of a lawless space. The authorities support traitorous (baikokudo) capitalists that are only concerned with their own profit, to the detriment of the nation’s wellbeing. “Because [the colonial officials] were just a bunch that aimed at high salaries,” Todoroki explains, “it’s unavoidable that they’d be of a poorer character than the officials in the mainland.” The tensions between Japanese officials and common colonists that structure this narrative were common in the social landscape of the period. The alienation from the “common” Japanese colonizer appears as the root of corruption. Distance from the metropole facilitates this disorder, leading to what Todoroki refers to as “Korea’s Monroe Doctrine” in which the government-general acts independently of the mainland authorities.

Despite the distance that Kyūsaku conjures with his depiction of the political situation in Korea, his immediate concern is the nation figured through common fishermen from southern Japan, the ultimate victims of blast fishing, through whom he gestures at the larger global situation. In “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” the vested interests support blast fishing regardless of the damage and destruction it does to the livelihood of the Japanese fishermen transplanted there from Kyūshū by Todoroki himself. No mention is made of Korean fishermen in the narrative. The concern with blast fishing does not end with the Japanese fishermen, but reaches past them to a larger international network of competition. The explosives used in the practice trace a circuit around East Asia running the risk of falling into the hands of Chinese dissidents in Manchuria or the Russian army. Once more, Kyūsaku demonstrates an interest with the interior, but in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” this interior is not the mind; rather, it is primarily configured as the nation and rogue nationals are the most pernicious threat.

The representation of Korea’s corruption—specifically the corruption of Japanese officials—and disorder appears in the metropolitan journalism of the period, especially after Korea’s annexation in 1910, providing a justification for imperial encroachment. But the

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43 Fuseji were not inserted by the censors, but rather by publishers and editors.
45 Driscoll, p. 107.
46 Matsuda Osamu argues that the omission of Korean fishermen in the narrative is symptomatic of a rejection of current politics. See his “Bakudan Taiheiki—Umi wo saku ishi” in Yosô, vol.3 (April, 1981).
47 Peter Duus, The Abacus and the Sword (Berkeley: University of California, 1995), pp.407-413. Duus chronicles the myth of “virgin” land in Korea arguing that, it was this imagined space of opportunity, rather than lack of opportunities within the mainland that encouraged enterprising Japanese to seek their fortunes there. Korea figures in another Kyūsaku story, “The Doubled Heart”, (Nijū shinzō, 1935) as the origins of siblings, as well as in his
framework in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” differs from the so-called civilizing mission espoused. The movement of Japanese fishermen into the peninsula is blatantly couched in expansionist terms. Todoroki gives the readers an image of the situation in the mainland and the urgency of expansion:

The inshore fishing industry at the mainland has been overdeveloped for some 2500 years and fallen into extreme overpopulation. There is no work left other than mutually contested fishing grounds. This was the state of the fisheries after the Restoration. In contrast how about Korea? All of the southern coast of Korea is enclosed by virgin fishing grounds. Not to speak of the Russian maritime territories and the like. Without advancing, what would become of us? The pet theory while I was at school was that the overpopulation of 300,000 cannot be helped, right? You, too, were thoroughly informed…so at that time when I graduated I became like a falling star. My rushing out from Japan and crossing over to Korea was in the spring of Meiji 26 [1893], just when there was the promulgation of a government inquiry into the fisheries. At that time, I came with my saved capital from milk distribution of twelve yen, a thousand pounds of Senkintan medicine, and two hundred sheets of oiled paper, so it was like an Oshikawa Shunrō adventure novel.48

In Todoroki’s view, the deadlock in the mainland, overpopulation, and competition for limited resources prompts movement towards Korea, which is described as having “virgin fishing grounds,” ripe for use by the Japanese fishermen. He implicitly espouses the Meiji ideology of advancement (risshin shusei); this encouraged Japanese men—particularly those from rural villages—to seek out their fortunes even outside the bounds of nation. But while the individual was the privileged subject of advancement, Todoroki’s eye for colonial expropriation emphasizes his community of fishermen in mind for his ambitions. His close ties to this community contrasts Todoroki with the corrupt officials who only have their own benefit in mind.

Fiction, not official ideology, mediates Todoroki’s plans for success abroad, further cementing his difference from the fishermen under his care. He views his personal trajectory—his movement from the mainland to Korea—as a heroic act similar to that of the adventure novels of Oshikawa Shunrō (1876-1914), who was known for his tales of militaristic sea exploration meant for young boys.49 Such narratives, which also took the form of articles of the lives of successful overseas Japanese, were prevalent even on the pages of the magazine New Youth itself in the early twentieth century before detective fiction had managed to take root in the popular imagination. These accounts were often referred to as narratives of “going forth abroad” (kaigai yūhi) or “overseas expansionism” (kaigai hatten shugi).50

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47 Considered one of the pioneers of science fiction, Oshikawa’s most famous work was his 1900 Underwater Battleship (Keitei gunkan), where a capital builds a high tech ship in an uninhabited island. He uses the ship in war against Western powers.
This account of movement overseas corresponds to the biopolitical regime that characterizes the 1895–1915 period, when Japanese populations were encouraged to open markets outside the Japanese mainland and, in doing so, increase Japanese influence.\textsuperscript{51} According to Mark Driscoll, violent disposessions and disreputable business practices went hand in hand with the ventures of Japanese capitalists. Underneath the rhetoric of order and advancement that the Japanese colonizers would purportedly bring to Korea lurks greed and ambition. Todoroki’s mention of his humble savings recall the paltry possessions of the child would-be explorers we saw in “Bottled Hell,” the crucial difference being that more than tools of survival or signifiers of modernity, what Todoroki carries are useful for his attaining special favors from easily duped Korean aristocrats. Thus, the narrator also engages in self-interested schemes. What sets him apart from the corrupt Japanese elite is how his deceit is oriented towards the faceless Koreans that he dupes and his loyalty to the Japanese fishermen. He narrates his exploits upon his arrival to Korea:

At that time Koreans prized Senkintan a great deal. You remember Senkintan, right? ….It was a remedy that did no harm and no damage, but if you pulled one slab out [cut into] thirty or forty triangular pieces you got wealthy people bowing and an overnight stay. If you gave out one slab in three pieces, big name officials with authority over the prefectoral governor in the district then would guide you across the coast while doing a handstand, so it was a total fairy tale. Besides, I wore my old cavalry sergeant uniform, bowler hat, leather boots, a country bumpkin’s walking stick—don’t laugh….Stroking my long mustache, I handed over my business cards [made on] thick paper with gilded edges like a postcard: Inspector for the Japanese Imperial Government, Doctor of Classical Medicine, Third Class Meritorious Service, Todoroki Naruo [glossed as Choshi Deyon Un], printed in number one printing type. Because liberally translated it was a name of a great man, above all in valor and boldness, it dazzled most people’s eyes. Everywhere, even the lowest yangban was buying one after the other.\textsuperscript{52}

Todoroki’s deceit takes the shape of peddling a sham medicine, particularly to the moneyed classes of the native population, the yangban aristocrats. Adding to the remedy, which “does no harm and no good” but is prized nonetheless, is the image he cultivates, aided by the trappings of modernity—his uniform, which also signals military might, bowler hat, leather boots, and accompanying pretentious business card. The reader, positioned here as the listener, is invited to laugh at the incongruous image of Todoroki’s high status, as much as to the ignorance of the wealthy Koreans taken in by his image. More importantly, Todoroki’s scams indicate the bifurcation that characterizes biopolitics, in which a population will be selected for improvement and maintenance of life, while another will be left to let die. Todoroki’s account demonstrates not only the possibilities for an enterprising Japanese young man, but the relative impunity with which these were permitted to carry out colonial plunder. It demonstrates to what extent self-interest ran amuck under the banner of self-advancement.

The story depicts Todoroki’s deceit as playful, harmless, and part of the trappings of his civility. Alongside the colonial officials’ more pernicious deceit, this depiction positions the former blast fisherman Tomokichi as authentic and his suicide as the evidence of it. From the beginning, this authenticity appears in stridently nationalistic terms coupled with law-breaking

\textsuperscript{51} Driscoll, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{52} “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” p. 232.
violence. Todoroki describes him as a splendid Japanese (rippana nihonjin), implicitly comparing him to the traitorous officials and capitalists.

The admiration takes on a gendered inflection, as Todoroki praises Tomokichi for being a “hot blooded man” (nekkentsukan), one who, after killing his wife and the man she cuckolded him with, escaped from his hometown with only his son and the clothes on his back. Tomokichi has always flaunted the law, taking it upon himself to address wrongs committed against him through violence. In this, he exercises a type of “natural law,” a violence justified by its ends. However, his appropriation of force that should lie in the purview of the state leads to his escape for fear of being seized by its legal apparatus. The sacrifice of community in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” suggests the strength of Tomokichi’s character. His lack of control is depicted as his being untouched by the artificiality of civility and restraint. These circumstances precipitated his involvement in the dangerous underworld of blast fishing. Tomokichi’s example thus illuminates a link between violence and authenticity that will be further clarified through this apotheosic revenge.

Tomokichi’s brazen character is a constant throughout the story. It leads him to try his own hand not just at blast fishing, but also at smuggling explosives to his comrades, which draws the ire of the bosses. These order an assault on him that leaves him and his son near death and needing Todoroki to intervene. Now indebted to Todoroki, Tomokichi pledges his and his son’s life to him—which further shows his strength of character—and eventually discloses all he knows about blast fishing, including the involvement of the colonial officials. When Tomokichi is forced to face the duplicity of the colonial administrators during Todoroki’s final lecture, his wild nature manifests again. The officials ask for the demonstration of blast fishing, even as they know well what the practice involves. Tomokichi reveals the hypocrisy with which they make their demand, telling Todoroki,

[...]the officials] learned from experience. They step with care and get to work. Around the government office in Korea [they] thoroughly devise schemes. Because they got those at the outskirts of blast fishing, no eyes would settle on them. Those who have come [to your lecture], those influential people over there are all big shots in blast fishing...Without a doubt, while you scowled at them, they purposely covered their faces....they do not listen to [your] extraordinary lecture and then make such an outlandish request? Tomokichi refers to himself as one of the unfortunate victims at the “outskirts” (nakama hanare) deemed expendable by the crafty officials, who only seek to cover their tracks. Their demand to see the process of blast fishing, in Tomokichi’s view, further cements their hypocrisy. The request is “outlandish” (ketahazure) because it conflicts with the contents of the lecture, which focuses on the dangers of the practice to the fishermen and their environment. It is outrageous, too, for its calculated boldness given the officials enabling of the practice. For all these reasons, Tomokichi sees it as nothing more than insult added to injury.

Previously in “Bottled Hell,” we saw how the narrative was mediated by the trope of savagery staged in the unnamed tropical island; by contrast, in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” Korea functions as the setting for heroism that the narrative embeds within a collective, specifically “Japanese,” psychology. We might not only gesture to the allusion to Oshikawa

53 Benjamin, p. 278.  
54 Ibid., p. 267.
Shunrō and his tales of national heroism in the face of future war, but look towards the allusion in the story’s title itself. As with “Bottled Hell” and its echoes to classical love suicides, “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” also alludes to premodern classical literature. The narrative’s title refers to the fourteenth-century war epic *The Chronicle of Great Peace* (Taiheiki), gesturing to its political content—a civil war—and to the centrality of a glorious self-inflicted death.\(^{55}\) Similar to the use of the love suicide trope in “Bottled Hell,” the resemblances are superficial. As in *The Chronicle of Great Peace*, the conflict in Kyūsaku’s narrative is between the interior boundaries of the nation, but in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” empire has redrawn them to include Korea. The “appropriate” use of the land and seas of Korea are what is at stake for different Japanese factions—the colonial authorities and the fishermen. Inasmuch as the samurai deaths in *The Chronicle of Great Peace* gesture to the authentic feeling of the samurai, we see a link between authenticity and heroism that Kyūsaku uses as scaffolding for his narrative. Tomokichi transcends his status as a mere fisherman to become a heroic figure through his suicide because his death appears as the ultimate proof of his passion for communal revenge. Further, the contrast between him and the seemingly untouchable elites that are his enemies also make him a patriot worthy of having his story told.

Tomokichi’s transformation from poor old man (mazushii oyaji) to a hero occurs in the context of nation. The narrative makes connection through presenting blast fishing as a manifestation of Japanese national character or spirit (yamato damashii) in its self-annihilating aggression when under duress. In this manner, Kyūsaku unveils a primal instinct that emerges at moments of urgency as part and parcel of national identity. Blast fishing with its accompanying destruction demonstrates the potential for apotheosic violence that lies in the national psyche:

> The general public easily chalks up the cause for the pervasiveness of blast fishing to simple materialistic reasons (yuibutsu teki)— its large profits and such. Looking at it through my eyes, [someone] who was mixed up with them, sharing their lice, there was at bottom another deeper psychological reason (shinriteki na ryû). To sum it up in a phrase, this blast fishing industry is a means of fishing that conforms (tekigô) to our national character [as] Japanese (wa ga nihon no kokuminsei), even if you say it’s outrageous, this is a fact, so it can’t be helped. When war breaks out, we quickly throw human bullets. In the sea, we want to spill blood through torpedo boat assaults. The Japanese know well the essence of the Japanese spirit (yamato damashii), that which when taken off guard crashes an airplane piled with explosives to an enemy ship, whose anger is not mollified without going to the extremes (kyokutan made ikanakereba).\(^{56}\)

With psychology, however, Kyūsaku can gesture to something that is concealed, repressed. The appeal of violence here is something akin to a “call of the wild.” Blast fishing’s psychology reflects a character that upon confronted with the conflict between aggression and prohibition will vent his aggression, annihilating its object, as well as himself. In that sense, the self is also punished for its transgression. More than the self however, the way violence exhausts itself means that the murderer is no longer reachable by the law. In Benjaminian terms, this violence is most clearly law-breaking in this regard. The violence has inaugurated a new law tethered to national affect rather than legality. Todoroki’s description anticipates Tomokichi’s suicide and

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\(^{55}\) The *Taiheiki* narrates Emperor Go Daigo’s attempt to retake power from the Kamakura shogunate that wielded it at the time.

offers an interpretation of it that is enjoined to nationalist conceptions of character. Unlike the Japanese officials, the story positions Tomokichi as a true patriot, the embodiment of the “Japanese spirit” in his ability to transform his powerful emotions into law-breaking violence that generates a new law. This was suggested with his previous history of murder and escape.

Todoroki positions himself as both participant and knowledgeable outsider, suggesting that this heroism is something that is accessible even to him, even though as readers we know his civility stands in the way. First, he aligns himself with his fellow fishermen; he “shares their lice,” in contrast to the general public. But this positioning confers to him the authority to diagnose their inclinations towards blast fishing. Within this almost ethnographic analysis, Todoroki once more sets himself as a participant, stating that such a practice is commensurate with “our” national disposition. While born in the same place as the fishermen and surrounded by them, Todoroki differs through his education. He gestures to his difference from them when he explains that the fishermen become entrapped in blast fishing out of ignorance, chalking maritime phenomenon as “mysterious” (shinpi), since they are not equipped for any “scientific study” (kagakuteki na kenkyû) upon it. Todoroki’s education has bestowed upon him a higher rank and made him an authority over the fishermen, yet it also alienates him from them and makes him an ineffectual protector, demonstrating the limits to his being both participant and knowledgeable outsider.

The narrative suggests that in the face of the destruction that blast fishing wrecks, the only means of retaliation is authentic action, through which the powerless gain power. This is the reason why Todoroki must turn to Tomokichi in the hopes that his true-to-life demonstration will be persuasive, since Tomokichi has a direct connection to the practice and the fishermen. He does not imagine however, to what extreme Tomokichi will go in his performance of authenticity. Tomokichi’s final moments see the old man gather power over the ostensibly influential people around him. His anger and resentment transform into an implacable determination. The narrator witnesses how “that face, which basked in the sunlight from [above] his head was very calm…rather than valor, it had ebullience (rinrintaru mono).” Tomokichi’s demeanor arrests Todoroki and, more importantly, the other spectators—the corrupt Japanese officials. As Tomokichi introduces himself and tells his story, the previously rowdy crowd stills, the atmosphere “consumed by Tomokichi’s spirit.” Todoroki describes the crowd listening to him as having a psychology that resembled “a frog entranced by a snake.” His lurking resolve has transformed him from a mere fisherman, a victimized pawn of unethical administrators to a fearsome, predatory figure, chuckling while he inaugurates a nightmare for all around him. It is fitting then that his final words be “With this, begone demons” (Kore gedō sare!), which has religious resonances, calling to mind a shaman cleansing the space from evil.

His suicide transcends personal revenge as Tomokichi places himself as a representative of his wronged fellow fishermen and, implicitly, national interest. Despite his grotesque end, or rather because of his split body for the collective, Tomokichi’s heroism reaches epic proportions:

“…. You are a disgrace to Japanese officials, eh? This is the repayment from my put upon colleagues. You’ve eaten them up,” saying this, he quietly attached the fuse to the incense coil. Holding the dynamite that swished with one puff, he chuckled and launched it to the bottom of the stern’s draft mark. There was a roaring vibration. In that moment,

57 Ibid., p. 273.
58 Ibid., p. 274.
59 Ibid.
the geisha’s shrieks split the air, crushing our ears. Seeing that, old man Tomokichi chuckled again. He pulled another dynamite stick from the removable floorboards and lit up the fuse. He lifted it high above his head.

“With this, begone, demons!” he shouted in a thunderous voice while letting the explosive go. But [if] before it had been slow, now it was fast, I thought. With a swish, the flame sprouted a black orb separated barely by three shaku from the old man’s hands as we watched. A yellow flash quickly streamed out, dazzling our eyes. The old man Tomokichi’s hands, or feet, or head, or the ship’s gunwale, or planks, or unknown black things scattered and fell on all sides with a splash from the middle of the small boat, which had been completely enveloped by a thick gray smoke. Then, when the smoke cleared, the small blood-splattered boat had been reduced to half a water trough drifted about the swirling ripples on the water, pieces of flesh still clinging to its turret.  

Tomokichi clarifies during this moment that his vengeance is about the wrongs committed against him and the fishermen as a whole. These fishermen are pressured by the colonial officials to engage in blast fishing to keep the profits high. The officials’ selfish disregard leads Tomokichi to call them a disgrace to their position (Nihon no yakunin no tsurayogoshi). He also frames his action as revenge on behalf of his comrades (don nakama no ongaeshi), who have been exploited by the authorities. In doing so, he transcends his personal vendetta. He reveals himself as a patriot, protecting his community as well as the national interest.

The suicide carries a theatricality of its own that also arrests its spectators. It begins as an overwhelming sensorial experience that ends with the split body, bracketed by the sounds of Tomokichi’s chuckles and the screams of the geisha following the first explosion. If the first explosion was characterized by sound—by the roaring of the vibration and the piercing screams—the second is primarily a visual experience, black smoke and a yellow flash. And yet, the narrative goes further, gruesomely yet significantly describing the body, barely distinguishable from the parts of the ship.

In fact, the narrative quickly sidelines the biological fact of death in favor of its significance. After his death, the narrative reinforces Tomokichi’s heroism when one of the characters, a doctor who had attended him after he was left for dead, compares Tomokichi to the historical figure, Hirose Takeo, one of the heroes of the Russo-Japanese War for his selfless sacrifice during the Blockage of Port Arthur. In the same conversation where the doctor compares Tomokichi to Hirose, he mentions wanting to preserve the body parts in alcohol for the comparison between them of their “loyalty and filial piety” (chûkô). Tomokichi’s split body is no longer mere dead flesh, but a signifier of the values that the colonial officials lack. With its visibility, his dismembered body appears as the irrefutable evidence of authentic feeling.

Nonetheless, through his shocking suicide, Tomokichi has once more flaunted the law, this time more directly than before. The ensuing chaos after the explosion claims the lives of seven Japanese officials and injures many others. The geisha are left as collateral damage, unaccounted for at the end of the day. Far from such damage leading to ambivalence, it depicts the lengths that Tomokichi’s authenticity would take him. This establishes him as the “great

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60 Ibid., pp. 274-275.
61 Hirose Takeo was a commander of a ship during the naval blockade of Port Arthur. As the ship was docking in the channel, it was hit by a torpedo and exploded. He survived the initial blast, but went to look for the rest of his crew and in doing so, was hit by a shell and killed.
criminal” figure Benjamin speaks of, but his criminality, in fact, reveals a submission to a greater law of national community and authenticity.

This view is validated by the eventual success of his death even beyond the immediate vengeance he achieves over the colonial officials. At first the narrative presents a failure of bureaucracy that seems to call Tomokichi’s actions into question. An emboldened Todoroki confront the officials who dismiss him from his post. Exiled to an island off the coast of Korea, it appears as if the officials will once more stage another cover up. Knowing this, Todoroki finds it difficult to complete his written account of the events. Only the return of Tomokichi’s son, Tomotarō, provides a satisfying resolution as he is able to draw the attention of mainland officials. Todoroki’s failure once more positions him as an outsider, whose privilege stands as an obstacle to authentic action.

Tomotarō is not bound the same way, and his intervention recalls how the split body signifies authenticity. Upon his return he pens a letter in his own blood detailing the cover up that has occurred. While not the spectacular sacrifice that his father made, the blood that he spills in the correspondence communicates Tomotarō’s own authenticity and reinforces its link to violence. The letter draws the attention of Chief Prosecutor Saiki, an old acquaintance of Todoroki’s to whom Todoroki finally discloses all. Once more, it is the humble fishermen that have acted with the authenticity needed to change the course of the story, protecting not only their livelihood, but also Japan’s imperial ambitions.

Yet Todoroki is able to communicate the events in order to save the fishermen. He is, after all, the narrator. While labeled as authentic and as the volatile, “undomesticated” elements of the national community, the fishermen still need Todoroki to be their voice. Thus, the story carries no radical valence with respect to social class. Rather it posits that harmony necessitates hierarchies. What harms the balance is the rampant self-interest and duplicity that colonial space enables. Taken to the extreme, such interest is turned back upon itself. In the blind effort to make their fortunes through blast fishing and gunpowder trade, the corrupt officials lose track of the damage they are doing to their own resources and their own nation. At those times, it is only law-breaking action that can restore some measure of order, displaying an even higher law than that of the state, a law grounded in national affect (extreme passion) inaugurated by violence.

The patriotic hero figure takes shape among disorder, splitting his body to display his authenticity and punish the traitors. The splitting of the body renders his resentment and rage visible. In this excess, the body stands for the collective. Tomokichi’s revenge is not for himself; it becomes a revenge on behalf of the other wronged fishermen and even extends to include Todoroki himself, who is temporarily animated to carry on with his antagonism towards the remaining officials. While springing from anger, despair, and frustration—alienating emotions—upon occurring, Tomokichi’s authentic violence brings the deceit and cowardliness of the officials into relief. Nevertheless, because it occurs in a colonial setting depicted as distant, it needs to be communicated past the bounds of the colony, through more authentic violence (the letter written in blood) until it becomes a tale to be told to a sympathetic listener who can intervene. Suicide in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” shows the process through which the breaking of the law is at the same time the reestablishment of an even greater law and a harmonious, authentic national community.

**On Thin Ice: The Bungaku Seinen as Martyr in Manchuria and Beyond**
Kyūsaku continues his exploration of the intersection of domestic with international politics begun in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” in The Ends of the Ice and couples this political content with the introspective narration we saw in “Bottled Hell.” The novella was published in its entirety New Youth in 1933 and is considered by many critics to be one of his masterpieces. In his remarks on Yumeno Kyūsaku at the conclusion of the second volume of his history of Japanese detective fiction, Nakajima states, “The Ends of the Ice, which has held center stage [in Kyūsaku’s work], gives a feeling of pouring out what was amassed [by Kyūsaku] in the later three years.”63

A large part of its plot takes place in Harbin, Manchuria, but the action later moves to the wilderness of Siberia. Like “Bottled Hell,” the narrative takes the form of a letter. This time it is a letter written by a soldier, Uemura Sakutarō who has been stationed at Harbin during the Siberian Intervention in the 1920s.64 His letter describes the events that led to him being framed for many crimes and reveals the traitorous actions of several of his countrymen amidst the various forces that fight over Harbin. Because the authorities are pressing upon him and he cannot clear his name, the letter announces his suicide. It paints a picture of Uemura’s riding out into the frozen ocean with his companion, a “half-Corsican, half-gypsy” woman named Nina to locations unknown, away from the suspicions of the military police. Suspicions are all they need to mark him for horrific punishment.

Suicide in The Ends of the Ice frames the narrative as much as it does in “Bottled Hell” and “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” providing an end point around which Kyūsaku organizes the text. Readers are aware of its inevitability from the opening, even if like in “Bottled Hell,” this suicide is a projection for the future. Uemura’s suicide gestures to the insufficiency of law in the chaotic space of Manchuria, where his fellow compatriots frame him. The machinations of a poison woman coupled with ineffectual authorities leaves Uemura with no choice save be killed by the military police as a criminal or commit suicide on his own terms. By choosing the latter and using it as a motivation to speak of the incident, Uemura maintains some control over his fate. His account permits Uemura to communicate his story to the reader and fully disclose his involvement in the events without casting himself as entirely blameless. At the same time, it allows him to depict himself as a martyr who has unwittingly caused dissention within the wider national community and is taking measures to correct it.

The Ends of the Ice has more affinities with the detective fiction genre than “Bottled Hell” or “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” but its amateur detective, referred to as such in the narrative, fails not at solving the crime but at gathering the evidence he needs to validate its solution. This is because his pursuit of the case lands him between the Japanese army, the Bolshevik Russians, and the anti-Bolshevik Russians who seek to control Manchuria and beyond. The interference of these diverse elements obscures the central mystery and its perpetrators. As a detective, Uemura attempts to solve the disappearance of the translator and the accountant of his regiment with some public funds. His efforts to solve this crime, however, lead to his falling into a trap laid by the primary villain, Tominaga Tomi (the Japanese proprietress of an upscale teahouse in Harbin). Once she frames Uemura, he has no choice but to flee the city and into the ice-covered lands of Siberia. The detective figure in The Ends of the Ice is then far from the

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63 p. 243.
64 The Siberian Intervention took place between 1918 and 1920s and refers to when the Allied Powers sought to curtail the effects of the Russian Revolution in 1917. Japan was involved in this venture, but its wider motivation was to gain a foothold in Manchuria. When the US learns this, it begins to pressure Japan to withdraw its forces. This pressure is the political backdrop for the novella.
masterful detective that characters such as Edogawa Rampo’s Akechi Kogorō embody. Far from being a detached observer, Kyūsaku’s Uemura falls into the underworld of crime with no hope of reemerging.

The text draws from common images of Manchuria present in the mass media of the period. Kyūsaku never actually visited Harbin himself (or the South Seas or Korea), but most likely based his descriptions on a variety of texts on Manchuria. In newspapers, music, and other media, Manchuria emerges as a frontierland of possibilities for the Japanese empire. This territory was conceived as the “lifeline” (seimeisen) of an economically struggling Japan in the 1930s. Harbin appears often in travel narratives and the mass fiction of the period. Dancing girls and the Russian elements in the city were the most common motifs, signifying the pleasures and imperial competition for the city. More than any other territory, Manchuria was prevalent in Japanese detective fiction of the 1930s, rife with espionage and murky loyalties. The Ends of the Ice shares these elements with the spy novels that would become popular at the end of the decade.

Loyalties are not the only unstable elements in this space. Guilt and innocence, too, become fraught. While Uemura discloses to the reader the true perpetrators of the crimes, he is still condemned by the suspicions cast upon him. It is precisely because he is a failed detective, a detective who has become a criminal in the eyes of the law, that he writes his account. The melancholic letter stands as a counter to those that paint him as the fugitive his countrymen seek. But Uemura does not claim absolute innocence. Instead, he wishes to clarify his involvement, presenting himself as only interested in the “truth” (shinsō), but willing to sacrifice its revelation should it cause strife:

If this note is to be disclosed, I would prefer it would be after 1921. This is something from more than ten years ago today. But if there appears to be someone affected by this, please suspend its disclosure …. It might have been better not to write this regretful letter, if such a thing were possible for me. But even thinking of going on to die silently taking up the whole of this charge on the other hand, is not easy. I would be satisfied just to make clear the degree of my responsibility (sekinin) in this incident .... It is to this extent that this was an unhappy, frightful, and appalling incident.”

Like the previous two narratives I have discussed, the first-hand account, be it in a letter as it is here and in “Bottled Hell,” or an oral tale as it is in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” is directed at a reader with a specific demand. The reader is to judge Uemura’s involvement and transmit his story under the conditions that he mentions. His conditions communicate his sincerity and ostensibly disinterested motives. Uemura states that the letter is not written with the intention of carrying out a grudge against those touched by the incident, nor out of regret, or a demand for justice. He takes an “honest responsibility” (ryōshinteki sekinin), not for causing the events, but for being powerless to resist the force of its turns (senkairyoku). Through his self-depiction as a victim, as well as his self-effacement, his desire for silence in the face of conflict, Uemura positions himself as a martyr that maintains the community’s harmony—which, as we have seen, is lacking in colonial spaces.

Uemura’s vulnerability, what makes him such a compelling victim, is one of the first traits that come to the fore in his narrative, given form through his avowed identity as a bungaku seinen (literary youth). Despite his being a soldier, he is given more to daydreaming than gritty

reality. This personality alienates him from his comrades who consider him timid (shōshin) and cowardly (yowamushi). Even before joining the army, Uemura was rootless, having no family to speak of and meeting only with failure. While not following the slogan for self-advancement as stridently as Todoroki in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” the literary youth, too, was incorporated in discourses of imperial expansion. In his reading of Natsume Sōseki’s *Higan sugi made* (Until After the Equinox, 1912), literary critic Komori Yōichi points out the intersections between this figure and the socio-historical context of the 1910s. According to Komori, the colonies were particularly important as a recourse for the influx of educated youth who faced difficulties gaining employment during the economic downturn after the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905).

The story reveals a tension between the contradictory images of Manchuria as a paradoxical land of plenitude and lack. For instance, Uemura’s rootlessness is far from resolved when he arrives in Manchuria; alienated from his fellow soldiers and the city in general, he views Harbin as a space of boredom from which the search for the stolen money stands as a reprieve. But that is not to say that Uemura is ignorant of the riches of Harbin or even of the pleasures in wandering around the city. In fact, he mentions that one of the activities he most enjoys is looking out at the urban space from the roof of the building where he is stationed. His description of Harbin from that location addresses the city’s cultural otherness. It also suggests the resources that can be possessed and render profit. In this manner, it echoes the descriptions of both the idyllic deserted island in “Hell in Bottles” and Korea’s “virgin” coast in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs.” This perspective shows us the dynamics of Japanese colonialism according to Kyūsaku, which he characterizes as greed that leads to corruption. The narrator tells us,

True to its reputation, Harbin was described as ‘the Paris of the East’ or ‘the Tokyo of North Manchuria’. The light brown line of the road went straight, extending for a breadth of I don’t know how many hundreds of meters, representing this thrill of a view never seen on the mainland. I felt an air of the exotic well up inside me (ikoku jōcho ga mune ippai ni komiagette kuru) just from looking at the three or four rows of huge elm trees with leaves that stuck together like small mountains, charming Russian flower beds were scattered between them here and there.

Here and there I could see thick gardens. In that space, the straight line and curves of the railway crept about for I don’t know how many thousand miles and met with the railway station. The spire of a distant Buddhist temple flickered in the light. Even further to the west the Sungari River stretched out as if looking at the sea, not knowing where it had flowed in and where it would flow out. A large iron bridge of about three thousand one hundred and nine feet was visible. Even further for I don’t know how many miles of

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Sōseki’s Tagawa Kentarō is one of these young men who dreams of find success abroad, now that his failure to find an occupation has rendered him “useless” (*muyōsha*) to society. He also wishes to be a detective, which only leads to his getting duped by the acquaintance who hires him. Komori notes that the figure of the detective during this period emerged primarily through the media attention to the 1910 Great Treason Incident (*taigyaku jiken*). During this time the Japanese authorities detained leftists for supposed involvement in a plot to assassinate the emperor and sentenced twenty-four of them without conclusive evidence. This connection explains Kentarō’s reservations, since he views the profession as one that acts on predictions of crimes, assuming the worst without conclusive evidence.
fields of sorghum, tofu and corn exposed the curved line of the earth. Anyone could imagine the expanse of the wide sky and the breadth of the land. Emerging from the basement room and surveying that view, I was dazed (bō tō natte shimau)...an incredible feeling of nothingness...(subarashii kyōmu no jikkan).  

This expanse highlights Japanese ambitions in the continent. The narrator’s eye moves along a road that stretches a near endless length and this view generates excitement with relation to the metropole. Harbin’s view becomes exotic with respect to the implicit image of Tokyo, whose scale does not approach that of the North Manchurian city. It is only after the narrator mentions the open space of Harbin that he then moves to its cultural otherness, mentioning the Russian influence in the city, suggesting the other forces that compete for it. For Uemura, this otherness is something that when visually consumed can “fill him up completely” (mune ippai komiagette kuru).

As he continues, the description moves beyond the city after touching on its most important means of economic growth: the arteries, roads, Sungari River, and railroad. These sights also gesture to Manchuria as a node within the larger space of empire. That is to say, goods and people, travel through and from Manchuria. Past these, however, lie the sources of imperial ambition through the fields of sorghum, corn, and tofu. The Japanese empire sought to harness such products for its maintenance. We see that Harbin falls under Uemura’s colonizing gaze which, in traveling outwards, reaches past the city to the whole of Northern Manchuria and its resources. The novel attains this reach, even if ambivalently, at the end when Uemura does in fact leave the city to flee out to Siberia.

However, despite the mentions of sources of wealth that exist beyond the city, the protagonist addresses a feeling of emptiness (kyōmu) conjured by the sight of the endless landscape. Rather than be drawn into the possibilities of Manchuria, Uemura displays boredom. Later, as he speaks of the different ethnicities that inhabit the city, Uemura states, “in the vast emptiness they seemed like various swarms of wriggling insects.” This negativity resembles that which conceptually buttressed the rhetoric of universality with which Japan justified its imperial expansion. In that account, negativity or “emptiness” functions as a universal under which all difference can be subsumed.

Uemura’s remark about the masses of people resembling insects across the colonial terrain also recalls Kyūsaku’s criticism on the aims of detective fiction, where he mentions that the genre “reveals (bakuro). . . human character as a small, atrophied wriggling insect at the depths... of a scientific culture (kagaku bunka).” By “scientific culture” Kyūsaku refers to one

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69 The Ends of the Ice, pp. 16-17.

70 Ibid.

71 Seen, for instance, in the thought of Nishida Kitarō (1870-1945) and his concept of “Mu no bashō” (the place of nothingness). While Nishida’s relationship to nationalism and imperial expansion is not always clear, as Yoko Arisaka argues in “Beyond East and West: Nishida’s Universalism and Postcolonial Critique” The Review of Politics 59:3 (Summer 1997), p. 559, “Nishida optimistically believed that Japanese philosophy could help liberate Asian nations by raising them to universality. In Asia, Japan was the bearer of “truth,” because of the unique non-dominating metaphysics of “place as nothingness” expressed in the Imperial Way. This belief in theoretical universalism eclipsed the understanding of Japan’s historically contingent position and made it impossible for Nishida to evaluate Japan’s Asian war realistically.” This is not to argue that Kyūsaku read Nishida or the philosophy of the Kyoto School, but the concept was grounded in Buddhism and Kyūsaku took orders as a Buddhist priest for a time.

72 “Tantei shōsetsu no shin shimei,” p. 66.
that is ordered, sanitized, and healthy on the surface. Underneath, however, human character is stunted and unclean. In the same work, he mentions “nihilism” (kyomu shugi) or materialism as existing at the core of capitalism, which has left ideals behind. Consequently, the colony blatantly showcases the pursuit of profit, which reduces human beings to scavenging insects.

Although Uemura appears to be an outsider to these ambitions for resources, as an introspective and rootless literary youth, his life, too, is devoid of meaning. This emptiness sparks his investigation into the stolen funds. When his superiors call for his involvement in the search for the money, Uemura remarks that it was “with a new feeling similar to watching a type of detective play.”73 He assures the reader that his “boring interest in investigation” (tsumaranai tantei shumi), is most certainly due to the ennui (taikutsu) he’d been suffering from. Uemura emphasizes this link: “the gigantic devil of boredom all of a sudden transformed into a type of radical interest in investigation.”74 If meaning is not to be found in the domination over colonial space and colonial plunder, then how can we read Uemura’s overwhelming feeling of boredom, which characterizes his time in Harbin and leads to his doomed effort to play detective? The answer lies in Uemura’s isolation, his lack of ties to the community. He mentions having no family—no parents or siblings—to answer to about his failures even while in Tokyo. In Harbin, the situation grows more acute with his estrangement from the other soldiers and his inability to speak Russian. This suggests that colonial space has exacerbated his tendencies towards alienation as a literary youth or bungaku seinen.

The collusion between his interest in sleuthing, naiveté, and isolation make Uemura the perfect victim. In accordance to its reputation, Harbin is replete with duplicitous characters, none as seductive as Tomi Tominaga, proprietress of the Gingestu teahouse. Uemura’s rootlessness and his lack of ambition starkly contrasts with Tomi and her background. She will eventually be revealed as the puppet master behind the stolen money and several murders. The narrator’s literary sensibility comes through as he describes her:

Should I describe her face as one that brought together a more captivating impression than Yosano Akiko and Ito Akiko? Her large eyes crinkled at the corners, showing her maturity, the white of her straight nose and her thin lips were suited by the lustrous (mizumizushii) marumage coiffure. All seemed to promise complete control (jiyȗ jizai) over her countenance. I could feel that those dark, wet pupils and her fine, white skin possessed had an unexplainable, strange (byoteki), bottomless attraction.75

His view of her brings into focus the narrator’s bookish nature, since both Yosano Akiko and Ito Akiko (more commonly known as Byakuren) are female poets known for their passion. Because these women are recognized for the sensuality of their work, the comparison highlights Tomi’s own sex appeal, a mix of both mature restraint and vivaciousness. Her hairstyle, associated with a conservative matronly style, gestures at conventional Japanese femininity that can perhaps carry with it no small degree of nostalgia in the colony. However, Tomi’s femininity also projects excess to Uemura. Her complete control (jiyȗ jizai) over her expressions, a description the narrator repeats throughout the novella, immediately raises questions about her moral character, implying that her charm functions as a mask that hides her scheming. She is successful

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73 The Ends of the Ice, p. 21
74 Ibid., p. 46.
75 Ibid., p. 31.
from the beginning, seducing the narrator into disclosing army secrets. This immediately makes him a criminal to the nation (kokka no hannin) in his own eyes.

With such murderous scheming, we see a resurgence of the figure of the poison woman (dokufu onna). The text refers to her methods as those of “the lot of poison women and women politicians” (joryū seijika to ka dokufu to ka to iu renjū), underscoring how central the covert plotting is to the trope. The figure of the poison woman became widespread in the Meiji period as influence from tabloids gave rise to biographies of beautiful women quick to seduce and murder if it fit their aims. These biographies are thought to be the predecessors to detective fiction, to which the narrative alludes when the narrator comments “A woman behind a crime…what an old-fashioned resolution (furumekashii kaiketsu).” The poison woman signals anxieties over the increasing mobility permitted in the Meiji period. Such a concern continues in the following periods, magnified by women’s movement outside the boundaries of the metropole in the 1930s. These anxieties appear in the text directly when the narrator listens to Tomi talk about her past:

Strangely enough, we both began to speak frankly to each other of our life stories. I, who was usually so taciturn, strangely enough, chatted about my aimless life until now. By contrast to my confession of this aimlessness, the proprietress had Nagasaki as her point of departure, [and] while crossing Tokyo and Shanghai had listened to many men’s tales.

Tomi’s trajectory brings into stark relief her movement across empire, starting in Nagasaki and stopping at Tokyo and Shanghai on her way to Harbin. Her travels are with relation to men, presumably through some form of sex work. Tomi’s journey underscores her ambition, juxtaposing it with Uemura’s passionless drifting. Unlike Tomi and her henchmen, what moves Uemura is idle curiosity, not intention or purpose. Even when he confronts her about her plot and she attempts to murder him, Uemura does not anticipate that their struggle end with her accidental death—nor that this would make him more suspicious still to the colonial police.

Harbin’s lawlessness and unpredictability provide fertile ground for the poison woman and her ambitions to flourish, aided by the lack of meticulousness of the colonial police. This allows Tomi to label Uemura a spy for the Bolsheviks, a false charge that sticks even after her death. The unpredictability of Harbin as a borderland is brought home by Nina, Uemura’s guide, who tells him: “Don’t you know that Harbin’s is famous for Nakhalovka, nude dancing and plotting for fun? Harbin is the type of place where when it comes the time to be killed, you will be killed even if you’re told it would never happen.” Her statement emphasizes the pleasures and dangers of the city. What is significant is the unpredictability that characterizes this danger. The plotting in Harbin is for fun or as a game (gokko), not necessarily for any a concrete reason. Further, even if one receives assurances of safety, these are merely lies. Nina’s appraisal of Uemura’s naiveté is that he is honest (shōjiki), and for this reason, does not appear to fit within the murky, intrigue-laden landscape.

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76 Ibid., p. 73.
77 Ibid., p. 93.
78 Mark Silver, pp. 30-57. Silver discusses the figure of the poison woman in narratives that predated detective fiction. For more on women’s movement to the colonies in the successive periods, see Driscoll, pp. 81-100.
79 The Ends of the Ice, p. 91.
80 Ibid., p.109. The district Nakhalovka was infamous for its slums, where a large population of White Russian refugees lived.
Although Harbin’s history of political conflict shapes its representation, we saw a similar unpredictability with the depiction of Korea, and to a lesser degree, the deserted island in the South Seas. In all three spaces, the expectation of control—administration by ethical Japanese officials in Korea, the maintenance of civilization in the distant island, and the loyal participation of Japanese expatriates in gaining a foothold in Harbin—is subverted from within. In The Ends of the Ice, the interior refers not only to the traitors within the Japanese faction, but also to Uemura himself.

Leaving the city suggests a transformation of sorts for Uemura. After leaving Harbin, Uemura divests himself of his uniform for his safety from his fellow countrymen and, with Nina’s help, disguises himself as an itinerant musician, showing that perhaps now he too has been tainted by corruption and duplicity. The loss of the uniform has been taken by one critic as a turn away from the nation. Uemura says, “the care of the police in the mainland, the gentility of their operation is late in coming.” By referring to the Harbin as a battleground, Uemura stresses the competition and conflict that marks the landscape. While Manchuria is a land of opportunity, unlike the imaginaries of the uninhabited or “virgin” South Seas or Korea, it is one where its opportunities are to be wrested from other empires, even while being caught in conflict with one’s own countrymen.

Uemura and Nina’s departure from Harbin creates a break with respect to the international intrigue and a return to the melancholic introspection that began the novella (while also recalling the anguish of “Bottled Hell”). Uemura’s decision to commit suicide occurs after a year of aimless travel across Siberia, when his declining health, despair at his status as a fugitive, and the reappearance of his Japanese pursuers create an even more desperate situation. Since they are cornered, Nina suggests a beautiful death (sutekina shinikata) together. Although, this is her suggestion, Uemura feels she’s just said what he had been thinking.

This suicide takes the fantastical form of their riding out on a sled above the frozen sea:

After we rounded Russky Island, we spurred the horses on to go straight towards the waves….It was a night with a good moon and the ice gradually took on the color of a pearl, its color changed to those of a rainbow, piercing our eyes. Regardless, we continued towards the waves….

“As long as I’m together with you, it’s all right,” she said laughing and I put down my pen and glared at her.

“If the ice continues to Japan, what will we do?” she asked, her knitting needles in disarray, and laughed heartily.

This moment approximates the style of “Bottled Hell.” Like Tarō’s account, Uemura writes it for the reader’s benefit with considerable flair. The passage’s repetitions and onomatopoeia add to the poetic sensibility that departs from the intricacies of the plot. The narrator focuses on the image of the ice of the open sea as it changes colors, dazzling his and Nina’s eyes. At this

81 Tada Shigeharu, p. 205.
82 The Ends of the Ice, p. 24.
83 Ibid., pp. 147-148.
moment, their movement towards death seems luminous and overwhelming. The ice becomes black to them as their final end remains unknown, suggesting a more ambivalent end.

Rather than waiting to be caught or for his health to decline further, Uemura sees in suicide the opportunity to control his own destiny and the account he gives of himself. The prospect revitalizes him and provides “excitement” (kōfun). He mentions “discovering the true flow of my existence (hontō no seimei no nagare)” in this upcoming death. This imminent death prompts him to write the text we are reading and, thus, could be said to organize the narrative.

Aesthetically, the romantic depiction of Uemura and Nina’s death resembles a love suicide (shinjū), an observation that would be obvious to the readership. Like “Bottled Hell,” the resemblance is only at the surface level. In contrast to the sentimental attachment made visible by classical love suicides, Uemura makes no such claims towards Nina. In fact, at the opening of the letter he states:

I don’t understand her character. I don’t understand people of a different race at all. It may be an absurd thing to say, but I cannot guess at all what is she always thinking, or what kind of view she has on life. Just that she agreed because she certainly wanted to die together with me. She is a woman who simply agreed to wait to die until I have finished writing this letter, quickly settling down to begin her knitting. So I don’t understand.\(^{84}\)

Presumably a true love suicide would reveal the connection between him and Nina, but this remains unclear. What is clear is the familiarity that Kyūsaku draws upon when presenting the readers with the much-lauded final image of Uemura and Nina riding out atop the frozen ocean. That aesthetic familiarity obscures the remaining otherness, the gulf between the characters, which Uemura attributes to race (jinshū).

But even if Kyūsaku disavows otherness through the gesture at a love suicide, it returns in the form of a powerful ambivalence embodied in the final lines of the novella. Nina interrupts Uemura’s beautiful projection with her laughter and asks what they would do if they arrived to Japan. Thus, we are faced with a question similar to the one that remained at the close of “Bottled Hell”: does this suicide represent a break from the community—a ride into darkness? Or does it represent a phantasmal return? The Ends of the Ice broaches this question through the image of darkness at the end and through the letter itself addressed to projected future reader.

Uemura consistently described himself as being at the mercy of criminality and disorder rampant in colonial space, and his self-annihilation gives the possibility of transcendence, of attaining something akin to the martyrdom of the scapegoat whose erasure brings about harmony in the wider community, particularly in the mainland.\(^{85}\) Uemura seeks the harmony of this connection to his readers. Uemura’s opening indicates that his motivation is to communicate the “truth,” but only on the condition of maintaining social harmony, of not troubling (meiwaku wo kakeru), anyone who may recall the incident. In the same ambivalent manner, the suicide that frames and enables his account takes up a measure of guilt (which he claims in the letter), without acquiescing to the whole of it. As it did for the siblings in “Bottled Hell,” suicide places Uemura on the boundary lines of community and of law.

**Conclusion**

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\(^{84}\) Ibid., p. 14.

Setting his works in colonial spaces allowed Yumeno Kyūsaku to emphasize detective fiction’s exploration of the unknowable, and in doing so, thrill readers with a representation of exotic, tumultuous places that drew upon the Japanese colonial imaginary. In “Bottled Hell,” “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” and The Ends of the Ice, diverse lands of the South Seas, Korea, and Manchuria, share a common state of disorder and chaos where law is precarious. In “Bottled Hell,” the idyllic paradise of the island enables a descent into savage instinct and forbidden desire; in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs” unchecked greed threatens the nation; and in The Ends of the Ice, that very greed coupled with twisted loyalties make innocence and guilt difficult to identify. Suicide functions as a strategy to avoid being swallowed by this tumultuousness, since through self-annihilation the characters reaffirm their position at the boundary of community. Suicide structures the narratives and gives them an inevitable end towards which the readers are led.

Despite the closure that this might suggest, the first-person narration of the stories undermines this closure. Both the epistolary form and the oral narrative establish a relationship with the reader. The narrators address the reader directly and ask him to engage with the account he has been provided. In all of the cases, the engagement is a call to judgment, which interpellates the reader into the community invoked by the narrator. The framing letter and Tarō in “Bottled Hell,” Todoroki’s narration via monologue in “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” and Uemura’s letter in The Ends of the Ice appeal to the reader to reassemble the unwieldy narratives and to take a position with respect to them. Tarō asks for forgiveness, Todoroki asks for the mainland’s intervention to solve the blast-fishing problem, and Uemura asks for the reader to disseminate the account under several conditions. In these narratives, the first-person narration is gesturing to community, one that moves from the family circle, to that of the nation.

The spectacular suicides in these stories have various functions with relation to law. “Bottled Hell” confronts us with a suicide as a punishment, that which occurs when law is broken. “A Chronicle of Great Peace with Bombs,” on the other hand, positions with suicide along with murder as heroic revenge, demonstrating the insufficiency of the law as it stands. Tomokichi’s murder-suicide breaks the law, but the moment of its collapse makes visible a deeper law that maintains the national community. Finally, The Ends of the Ice represents suicide as martyrdom, a willing sacrifice regardless of culpability in the service of maintaining the law and more importantly the harmonious community it protects. What all of these visions of self-destruction share is an ambivalent relationship to law and to the community that is protected by that law. Although suicide might seem to pose a law, a closer look reveals that this is not so in absolute terms. Rather, suicide in the narratives inhabits a space of unknowability, a borderline between criminality and law, between alienation and belonging.

This ambiguity conforms to how Kyūsaku envisioned detective fiction. Kyūsaku’s interest is in a general state of disorder, one that he linked to modernity itself. In his view of modernity and progress as a devolution or degradation, this disorder may be veiled or deferred, but it cannot be quelled. While scientific rationalism obscures the chaos underneath modernity in the mainland, his works suggest that it is the colony which lays it bare, just as the detective fiction form, specifically its unrestrained henkaku or unorthodox form, is the means to fully explore it.
Chapter Two
A Mystical Science in the Periphery:
Oguri Mushitarō’s “The Perfect Crime”

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we saw how Yumeno Kyūsaku’s fiction set in the colonies foregrounds the protagonists’ attempts to appeal to community through spectacular suicide. In Kyūsaku’s stories, the exotic settings of the South Seas, Korea, and Manchuria are spaces where interior and exterior conflicts can only be navigated through claims to authentic belonging to a national—specifically Japanese—community. This chapter focuses on law and its transgression in the periphery in another work of detective fiction, but it is science, not community, that supplies the basis for the crime and the solution.

Oguri Mushitarō’s (1901-1946) debut in New Youth with “The Perfect Crime” (Kanzen hanzai, 1933) garnered him an almost instant following among detective fiction fans. The novella, set in an imaginary location in southern China, was immediately positioned as a honkaku or “orthodox” detective fiction for its use of science and logic in the explanation of a crime. The story critiques this subcategory by pushing it to its extreme. Science not only provides the method for the murder itself, but also appears entangled with the motivation for it through eugenics discourses, which gave a scientific basis for the superiority of certain races and traits above others. These discourses cloak themselves in the accuracy and objective certitude of science. These same attributes were put forth by proponents of the honkaku detective fiction

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86 Born Oguri Eijirō, Oguri Mushitarō submitted his first work to the detective fiction coterie magazine A Taste for Detection (Tantei shumi) in 1927. However, it was not until 1933 that his first major work, “The Perfect Crime,” was published in New Youth’s July issue with the backing of detective fiction writer and critic, Kōga Saburō. Mushitarō’s recognition only increased with his third and fourth stories, “The Halo Murder Mystery” (Gōkō satsujin jiken) and “The Temple of St. Alexei” (Sei arekisei no jiin), both published in New Youth the same year. The next year, he published his most famous work, “The Murders at Black Death Mansion” (Kokushikan satsujin jiken).

Nevertheless, in contrast to “The Perfect Crime,” those works have been categorized as belonging to the henkaku category, which came to refer to any work that did not fall under the rigid constraints of the honkaku category. Oguri was involved in Japanese detective fiction circles (tantei bundan) throughout the prewar period. Along with Kigi Takatarō and Unno Jūza, he formed the detective fiction magazine Shupio, published in 1937 and 1938. Although Oguri did not have experience in the colonies prior to writing “The Perfect Crime,” he was drafted into the Japanese army from 1941-1942 and sent to the South Seas. Afterwards, he drew on his experiences in Malaysia for subsequent works outside the detective fiction genre.

87 Eugenics was introduced in Japan in the early 20th century by physicians, scientists, and journalists familiar with the ideas of Francis Galton (1822-1911). In Japan, eugenics was seen as a means to improve the overall physical health of the nation. It gathered popularity in the 1920s and 1930s as seen in the publication of the journals Eugenics (Yūseigaku) in 1924, Eugenic Movement (Yūsei Undō) in 1927, and Racial Hygiene (Minzoku eisei) in 1931. During this time the idea of “blood purity” also gained currency, primarily in conjunction to debates over imperial assimilation policies. In her work on eugenics in Japan, Jennifer Robertson notes that eugenics took shape in a crucial nexus between science and mass culture. As a work in a popular genre that thematizes blood and heredity in its negative valence, as pollution and degeneracy, “The Perfect Crime” is a key example of this intermingling of science and mass culture. For more on the history of eugenics, see Jennifer Robertson “Blood Talks: Eugenic modernity and the creation of new Japanese,” History and Anthropology, 13:3, pp. 191-216 and Eiji Oguma, “Japanisation versus Eugenics” in A Genealogy of Japanese Self Images, trans. David Askew (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2002), pp. 203-237.
subgenre to contrast the freewheeling *henkaku* or “unorthodox” subgenre, which was dominant in the 1930s.

In “The Perfect Crime,” however, the eugenics discourses that emerge at the end demonstrate that, while science appears orderly and objective, in the final instance it reveals itself to be a self-enclosed belief system. Even before arriving to that point, the increasingly elaborate explanations and ornate narration raise doubts about the narrative’s alignment with a linear, ratiocinative paradigm. The asides in the narrative distract from the central plot of the story, disorienting the reader with their excess of detail. Culled from disparate sources—among them folklore, history, and chemistry—this excess generates the complexity of the story and a distance between the work and the reader. Oguri’s decision to focus on a cast of non-Japanese characters further compounds this defamiliarization. It is no coincidence then that in one critic’s summation the story seemed like an adaptation (hon’an) of a foreign work. The distance between reader and work stands out all the more when we consider the detective fiction genre as departing from an effort to use science to familiarize and render understandable what at first seems to lie outside its bounds. That is, through the process of rational deduction the reader follows the detective and eventually solves the crime with him. In “The Perfect Crime,” the plot proceeds in the opposite direction, depicting science as a framework that encourages an obsessive focus on detail, but instead of bringing clarity, this excessive focus defamiliarizes, stripping objects and events from their historical and political context. This eschewing of context facilitates the transformation of science into a self-enclosed belief system.

This focus on science as an alienating belief system strikes a contrast with Kyūsaku’s works which rely on Japanese literary tradition to make the characters and their plight sympathetic to their audience. If Kyūsaku’s colonial space is ultimately given order through the aesthetic suicides of his characters, the subversion of science in Oguri’s work yields a different outcome. The boundary between civilized and savage endures, suggesting that colonial space remains threateningly other. From the beginning, the setting of “A Perfect Crime” lends itself to excess and defamiliarization. Although it is set in southern China, this is far from the exotically beautiful spaces that famous and established writers like Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, Satō Haruo, or Akutagawa Ryūnosuke used in their works during the Taishō period (1912-1926). The events

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88 Oguri’s work has been described by various critics as having a “pedantic” style similar to G. K. Chesterton and S.S. Van Dine, in particular, whose works appeared in *New Youth* during the early 1930s. Van Dine’s master detective Philo Vance was known for his esoteric knowledge, which he would display when solving the crime. By comparing him to these English-language writers, critics highlight the voluminous sources that Mushitarō integrates into his work, displaying encyclopedic knowledge. Oguri’s son, Oguri Senji has noted his father’s interest in languages, showing great aptitude in both English and French as a young man. (See “Shoden Oguri Mushitarō” in *Oguri Mushitarō zensakuhin*, vol. 1 (Tokyo: Chusekisha, 1995), pp. 327-347) In “The Perfect Crime” he draws from folklore, chemistry, anthropology, history, and other disparate sources, which he cites within the story. Nakajima Kawatarō describes the experience of reading his work in the following manner:

The citation of copious references inlaid by this encyclopedic knowledge [creates] an interest in tracing the story, looking at the rare books rendered in katakana gloss and the list of vocabulary – just that, perhaps, is an effective way of reminding [us] of a superiority that is linked to the mastery of references. The proper nouns and catalogues of books that appear in his work certainly incite a feeling of wanting to mater [the material] that plays the role of a necessary, yet impossible smokescreen that maintains the fragile frame.


89 This was *New Youth* editor, Mizutani Jun. See Nakajima Kawatarō, p.62.

90 The images of southern China that these writers drew on for their works set in that space are heavily indebted to Chinese literary tradition. This trend, similar to chinnoiserie was called *shina shumi* or “a taste for China.” See Kawamoto Saburō, *Taishō Gen’ei* (Tokyo: Chikuma shobo, 1997).
of “The Perfect Crime” occur on the remote fictional village of Hassensai on the outskirts of the southwest frontier of China. Its protagonist and characters are not Japanese or Chinese, as readers would expect. The main character, the Russian Vassili Zaroff, is a brilliant sleuth and member of the Soviet secret police (GPU). At the time of the story, he commands the western arm of the Chinese communist army, mainly composed of soldiers from the Miao ethnic minority. With Zaroff’s leadership, this army has achieved numerous victories. At the opening of the story, the army has as its headquarters a Western-style building that once belonged to the late Hugh Laurel, an Oxford professor of Anthropology, but now belongs to his physician daughter, Elizabeth. In this building Heda Mueheretze, an Eastern European military prostitute, will meet her death. The strange circumstances of her death initiate the investigation, since she is discovered to have been poisoned in a locked room that no one but her could access. Moreover, there are witnesses that claim to have heard a man’s laugh from within her quarters, though no visitor was seen going into her room nor left any trace.

The story is divided into seven sections and unfolds through the display of Zaroff’s investigation, which is doomed at the end. His inquiry consists of his perceptive reading of clues and interrogation of the people involved within the enclosed space of the army headquarters. However, while he manages to reconstruct key parts of the murder, its total elucidation happens through a final letter written by the perpetrator, Elizabeth, explaining her murder by toxic gas and justifying the act through eugenics as a belief system. Heda, she writes to Zaroff, is of “tainted blood.” Because Heda refuses sterilization, she will only reproduce undesirable qualities through her offspring if she is not eliminated. Elizabeth’s belief that biology is destiny also condemns Elizabeth herself to death, as we discover that she has a similar genetic background as her victim. The ornate style of the text and of Elizabeth’s letter clashes with the crude rationalization laid out by the final motivation for the crime. The interplay between the disorder calls for the instrumentalizing logic of eugenics; the linguistic excess that eventually undercuts it that I would like to trace in the story.

In her analysis of “The Perfect Crime,” Sari Kawana argues that the Miss Nippon contest of 1930 embodies the discourses found in the story, since it disseminated images of a healthy national body coterminous with eugenics discourses. While these are central to the text, my focus is not on their biopolitical inflection but on the necropolitical inflection that is its mirror image. As Kawana suggests, the bodies in “The Perfect Crime,” are the opposite of the healthy and beautiful bodies that demonstrate “good blood,” a fact that can be tied to racial politics at the time, but this is only the biopolitical or “life preserving” part of the story. The war-waging machinery in the background, complete with its allusions to a comfort system—the movement of women with the military for the express purpose of sexual exploitation—sets “The Perfect Crime” in a necropolitical regime. Such a regime centers its gaze on the undesirables, those populations marked for a dispossession so complete as to result in direct (e.g., murder) or indirect (e.g., disease or starvation) death. Those conditions describe the day-to-day life of the colony, which, in Achille Mbembe’s words, is a “zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization.’” While the state is not a key player in “The Perfect

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91 Murder Most Modern: Detective Fiction and Japanese Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), p. 137.
Crime,” and its setting is not explicitly a colonial setting, civilization plays an important role as a counter to the threatening chaos of the space and those within it. Referring to a crude notion of progress in vague racial terms, this “civilization” is what Elizabeth aspires to with her elimination of Heda.

In the following section I will discuss how the depiction of this uncivilized space echoes that of the foreign female figures within it. The contamination within these women invites Elizabeth’s eugenic logic. While presenting her justification for murder, her ornate language—as well as the theatricality of the murder—gesture at eugenics more as a belief system than a science, despite what Elizabeth would have us believe.

**Legitimizing Murder**

The notion of “civilization” and its lack or maintenance are key concerns in the liminal space of “The Perfect Crime,” set in a village called Hassensai. This village, its criminal, and victim showcase the rampant disorder of an “uncivilized” place. In the space and the figures within it, disorder takes the shape of degeneracy and decay that threatens to spread. The narrative focuses on Elizabeth Laurel, the murderer, and her victim, the prostitute Heda, as the figures of this disorder. Degeneracy and decay first appear on the surfaces, not just of the bodies of the two foreign women, but also in the forces of nature that sweep across the village, creating a link between the women and the space. For Elizabeth, Heda embodies this disorder, as well as the threat of its spread through her fertility, necessitating drastic intervention. Yet despite justifying her intervention as the actions of a scientist, her reasoning is couched in ornate, religious language that undercuts her rational framing.

As this initial description indicates, the women who embody the degeneracy and decay of Hassensai are not from there. The analogous relationship between them and the space emphasizes the rootlessness of both the women and the village, as well as their participation in a colonial web of relations. For instance, Elizabeth is the daughter of an English anthropologist from Aberdeen, who came to the village in search of the fossils of primitive man. The connection to anthropology here brings to mind the relationship between science and colonialism. Upon her father’s death, Elizabeth is left with his final command for her not to leave the village. Later we learn that she comes from a corrupt family line similar to Heda’s from her mother’s side. Heda herself hails from Poland, where she was mistreated and traveled with a circus before joining Zaroff’s army as a prostitute, providing sexual services to his “barbarian” army. Both women demonstrate a displacement from their place of origin that indirectly speaks to colonial anxieties we have seen, albeit more blatantly, in Yumeno Kyûsaku’s work with regard to the movement of people outside limits circumscribed by nationality, gender, and class.

Hassensai itself seems equally rootless, standing apart from China by its remote southern location. That it borders Russia and India suggests its vulnerability to invasion. The text does not

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94 Nishitani Osamu develops this link through tracing the etymology and asymmetrical relationship of “humanitas” as the subject of knowledge and “anthropos” as the object of knowledge in Western languages. The discipline of anthropology denotes the study of what is Other to Western modernity, an otherness that emergence when the spatial distance of the non-West was also taken as temporal difference, thus marking the non-West as behind in a hierarchy of progress. See “Anthropos and Humanitas: Two Western Concepts of ‘Human Being’” trans. Trent Maxey in *Translation, Biopolitics, Colonial Difference*, eds. Naoki Sakai and Jon Solomon (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), pp. 259-274. Although Nishitani does not discuss the field of anthropology in Japan, the asymmetrical relationship between “anthropos” and “humanitas” was often replicated in the encounter between Japanese scholars and other Asian populations.
describe the villagers through their link to China, nor are the soldiers in Zaroff’s occupying force stereotypically Han Chinese. Indeed, there are few mentions of China or Japan, creating a sense that Hassensai stands apart as a no-man’s land whose very environment is unstable. Its descriptions allude to it as a place removed from conventional bounds of time and place: “….when the eastern wind blew it became an enchanted land just like Peach Blossom Spring.” Zaroff is awed that such a distant place has any relationship to modernity. “It’s a complete myth,” he exclaims upon being told of the late professor’s research into the remains of primitive man supposedly in the area. “How can it be that the essence of civilization be buried in such a remote (hekichi) place as this?”

A pervasive disorder where mentions of violence and death are numerous characterizes this space. Even before we discover all the details about the murder at the center of “The Perfect Crime,” the text gives us a glimpse of the violent history of the remote village. For instance, the Japanese Buddhist temple (nippondera) that stands as the only trace of Japanese colonial ambitions and the only reference to Japan in the text memorializes the massacre (by local bandits) of a Japanese millionaire who had come to examine some gold mines in the area. The temple is thus a testament to unsanctioned violence and lawlessness. This brief mention also underscores the anxieties surrounding the colonial venture. At the same time, the background, given as an aside, is so brief and unexpected as to seem jarring with respect to the plot. It is one of the instances of information given without context, compelling the readers to focus on the disorder that such an event emphasizes.

Although “The Perfect Crime,” as a work of detective fiction, develops under the assumption of taming disorder—of using the figure of the detective to make a crime understandable through a logical, rational method—in the end even rationality and science are compatible with violence and disorder. The narrative hints at this by presenting Hassensai as a site of scientific inquiry holding the research of the late Professor Laurel, who was pursuing the fossil specimens of a relative of Sinantropos Pekinensis (commonly referred to as Peking Man).

Scientific inquiry might appear to keep the lawless violence at bay; Elizabeth’s knowledge and services to the villagers as a doctor maintains good relations between them. But her eventual use


96 Ibid., p.11.

97 Like the Russian prostitute, the local bandit was another stock figure of the Manchurian imaginary. See for instance the hit song “Bazoku no uta” (Bandit Song, 1922) as Umehara Sadayasu discusses this figure in “‘Bazoku no uta no keifu” with respect to its changes over time in Taishū no tōjō: hiirō to dokusha no 20~30nen dai (Tokyo: Imupakuto shuppankai, 1998).

98 “Peking Man” was the common name given to some skeletal remains of homo erectus discovered in Zhoukoudian, near Beijing in beginning from the early 1920s. These findings made their way into the mainstream news, which notes the discovery being that of the oldest remains, therefore placing Asia as the cradle of humanity. For example the Asahi Shimbun has a short report from October 24, 1926, “Mr. A’s New Report: The Recent Discovery Near Peking of the World’s Oldest Human Remains” (Sekai saiko no ningen kaseki Pekintsukekin de hakken A shishin happyō) and another article in December 22, 1928, titled “Scientific Diggressions: Travel West With Two Teeth” (Ha ni hon de obei angya). The Yomiuri Shimbun for its part discussed the findings in the column “After Dinner Topic” (Shokugo wadai) titled “Adam and Eve were Chinese?” (Adamu to Ibu wa chugokujinka?) on July 31, 1930. A more detailed article was published in December 24 of that same year under the title “Trends of the Scientific World of 1930: The Discovery of New Fossils of the Origin of Humankind in China (1930nen kagakukai doko—shina ni okeru shin kaseki genshi junrui no hakken).
of this knowledge to commit murder demonstrates the ultimate rationalization of violence, as it is given a higher cause—the survival of mankind.

This “rational” violence is not limited to the bounds of the village. Zaroff’s army troops, comprising mainly “barbarian Miao from the west” (seiiki iban byōzoku), gesture to war as a subtle but ever present backdrop of sanctioned, rationalized violence. This violence contrasts with the brutal massacre of the Japanese millionaire. Zaroff’s soldiers are another gesture to savagery and barbarism, but theirs is a savagery that can be controlled and channeled productively for the conquering power (in this case, the Russians). The background the narrator provides of Zaroff’s accomplishments, as well as his education in science (rika) at Moscow University, suggests that his leadership disciplines the backwardness of his Miao soldiers. As the narrator states, before carefully tracing Zaroff’s resume, “Indeed, it was he who continued to lead these soldiers of poor quality into victories that were close to miraculous.” Zaroff’s formal training allows him to discipline the troop for its maximum efficiency.

Violence, whether irrational and unsanctioned or rational and sanctioned, is not limited to the human subjects in this landscape alone. In the descriptions, the isolated space of Hassensai itself takes shape as violent and unbounded. Reeking of death, it acts directly upon the people within it, but can just easily become an idyllic space. The mention of the fabled Peach Blossom Spring discussed earlier reinforces Hassensai as a mythical space outside time. Even though the war outside suggests a fraught political situation, the text does not mention who the enemy is or what the stakes are. True to its chimerical status, Hassensai can be both paradise and hell arbitrarily, depending on the direction of the wind. The contamination that it violently exudes, as well as its changeability, make this landscape threatening and echo the depiction of the two women:

….between the cluster of mountains of Osmanthus Lake and a tributary of the Xianjiang River, it was a poor village behind around ten or so marshes ....on cloudy days when western gales blew, the place had a slippery dampness and nausea-inducing gases assailed [the villagers] from the marshes with their lukewarm, almost fishy smell, completely enveloping the people from the village with a foul smell as if they’d been boiling crow meat.

When the western winds transform it into an abject landscape, its contamination spills invades the bodies of the villagers. Contamination here alludes to decomposition and death (through the senses of touch and smell), the damp and lukewarm quality of the air, and the fishy and foul crow-meat smell. The movement of the noxious gases towards the villagers is forceful; these

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99 Miao refers to an ethnic minority in China, which the Ching Dynasty had labeled as barbaric. These are often thought to be mountain dwelling and inhabit the Guizhou, Guangxi, Yunnan, Hunan and Sichuan provinces. “The Perfect Crime,” p.9.
100 Ibid., p.10.
101 Ibid., p. 12.
102 Julia Kristeva’s work on the abject gives insight into the implications of this description. In her formulation of the abject, she discusses a feeling of desire and repulsion that accompanies elements that threaten clean, discrete bodies. Abjection alerts us to a process whereby the self is constructed through the suppression and repression of an Other that is nonetheless necessary for the self’s emergence. Her privileged site of abjection is the mother, who is likewise suppressed and repressed by the child upon her entrance into the symbolic order, the realm of law and language. This abjection is yet another way that this space is aligned with the two women. See Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
gases “assail” (osotte kite) or attack the villagers and “completely envelop” (tsutsunde shimau) them, causing them nausea. However, the landscape can just as easily become paradise, as we see through the allusion to the legendary Peach Blossom Spring.

Elizabeth’s mansion stages a similar struggle within this chaotic space, where the landscape threatens to overpower the modern structure. The description of the building’s exterior recalls the death and contamination that assaulted the villagers, but markers of its modern accoutrements remain within, starting with the autopsy room that Professor Laurel had built, which rivals that of any other university. The structure’s decaying exterior contrasts with its elegant interior:

The foreign mansion at Hassensai that was chosen as the headquarters was covered by ivy and Venetian shutters and its paint was peeling off. On the outside it was made up of old-fashioned English gables, but on the inside, apart from the basement and the small house power plant, it had twelve rooms. Unstained by rain, the squared timber of evergreen oak in the ceiling stretched out like the skeleton of a great reptile. On all the doors of the rooms, various flowers stood in relief. Even now, this was an example of his refined, aristocratic taste that remained from Aberdeen, the professor’s birthplace.

On the one hand, it is hidden away both by the vegetation (the ivy) and its own architecture (the Venetian shutters) and exhibits decrepitude through its peeling paint. The image of the timber in the roof extending like the skeleton of a serpent similarly draws a connection—not only to the wilderness outside the building, but also to the specter of death that lurks in this space. The connection between that image and death is further underscored when Elizabeth announces that her father’s death was due to a snake bite. However, as a modern building it has a power plant and markers of civilization through cosmetic aspects that recall the Laurel family’s place of origin. Despite the connection to nature and death suggested by the image of the reptile’s bones, the wooden beam is “unstained by the rain” (ame nobiri no shimi hitotsu nai), suggesting some protection from the contamination and lawlessness that lurks outside.

Elizabeth’s description echoes that of the decaying house, hinting at her own contamination. Disabled in one leg and long past her prime, she walks with a cane, showing her infirm condition. She was at the age, the narrator tells us graphically, where her skin gave off the scent of an overripe fruit. This description recalls the cloying nature of the noxious gases in the landscape. The narrator makes the connection to death even more clear when he states that her face had the “ashy yellow coloring of a corpse” (shirakabane iro). When a member of Zaroff’s staff shakes hands with her, he claims that the temperature is like that of a fresh cadaver, stating, “Have you ever touched a dead body in which a bit of its temperature after death remains?” Thus, Elizabeth herself is also linked to death.

The pervasive allusions to death take on a necropolitical weight with relation to Zaroff’s “barbarian” army and the accompanying infrastructure supporting it. The war machinery relies on the dehumanization of those involved through instrumentalization and rationalization. The Miao soldiers were enlisted after natural disasters led to the loss of their lands; they are soldiers

\[103\text{ Oguri uses the term } \text{iijn yashiki (foreign mansion), a word that circulated during the Meiji period to denote the Western style buildings within the settlements where mostly Westerners lived. It distinguished those buildings from yōshiki or yōfu, which were more common during this period. These last two terms suggested the assimilation of Western architectural styles.}\]

\[104\text{ “The Perfect Crime,” p. 16.}\]

\[105\text{ Ibid., p. 14}\]
of “inferior quality” (resshitsu) but are “liberated” (kaihō) from their mediocrity by Zaroff’s leadership and incorporated into the war machinery—as disposable bodies. This structure does not only encompass food and weapons alone; women are likewise included as prostitutes for the soldiers. Zaroff refers to them as a “type of storehouse” (isshu no ryōshokukura) or “rations” (shokuryō). The prostitutes are dehumanized as objects to facilitate the soldiers’ war waging. In doing so, Zaroff reveals a rational approach to war where the soldiers’ needs are taken care of so they can continue to fight.

The murder victim, Heda, is one of these prostitutes who travel with the army. Her background and history echo the rampant disorder that characterizes Hassensai. Originally hailing from gypsies that settled in Poland, Heda had previously traveled with a circus before joining Zaroff’s army, where her sex work is viewed as another form of sustenance for the soldiers. Returning to Mbembe’s conceptualization, her body demonstrates “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” that defines the necropolitical. Elizabeth’s murder of Heda and her own suicide are, after all not an elimination of an individual but tantamount to the elimination of a whole family line. Like the Russian prostitutes that frequently appear in works set in Manchuria, Heda draws our attention to dislocation and exile. Hers is a liminal existence outside the bounds of nation, but deeply embedded within the mechanisms of war.

“The Perfect Crime” describes Heda as a grotesque figure, suffering from a mental handicap that is evident from one look (ikken shite wakaru seishin teikaku) and oozing womanliness to the point of it being repulsive (dokudokushii made ni onna de aru jikan shimideteiru). Here, the narrator gestures toward the contrast between her trade as a prostitute and her childlike demeanor, a contrast that gets underscored by the suggestion of alcoholism. That is, the pollution within her is something perceivable from the surface of her body. The use of dokudokushii (which also means “poisonous”) reminds us once more of Hassensai’s landscape and the description of Heda as repulsive and noxious. The term also foreshadows her death by poisoning, an expression of Elizabeth’s view of her as a threat. Zaroff himself is secretly afraid that she’s a “cancer” (gan) to the soldiers.

The abject landscape and women are not only contaminated but also exude this contamination. Such verbs as shimidete (“oozing”) used with Heda, hanatsu (“give off”) used with Elizabeth, and nurutto suru (“be slimy”) used to describe Hassensai further emphasize the danger of contamination. As such, it is not simply that these women and this space embody degeneration and decay; this degeneration is in danger of spreading beyond them. Such a threat rationalizes the need for isolation, seen in Elizabeth’s self-imposed exile in Hassensai and, eventually, her own suicide.

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106 But in her initial appearance, Heda stands out from the group of Chinese prostitutes with whom she is traveling. Therefore, it is not solely that she lies outside the national boundaries, but also that she lies at a liminal position with respect to race as well. Her depiction runs in line with sedimented discourses of degeneration that emerged around the time of the Russo-Japanese War (1904-1905). The mass media showed Russia as uncivilized in order to construct Japan as an ascendant power in the mold of the West. With the Russian Revolution of 1917, the images of Russian weakness vied with the sympathies and admiration from the side of Japanese leftists. Within both the displaced prostitute emerges as a particularly pathetic figure, which attests to the ever present interwar rivalries. See for example, Kuroshima Denji’s novella, A Flock of Swirling Crows in A Flock of Swirling Crows and Other Proletarian Writings, trans. Zeljko Cipris (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2005).


This invocation of Heda’s and Elizabeth’s lives as a threat allows Elizabeth to frame Heda’s murder and her own suicide as a form of self-preservation towards the species. She legitimizes her choice through her scientific inquiry in her final letter to Zaroff where she discloses her method and motive for the crime:

The belief (shinkō) that seeds that we cannot save for eternity must be destroyed is not solely my own, but burns like a flame in the hearts of scrupulous physicians. Crime, alcoholism, idleness, revolt, self inflicted poverty, malignant neuropathies, vices passed down by the generations of a family line-- one can by no means keep from crying out for [these subjects’] sterilization by surgical method. The last member of the Mueheretze line of the Polish Jukes had by coincidence appeared before me: it was Heda. At first I had no proactive impulse at all. When I had the chance to examine her I saw she had a detestable fecundity …. So I said nothing of this and attempted to offer sterilization but because of her ignorant fear, she blundered magnificently. I received a sacred revelation (shinseina keiji). For the sake of the society of the next generation an important decision must be made.109

Elizabeth places herself alongside other “scrupulous physicians” in her judgment of Heda’s corruption. Upon her examination of Heda, Elizabeth sees her as a threat to the human race.110 Her actions are then framed as both rational and ethical. By mentioning her examination and Heda’s reluctance to sterilization, Elizabeth supports her decision through her scientific expertise and conveys her decision as a logical choice. In her view, Heda is not just an example of degeneracy, but also carries within her the ability to pass it down through her fertility. Her evaluation of Heda parts from pathologizing the negative propensities of her family line and anchoring them in her genetic make up. Elizabeth thus sees the tendencies to commit crime and be idle, to name two examples, as the destiny of anyone biologically related to that family line. As a “scholar” (gakkyû) once more alluding to her rationality and impartiality, Elizabeth claims killing Heda was the best decision she could have made, not something to regret.

Although she presents her choice to murder Heda as reasoned, religious overtones abound in her account of her motivations. She refers to the survival of mankind as “saving seeds for eternity” and makes explicit that this is a “belief” (shinkō) that consumes doctors. The thought of murder comes as a “sacred revelation” (shinseina keiji) that continues to suggest the ineffable. According to Elizabeth, eugenics is the materialization of a sacred ideal (shinseina risō) above the authority of the law. In her account, conscientious physicians have a near-divine calling to better mankind.

The adorned excess that frames the elaborate murder also undercuts its claims to rationality. She views her crime as an art (geijutsu) in its perfection, one granted both by the purity of her motive and the ornamentation of her method. That is, Elizabeth is not content to poison Heda; her organ playing in fact triggers the mechanism that releases the poison. Further, Elizabeth chooses to play Gustave Mahler’s “Songs on the Death of Children.” The song, whose

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109 Ibid., pp. 84-85.
110 The tainted line Heda belongs to, the Jukes, are in fact a reference to a 1877 American study by a sociologist, Richard Dugdale titled, The Jukes: A Study in Crime, Pauperism, Disease and Heredity. The reference is significant because despite Dugdale’s emphasis on the environment, his study was quickly appropriated by eugenics proponents. In 1915, Arthurt H. Estabrook and Charles Davenport published The Jukes, which made Dugdale’s research serve the ends of an argument for eugenics. The name ‘Jukes’ in fact is a pseudonym for various other names.
doleful lyrics are quoted by the narrator at the beginning of the story, reflects a pathos that is missing from the rest of the story. Elizabeth, who describes the song as womanly (onnarashii), values not the sentimentalism but the perverse flourish of enabling her extermination of Heda, the last of her family line, through a melody mourning the loss of a child. Moreover, the type of poison she chooses for her murder also induces a hallucination, so it would appear that her victim was not alone, adding another layer of theatricality to the murder.

Elizabeth frames her own death with that same religious, adorned language. Confessing that she refused to marry due to her father’s last wishes, Elizabeth ends her letter declaring that there is one last experience she wishes to sample. In bombastic terms, she states she will blow out the “sacred light offered in the altar of virginity (shojo no saidan ni sasagerareta seishoku)[…] and tomorrow the flame of my heart….”111 She is euphemistically referring to losing her virginity to Zheng, the Hainan sentry, who is described as short and “monkey-like.”112 This description underscores his superiority in stereotypically racial terms.113 By choosing to sleep with him, Elizabeth brings home her own depravity. Her choice of partner makes her as undiscriminating as Heda; the only difference is that Elizabeth will commit suicide to prevent any consequences to her actions. Apart from carrying out her eugenic logic to its conclusion, her self-sacrifice fits under the religious framework that her language suggests.

Eugenics as a science in “The Perfect Crime” has a method and professes certainty; upon closer examination, however, this certainty has no basis. It relies on biology as destiny without verifiable proof. The story demonstrates the limits of eugenics as a science through Elizabeth’s letter about her murder and suicide in an adorned religious register. Her method also showcases a certain excessive ostentation that jars against the purportedly rational decision to eliminate elements that would threaten the human race.

The contamination of the women echoes the contamination present in Hassensai. The space invites scientific inquiry with the search for origins that brought Elizabeth’s father to the village, but even this project will remain unfinished. The doomed professor would die from the poison of the landscape through a snake bite. His failed quest and death demonstrate the pollution of this space, which the women share. Nevertheless, Hassensai is bordered by mountains and rivers. Although its pollution cannot be denied, it is geographically bounded and remote. The women can leave, which intensifies the threat they pose, one lodged in their very genes. Elizabeth attempts to forestall this threat with violence legitimized by her allegiance to science. But rather than be based on fact, the allegiance is to a science that functions as a belief system. In the end, her justification for murder is couched as more a matter of faith than reasoned judgment.

As such, it leaves the detective, Zaroff unable to apprehend her. After he reads her letter, he has a “feeling of falling that absorbed him” (uttori toshita tsuirakukan).114 The function of this logic that eventually breaks down gives Zaroff no firm rational position from which to judge the crime. He can only remain dazed. In the end, he surrenders the account to Elizabeth when he labels the letter “The Circumstances of Heda Mu betze’s Poisoning” (Hedda Myuresshe dokusatsu jiken tenmatsu), acquiescing to her argument that her letter is not a confession.

111 Ibid., p. 86.
112 Ibid., pp. 50-51. Hainan is the southernmost province of China, a small island in the Gulf of Tonkin. Through history it was viewed as remote. By 1927, it had become a hotbed of communist activity. The Japanese army would occupy it in 1939.
113 It is relevant here to note that part of the concerns of physicians following eugenics was how to make the “Japanese race” taller. See Jennifer Robertson, p. 195.
(kokuhaku sho), which would be labeled as such, but a report of a perfect, that is a legitimate, crime (kanzenna hanzai hōkoku sho). If legitimate, then it is not a crime at all.

If this conclusion demonstrates how science in the story is supplanted by fanaticism as a motivation, then what of it as the method of inquiry into the crime? In the following section I turn to the sleuth of “The Perfect Crime” the scientifically minded, Zaroff, who approaches the crime armed with esoteric knowledge and, as we saw, will end empty-handed.

**The Scientific Method, Esoterics, and Mysticism**

Heda’s death leaves Zaroff and his staff with a typical locked-room mystery on their hands. There is no evidence of an intruder found, nor was any visitor seen the night of her death by Zaroff’s vigilant staff, who spent the night occupied playing mahjong just outside her room. The only indication that Heda was accompanied on the night of her death was the strange laughter overhead by Zaroff’s staff. It falls upon Zaroff to discover the origin of the laughter and its relationship to Heda’s death.

The locked-room mystery form illustrates the scientific conceit of the story in its focus on showing that a seemingly impossible mystery has a logical solution. Through the spatiality of this enclosed room, the interplay between contamination and containment becomes literal. The detective must ascertain the means through which a foreign element violates an ostensibly sealed space. By explaining this intrusion, the detective creates his own metaphorical enclosure, laying out an explanation that accounts for all elements. This reliance on a painstaking investigation makes this form more than adequate for a honkaku or orthodox mystery.

The locked-room subgenre has a particular history with respect to Japanese detective fiction that shows one of the ways Japanese writers engaged with the genre’s foreign origins, modifying elements in it to engage domestic audiences. It is possible to read the locked-room form of “The Perfect Crime” as a rejection of the anxious wrangling with Western icons of detective fiction. That is, the story, rather than attempt to domesticate the many external elements and references, is content to leave them as foreign as part of the distancing effect it maintains. In this manner, Oguri subtly undercuts the story’s affiliation with the honkaku subgenre.

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116 In his study of how Japanese writers transformed the detective fiction genre in Japan, Mark Silver underscores the significance of the locked room mystery as a means through which Edogawa Rampo shows his ambivalence to the Western roots of the detective fiction genre. Rampo’s difficulty lay in the nature of Japanese houses and the relative lack of locks on the doors, but he worked through this challenge in “The Murder at D Hill,” (D-zaka no satsujin jiken, 1925) and *The Demon of Desert Isle* (Kōtō no oni, 1930). These two stories demonstrate the process through which the locked-room mystery became culturally hybridized to varying degrees of success. Silver argues that these indicate a discomfort with negotiating the West. That discomfort only increased during the 1930s. It is possible to read the locked-room element of “The Perfect Crime” as a rejection of such anxious wrangling with Western icons of detective fiction. See Purloined Letters: Cultural Borrowing and Japanese Crime Fiction 1868 - 1937, pp. 157-167.

117 The locked room mystery set in China was not without precedent. Ōba Takeshi (1904-1945), himself a resident of Manchuria, wrote the award winning locked room mystery “Murder in Room Thirteen” (Jūsan go shitsu no satsujin), published in New Youth in 1930. The story takes place in a Japanese operated hotel in Dalian and follows a foreign couple, the musician Fritz Mueller and a young Greek woman traveling with him, Maria Felster, who exhibits a multiple personality disorder. After she returns to herself after a long attack, she is found murdered in the room she had been staying and Fritz, who is discovered to suffer from neurasthenia becomes the primary suspect in
In “The Perfect Crime,” it is not just Heda’s dead body that gestures to an encroachment into this sealed room, referred to as a “dead end room” (fukuro heya). The room has only one door that leads to the outside. Beyond the door is a narrow, empty room akin to an airtight box and its own door leads to a corridor to another room where Zaroff’s staff spent the night playing mahjong. More than the body that they discover the following day, the laughter escapes the confines of the room and becomes an unnatural contaminating element needing explanation. Zaroff’s background in scientific study makes him well suited to the task. He is also aided by his experience in war, demonstrating the entanglement between war and science.\textsuperscript{118}

The difference between the chaotic death associated with Hassensai and the women from the necropolitical orientation of war lies in the rationality underlying the waging of war. Unlike the contaminating decay associated with the space and the two women, war in “The Perfect Crime” is framed as a rational endeavor, particularly with respect to the savage soldiers, which Zaroff domesticates through discipline and his scientific knowledge to the point of making them victorious in battle. His successful management of the army exhibits his rational mind. For Zaroff, Heda’s murder is a crime because it interferes with the rationality that structures this war waging. The crime must be solved to reveal that there is a rational explanation under the seemingly irrational circumstances of her death. In providing a logical solution, of resealing the locked room under an explanation that accounts for all the elements, order is at stake.\textsuperscript{119} The text invites the reader to follow the detective’s logic, even including sketches of the room and the victim’s position in it.

In addition to providing the sketches, the text alludes to the conventions of the locked-room mystery through Zaroff himself, even if this is to raise questions about their applicability. He differentiates the fiction of the locked room to “reality.” In fiction, the question is whether there was a violation of the room or a violation of rational principles. On the other hand, in reality, where the violation of rational principles is impossible, there is only the question of who entered the room and how:

First to awake you from your fervent belief (kyoshin lit. fanaticism), let’s get it out of the way that the idea of a murder in a perfectly locked room is a detective fiction writer’s ideal land (risōkyō glossed as utopia). Even a novel is not something that can be written with the absolute certainty of perfect conditions (kanzen na jōken). For one, how can [someone] appear and disappear like a ghost in a place resembling a steel box with no door? I think perhaps even in a million years we won’t account for that without resorting to mysterious phenomena (fushigina gensen). In short, even utopias (kūsō lit. fantasies) are impossible concoctions (kōsō)—how are they feasible in reality? This is what I want you to consider. Last night this was a perfectly locked room. All aspects certainly attest to that! The investigation from a while ago rendered [the existence] of a connecting secret

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the investigation carried out by the Japanese detective, Gō Hideo. This story is also considered to be a honkaku tantei shōsetsu. See Tsukasa Yokoi, ed., Ōba Taketoshi tantei shōsetsu sen, 2 vols (Tokyo: Ronpōsha, 2006).

\textsuperscript{118} Hiromi Mizuno’s Science for Empire: Scientific Nationalism in Modern Japan (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008) notes that the promotion and advancement of science increased during and after Japan’s involvement in WWI. Japan's participation in military conflicts provided the impetus for a variety of scientific advancements, not just in technology, but health and hygiene among other fields. The case of the battle against beri beri provides a compelling example, see Alexander R. Bay, Beri beri in Modern Japan: The Making of a National Disease (New York: University of Rochester Press, 2012).

\textsuperscript{119} Regarding Rampo’s work, Mark Driscoll argues that the distinction between interior and exterior grants a differentiation between crime and law, which is always precarious. See p. 220.
While Zaroff’s staff relies on the laughter to argue that there must have been an intruder, for him, this is mere “fanatism,” that is, a groundless conviction. The circumstances of a locked room are a writerly utopia, something for detective fiction writers to aspire to in their writing because of its seemingly impossibility. This situation invites explanations that push the bounds of rationality. In fiction, the supernatural could be an explanation, what Zaroff refers to as “mysterious phenomena,” but this places the solution in the sphere of the impossible. In reality—with its rational laws—the supernatural cannot be a valid explanation. With that in mind, as Zaroff emphasizes, if the room was truly completely sealed, then, objectively, there could not be an intruder. If there were, there would be no need for Zaroff and his scientific method, since in violating the laws of rationality the incident as a whole would be outside human comprehension.

Zaroff begins reluctant to accept the theory of the intruder on the basis that Heda’s laughter would not make sense. His staff’s claims to have heard someone else’s voice must be a mistake or a misperception. He emphasizes a gulf between “science,” here aligned with precision and accuracy, and “sorcery,” implicitly something undefined and irrational. In Zaroff’s view, to think of how the laughter comes about as a “psychological illusion” generated by the perpetrator—that is, how the perpetrator would make Heda laugh just before murdering her—lies outside the bounds of rationality:

As for the means of psychologically inducing the illusion of laughter (shinri teki ni warai no genkaku wo okisaseru hōhō)—that is already completely distant from the realm of accurate science (seikaku kagaku). In the end, it’s sorcery (fuyōjutsu, glossed as witchcraft). If that’s the case then Mr. Yanshin, even a genius like Swedenborg in focusing on such things eventually became mad.”

For Zaroff, the question of manipulating psychology is something far from the material, objective considerations that would make it a scientific inquiry. Through the positioning of an “accurate science” against more abstract means to manipulate mental states, Zaroff suggests that science has a material, definable basis that interrogations into matters of the mind do not. The mention of Emmanuel Swedenborg brings into relief the opening of science into mysticism, since for this controversial figure scientific inquiry eventually led to theological explorations, prompting many to question his own mental state. To mistake questions of the mind and how to influence it, Zaroff appears to argue, is like confusing issues of science with those of theology or mysticism. The two should always be kept apart. His remark is striking considering Elizabeth and her conflation of science with a religious belief in eugenics. This is an an instance of the “fanaticism” that he accuses his staff of having towards the theory of the intruder. More than the obscure reference to Swedenborg, the notion of “sorcery” joins the cluster of signs of the unknowable, which creates tension with the assumptions of rationality that underlie the subgenre of the locked-room mystery.

120 Ibid., pp. 34-35.
121 Ibid., p. 57.
122 The Swedish thinker Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) began his career as an inventor and scientist. Near the end of his life he focused on theological writing, becoming a Christian mystic.
It is not only a matter of the assumptions that readers have about the locked room mystery and its scientism. Zaroff is no ordinary sleuth; he is highly educated in and committed to the use of science. He clarifies his commitment to science when he begins his analysis of the case by refusing to ascribe the existence of the intruder to mental phenomena. As we saw, Zaroff does not view issues of mental states as aligned with science due to psychology’s implied lack of accuracy. On the other hand auditory phenomena can be verifiable, since it presumably has a concrete, perceivable source:

In essence, the sound that you witnessed with your ears (mimi de mita) constructed the conceptual image (gainen zō) of the intruder, but you all only perceived it auditorily. So I will extract the cancer (gan) of this incident by that very token. [This crime] suggests a unique method. Because the man’s existence is no more than an auditory phenomenon, it seems that there is still room to reinvestigate. Then after we have revised our analysis again, in the end we will have stripped the mask and completed the formula for the laughing voice (waraigoe no hōshiki).

Unlike the conceptual dead end that investigating psychology poses for Zaroff—that it was a phenomenon only occurring in Heda’s mind—to begin with the assumption that what the staff witnessed was an auditory phenomenon gives Zaroff a firm, concrete base from which to begin his investigation. Zaroff is not concerned with what he terms “the conceptual image” of the man, or the mental jump his staff makes from their perception of the laughter, but rather the actual sound of laughter as something discoverable. By beginning from that premise the investigation concerns what could have caused the sound to be heard. Zaroff displays his attachment to a scientific method by his voicing his optimism that he will find a “formula” for the laughter and reveal what the perpetrator has concealed. Through this view, Zaroff positions himself as an authority. He behaves as a physician of sorts, extracting the “cancer” of mistaken assumptions and illustrating the underlying logic at work.

However, Zaroff’s knowledge and his scientific approach does not give him or the reader easy solutions, because it is based on strange, intricate occurrences from his experience in war. Zaroff probes deeper into the mystery of the laughter—the possible material causes of it—but cannot find the “formula” that he seeks. Instead, the complicated, tangled background he offers in his pursuit of an explanation makes readers continuously lose the central riddle of the laughter’s origin. At the same time, his knowledge demonstrates the centrality of war to his scientific approach. Zaroff begins explaining the laughter as a symptom of the interaction between two toxins, one of which constricted Heda’s vocal cords, making the sound his staff had identified as a man’s chuckle. To come up with this explanation, Zaroff draws on two incidents he learned about through his time as a soldier. In one, it was the story of a White (anti-Bolshevik) Russian prisoner of war who accidentally poisoned his ventriloquist wife and a soldier who mistakenly ingested two poisons. In the battlefield Zaroff can hear about these incidents. In both, the perceived voice comes from the victim by means of the chemicals within. The chemicals give his theory a scientific foundation, which threatens to be lost amidst the details about the Russian prisoner and his jealousy over his wife’s affair and the different properties of the chemicals the doomed soldier mistakenly ingested. Zaroff’s meditation on how the senses might be deceived by the presence of chemicals forces the readers to follow his pained

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explanations via the detailed accounts he narrates. These labyrinthine explanations make it easy for readers to lose their bearings.

Not only do these vignettes cause the reader to lose sight of the central mystery, but they are joined by language that echoes Elizabeth’s in its turn to the irrational. Zaroff’s language at various moments opens up to the inscrutable. He speaks of aberrant mental states, not only of the delusions (sakkaku) of his staff, but also the victim’s own hallucinations (genkaku). Zaroff attributes the misidentification of the laughter as coming from a second person to the association his staff had of that low sound with the presence of a man. He calls it a mistaken assumption drawn from the “sorcery of sound” (onsei no yōjutsu). This language recalls Elizabeth’s own turn away from science to mysticism. Zaroff uses this language to dismiss the experiences of his staff and to reveal obscure, yet concrete, explainable phenomena at work (such as the chemicals). At the same time, while explainable, the complicated nature of these concrete elements at work (the chemicals and the details regarding the specific mix of these), call into question the reader’s participation. Despite the mystery being set up to invite the reader to join the process of its investigation and solution, the obscure nature of the elements in play undercuts this conceit. Significantly, while the theories Zaroff fashions from his experiences are compelling, these lack evidence just as much as his staff’s mistaken perceptions.

If these excessively detailed stories and Zaroff’s own turn to the language of the irrational are not sufficient to complicate the elucidation of the crime, we face another detour when Zaroff questions the sentry, Zheng, and similarly uses a rare, obscure phenomenon to dismiss his witness account. While Zheng claims he saw a man in the room through the window, which clashes with Zaroff’s previous rejection of the theory of the intruder, Zaroff eventually rejects Zheng’s testimony as well. Zaroff ends up demonstrating that what the sentry saw was an illusion no different from that of his staff. If what lay at the base of their misidentification was the association of the laughter with the mental image of a man, then in Zheng’s case, according to Zaroff, his unique physiology as a synesthete renders him vulnerable to the same. Zaroff refers to the misperception as a result of chromatic audition, an optical illusion caused by specific sounds. Zaroff references the research conducted by the scientist Gustav Fechner and describes the mechanisms through which Zheng’s misperception happened. 124

But truly rarely there are people who use that phenomenon to control these apparitions of color (shikikan no yūrei). This happens when there’s a quiet environment with no noise and acoustics with monotone sounds—these two conditions must match in this mysterious brain. Subsequently a sense of color from that intangible feeling (mukei jōcho) takes clear outward form. And those phantasms (genzō) as disordered masses and geometric shapes come to be reflected the retina. 125

Synesthesia, while being grounded in a rare physiology, is explainable. But it generates its own inexplicable outcome, illustrating the limits of Zaroff’s scientific method. According to Zaroff, outward perception in this situation has no stable basis; it emerges from an “intangible feeling.” Once more, he uses language that points to the supernatural and irrational—“apparitions” and “phantasms.” Thus, while this condition has a scientific basis that Zaroff suggests when he mentions Fechner, he conveys an arbitrary regime of sense perception that cannot supply

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124 Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801-1887) was a German physicist and psychologist was another figure who attempted to combine science with religion.

accuracy. Stripped away from its surroundings, now in an environment with little stimuli, the synesthetic mind sees specters and ultimately cannot be trusted. Zheng provides one final clue: Heda’s last words, “Kenemrik,” otherwise the detour into synesthesia yields a dead end.

We have seen how Zaroff’s skepticism about his staff’s experience has led him to draw upon his experiences, which he narrates with excess detail, eventually arriving at an obscure phenomenon that could likewise be in play in Heda’s murder. Similarly he rejects another witness account, speculating on an equally rare condition. Throughout his rejection of the simpler explanations (i.e., the presence of an intruder) and the elaboration of more complex ones (i.e., the presence of a mix of chemicals and sounds that generate a physiological response in certain individuals), Zaroff references figures that attempted to combine science with mysticism. In doing so, the text undercuts the polarity that he claims between science and mysticism. The whispered “Kenemrik” that Zheng hears functions in a similar manner, once more bringing non-rational elements into play. “Kenemrik” refers to a Polish legend about a witch whose crows cawed ill omens. The legend reinforces the connection with death that the story maintains throughout. This witch, too, is another grotesque figure: she is described as having a long nose, a narrow forehead, and swollen cheeks.

The inclusion of this account with the others also gives the text an excess of detail that complicates a linear trajectory and leaves Zaroff, his staff, and readers with more questions than answers, even contradicting Zaroff’s initial position of the distance between psychology and accurate science. Zaroff ends up speculating that a drugged Heda blurted out the name because of a resemblance between a gas mask and the face of the legendary witch. Zaroff’s speculation is in no way definitive and even goes against his earlier reluctance to address the manipulation of mental states in his inquiry. In her letter Elizabeth corrects his theory, narrating that it was upon seeing her own drunken reflection that Heda was compelled to blurt out the name. In doing so, she demonstrates that the initial question of how to manipulate the victim’s mental state is in fact relevant to the investigation. While the laughter is chemically induced, Heda’s blurted association cannot simply be a product of the gasses; it alludes to her personal background and native country. The folktale thus contributes to the numerous signs of irrationality—the supernatural and mysticism—that abound in the text and gestures to the inseparability of mental states and concrete, observable phenomena.

In the end, none of these accounts helps Zaroff resolve the mystery, although he comes close when he guesses that there is indeed some sort of hidden passageway to the room. Yet he remains with an excess of theories while lacking proof throughout “The Perfect Crime.” His theory regarding a poisoning comes the closest to accounting for the murder method, but the laughter seems to be the largest false trail, stymieing his efforts. Through pipes that connect the organ in the boiler room to the room where Heda sleeps, Elizabeth introduced a fatal combination of laughing gas, hydrogen cyanide, and ammonium, which yields laughter as spontaneous physical reaction shortly before her death. The laughter is wholly stripped from its natural context, from any indication of Heda’s mental state, becoming an opaque sign that cannot be deciphered through Zaroff’s convoluted theories.

His investigation ends unsuccessfully regardless of his painstaking exploration of the circumstances behind Heda’s death and those connected to her. The interaction of these chemicals with other minerals caused both Heda’s laughter and her death. The use of the gases as a weapon draws a connection between the murder and Hassensai, a connection that Elizabeth herself brings to the surface when she listens to Zaroff’s incomplete results and wonders if the
gases of the region have not affected his mental faculties, contaminating him with false reasoning and ungrounded suspicions.

**Conclusion**

“The Perfect Crime” intervenes into the discourses of science and eugenics through a nightmarish fantasy space and a locked-room mystery plot. These elements allow Oguri to display an oscillation between contamination and containment. From this interaction he pushes the limits of science, accuracy, and rationality to the extreme. In the end, this conceptual frame fractures, revealing a dark, chaotic death world. The honkaku or “orthodox” detective fiction form, meant to convey security and faith in the scientific method according to critics like Kōga Saburō, presents a world not so different from the maddened dreamscapes of the henkaku or unorthodox subgenre positioned as its opposite.

The story achieves the collapse of scientism through obscure references to myth and legend. The space of Hassensai, which embodies disorder and invites scientific inquiry to control that disorder, contributes to the tensions between the rational and irrational elements throughout the story. While not a colonial space per se, the conflicts that occur in the background, that of the villagers with occupying forces, and the mentions of war, make it function in a similar manner. Far from the exoticism and desire that we saw in Kyūsaku’s representations of the South Seas, Korea and Manchuria, Oguri emphasizes the peripheral space of Hassensai as an inhospitable place characterized by irrational violence. Unlike other representations of Southern China, which draw from its literary tradition and history, Hassensai is a virtual no-man’s land. While the former would be well-known among the Japanese readership of the 1930s, the latter is defamiliarized. As Matsuyama Shuntarō notes, the location is alienating to readers.126

Among the many references in “The Perfect Crime” are those to figures that themselves blur the line between science and mysticism. Apart from contributing to the feeling of alienation in the readers and showcasing the esoteric knowledge of the foreign protagonist, these figures suggest the precarious boundaries between the rational and the irrational. These boundaries are also between reason and madness, anticipating the ending. Their examples suggest that Elizabeth’s fanaticism, in being in the marginal bounds of reason, can easily be read as madness.

Elizabeth’s disclosure provides the climactic example of the transformation of reason to fanaticism, but throughout the text we also see the use of evocative language that describes irrational or abnormal mental states. In Zaroff’s investigation, misperceptions are often due to hallucinations and delusions. What is not completely in the realm of precise—that is, observable—science is not just a misperception, but is also referred to as sorcery and illusion. Thus, underneath the inquiry that drives the plot and makes the narrative fit superficially within the honkaku detective fiction subgenre lies a layer of the ineffable, which comes to the surface at the end with Elizabeth’s letter.

The letter makes the basis of the necropolitical regime clear. It is not simply that Heda is marked as an object to contribute to Zaroff’s war machine; being a threatening element through her contamination, she is marked for death—both her own and others’. This contamination is lodged in the very surface of her body. What is significant is not that it makes her inferior and will eventually lead to her death, but instead, that this bodily inferiority—a propensity for vice and criminality encoded in her very cells—can be passed down and spread throughout society. Despite cloaking her actions in rationality, what Elizabeth reveals is closer to a fervent belief

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126 “Kyozōteki hakushinsei he no henshitsu” in Oguri Mushitarō, p. 220.
than reasoned science. If, following Zaroff, we see science through its accurate and observable manifestations, then Elizabeth’s reasoning seems to exceed those bounds, depicting her as acting for the sake of a vague future and for humanity itself. Even her invocation of “society” rings hollow. What society is Elizabeth protecting in the remote areas of Hassensai? If Heda is a mere prostitute traveling with an army of soldiers considered savages, why should Elizabeth be so concerned about Heda’s ability to pass down her genes? These questions suggest that far from accurate science, Elizabeth’s motivation comes from eugenics as a belief system. The text gestures to this religious dimension through the theatricality with which she imbues her murder and the ornate language she uses to narrate it.

In his analysis of “The Perfect Crime,” Nozaki Rokusuke extends the metaphor of the locked room, and by extension the remote contained space of Hassensai, as representative of the closed intellectual world of the Greater Japanese Empire.¹²⁷ He finds in the story’s treatment of racial hierarchies an “anti humanism” that linked races identified as inferior to discourses of exclusion based on race and health. According to Nozaki, this theme is hidden in the story under the “poison flower of the fantasies [belonging to] a playful man absconded in his study.”¹²⁸ The inclusion of other works and narratives obscure the story’s racist ideology. The racial hierarchies, however, are far from obscured, even if their reach is not fully demonstrated until the end. Racial hierarchies within eugenics discourse are positioned as ostensibly stable, but what this fixation with taxonomies and hierarchies suggests is precisely the contrary—a space with porous boundaries, mixing, and chaos that must be kept at bay through violence.

¹²⁸ Ibid.
Chapter Three
Genre and the Colonial Writer:
Kim Nae-Seong’s “The Oval Mirror” and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder”

Introduction

The murders and subsequent investigation of Kim Nae-Seong’s (1909-1957) “The Oval Mirror” (Daenkei no kagami) and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” (Tantei shōsetsuka no satsujin) are set in colonial Korea. However, in contrast to both Yumeno Kyūsaku’s colonial landscapes and Oguri Mushitarō’s visions of the periphery, colonial Korea’s otherness does not dominate in the stories. Instead of the exoticism and excess characterizing the representations of the colonies in Kyūsaku and Oguri’s work, Kim’s representation of Korea relies on its similarity with the urban space his Japanese readership would know, often alongside familiar conventions of detective fiction. Although born and raised in Korea, Kim no doubt had more familiarity with Korea than Kyūsaku or Oguri would have had with the territories they wrote about; Kim’s choice was also a strategic consideration given his identity as a colonial author writing in Japanese.

His stories de-emphasize the colonial to conversely emphasize their belonging to the Japanese detective fiction genre. His use of colonial space thus suggests that conventions of genre can invite particular readings of his work. These readings would focus on the intersections of its intrinsic qualities with the expectations of genre rather than extrinsic considerations of his background. This is not to say that other detective fiction writers and critics did not notice Kim’s background, simply that his background was secondary to the evaluation of his work as detective fiction.

The stories’ focus on the murder as a puzzle to solve under a self-reflexive structure invites the use of genre as an interpretive framework. Like “The Perfect Crime,” “The Oval Mirror” and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” seem to follow the deductive process more commonly associated with the honkaku or orthodox detective fiction subgenre.

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129 I am using this term as a shorthand to refer to Kim’s background, not to suggest that he would have identified himself in that manner.
130 In the 1930s, Kim Nae-Seong, who was studying abroad at Waseda University, became involved with several writers who participated in the detective fiction magazine, Profile (Purofurū). He published two stories in that magazine during 1935, “The Oval Mirror” in March and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” (Tantei shōsetsuka no satsujin) in December. Kim also published another short story in the magazine Modern Japan (Modan Nihon) “A Strange Tale of a Love Letter Exchange” (Kidan kobumi ōrai), which won a prize in 1935. According to Nakajima Kawatarō, Kim, along with fellow newcomer Nishijima Ryō, drew the most attention out of all the new writers for the magazine. See Nihon suiri shōsetsu vol 1, pp. 52-53. Regardless, Kim did not receive much fame in Japan and returned to his native Korea where he went on to write several works of detective fiction in Korean and translate both Japanese and Western (primarily British and American) detective fiction. His two works published in Profile, which he translated to Korean in 1937 upon his return, add to the conception of Japanese modernity that supplements the West/Japan dyad. It does so by gesturing to what Karen Thornber calls the “literary contact nebulae” between Japan and its territories, the dissemination and translation of Japanese literature among colonial elites. Karen Thornber, Empire of Texts in Motion: Chinese, Korean, and Taiwanese Transculturations of Japanese Literature (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 2. She states, “Among the most vibrant subsets or
critical work, his focus is entirely on honkaku detective fiction. That is, in contrast to Kyûsaku’s work—which often lacks a strict crime or its investigation—the focus of Kim’s (and Oguri’s) narratives lies on the murders and the intricate investigations that solve them. Both stories are highly self-referential, thematizing the narration of a crime. The aspect of his texts constitutes another strategy to engage a metropolitan audience—specifically one well versed in the detective fiction genre. After all, “The Oval Mirror” and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” were published when the genre had saturated the market. During this time, too, writers and critics were becoming increasingly involved in debates over its limits.

While incorporating conventions of detective fiction, such as tailing and secret identities, the stories veer off in their exploration of crime and its investigation as processes involving creativity and chance. In the end, there is no stable point of reference for the investigation of the crimes outside the texts themselves. While conveying the fact of the crimes in detailed reports and reproductions of ostensibly empirical materials, these documents also have gaps and omissions requiring close scrutiny. The characters that will become amateur detectives are also implicated in these incidents from the beginning, creating an ever-shifting, unstable terrain that cannot easily fit under the positivistic paradigm associated with honkaku detective fiction. Although Kim’s stories make the presentation of a crime in seemingly objective detail the core of the narrative—demonstrating a desire to break free from the subjective trappings of narrative—this endeavor fails. The texts leave readers with an excess of clues that give them an unwieldy structure. Instead of the tight plot of an analytic detective story where the evidence and the investigation proceed linearly to converge on the culprit and the solution to the crime, Kim’s detective fiction meanders. The stories incorporate developments that, while related to the crime, go beyond it and push the bounds of plausibility. As they do so, these accidents or coincidences themselves gesture to other works of detective fiction. The stories flaunt their own status as fictional texts, serving as playful metafictions that show the author’s knowledge of the detective fiction genre, and his belonging to it.

Both “The Oval Mirror” and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” depict the fallibility of crime narratives and unveil the structure of classic detective fiction. This structure, as Tzvetan Todorov has noted, usually consists of two stories, the story of the crime and that of its investigation. The first story—the crime itself—is absent at the beginning; we arrive at it through the second. In Todorov’s appraisal, the second story appears transparent, wholly serving the first. In this context, “readerly contact” refers to reading creative texts (texts with aesthetic ambitions, imaginative writing) from cultures/nations in asymmetrical power relations with one’s own; “writerly contact” to interactions among creative writers from conflicting societies; “textual contact” to transculturating creative text in this environment (appropriating genres, styles, and themes as well as transculturating individual literary works via the related and at time concomitant strategies of interpreting, adapting, translating; and intertextualising); and “linguistic contact” to engaging with the language of the society oppressing or oppressed by one’s own.”

131 Honkaku refers to the view of the genre as based on a crime and its investigation propagated by Kôga Saburô in his “Discourse of Detective Fiction” (Tantei shôsetsu kôwa), which appeared in Profile’s pages from 1935 to 1936 and put him at odds with the majority of his contemporaries. I have discussed Oguri Mushitarô’s “The Perfect Crime” (Kanzen hanzai, 1933) in the previous chapter.

hardly transparent. Even the appearance of objectivity is illusive. That the characters at the center of the crimes are artists, writers, and actors reemphasizes the themes of artifice and imagination over cold rationality. As creative producers, these characters either construct their own stories or perform within them in ways that misdirect and complicate the accounts of the crimes. Ultimately, what the structure of Kim’s work and its outré elements propose is not a rejection of deduction, but a view of it as a creative process intertwined by accident and chance.

Although Kim’s stories are set in Korea, place does not figure prominently in the stories, which are largely concerned with crime and deduction as a form of narrative. The names of the characters and a few scattered mentions of landmarks are the only indicators of its colonial setting. The engagement within genre conventions, as well as the specific placement of Korea within colonial discourse, contributes to the occlusion of difference in his texts. “The Oval Mirror” and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” show how Kim engages with the genre in its Japanese context. His contributions to detective fiction circles predate an increased interest in writing by colonial subjects, seen in the appearance of works by writers from the outer territories to various magazines, as well as the nomination of colonial writers for such prestigious awards as the Akutagawa Literary Prize in the late 1930s. However, despite Kim seeming an oddity in detective fiction circles at the time, he was defined as a writer of detective fiction first. That is, the affiliations with genre and the work within genre conventions integrated Kim’s stories into the Japanese detective fiction landscape. In adopting the veneer of “orthodox” or honkaku detective fiction with its focus on crime and its investigation, the work invites the readers to engage with the texts as self-aware representatives of the genre.

133 Unlike territories such as Manchuria, Taiwan, and the South Seas, Korea was thought of as relatively close to the Japanese mainland, which is highlighted by the oft-repeated slogan naisen ittai (Japan and Korea as one body) and thus, presented with less exoticism than the other territories. We already saw this in Yumeno Kyōsaku’s “Bakudan Taikiki,” but it is present in early stories, for instance Yoneda Kakō, one of the pen names of Kawabata Masao (1905-1982), whose “Sheep and Domesticated Sheep” (Hitsuji to kai hitsuji) was published in 1926 in the detective fiction coterie magazine, Arts of Investigation (Tantei Bungei). In New Youth magazine Kataoka Teppei’s 1926, “The Ghost Who Speaks” (Mono iu), also takes place in Korea. In these fictions, Korea appears as a chihō a peripheral space not unlike those of the country within the mainland. Thus, as Nayoung Aimee Kwon notes: “chihō seems to assimilate the colonies into a spatial continuum with the metropole, linking the center of empire to its peripheral spaces in a harmonious community. On the other, it relegates the colonies to a position of difference, of perpetual provincialism, the peripheral status in the empire is always relative to and secondary to the standards set in the metropolitan center.” See “Translated Encounters and Empire: Colonial Korea and the Literature of Exile” (Ph.D Dissertation, UCLA, 2007), p. 186.

134 Thornber, p. 13. That contact between Japanese and Korean writers was not from one direction does not mean that there were not unequal power relations For instance, the language proficiency exhibited by Korean writers of works in Japanese had much to do with the colonial government’s enforcement of Japanese language over Korean as part of their policies for assimilation. As Thornber notes, by the end of the colonial period one-quarter of the Korean population and nearly all of the Korean elite knew Japanese.

135 Faye Yuan Kleeman, Under an Imperial Sun, pp. 160-227. Kwon looks at the interest in writings from colonial subjects, and Koreana in general as part of the “Korean Boom” in the late thirties as examples of colonial kitsch. See Kwon, pp. 103-174.

136 Ikeda Hiroshi, p. 32.

137 Kawamura Minato, Umaretara soko ga furusato: zainichi chosennin bungakuron (Tokyo: Heibonsha, 1999), p. 196. Outside of the sphere of detective fiction, colonial writers participated the most in proletarian fiction. As points out, the literature of Korean writers residing in Japan has commonly be seen as lacking elements of entertainment (enta-teimmento teki yōso), taking up the I-novel and style of Shiga Naoya as a golden rule (kinka gyokujō). Although Kawamura does not specify what he means by “elements of entertainment,” his mention of Korean writers engaging with the model of Shiga Naoya suggests their interest in an introspective confessional style. He goes into further detail. He notes that unlike resident Chinese writers, two of whom have won the Naoki Sanjūgo prize for
If in the case of Japanese detective fiction writers, the anxieties of influence were “about standing up to a judgmental Western gaze” that was in the end imaginary, colonial subjects had to contend with a judgmental imperial gaze that was very real. We see it in the evaluations that Kim’s work was given. A column in the detective fiction coterie magazine Profile titled “Joint Evaluation of Works” (Sōsaku no gōhyō, 1935) reveals how Kim’s work was critiqued and how he was positioned with respect to the Japanese detective fiction community. This exchange also shows that while Kim’s identity was not commonly discussed in the criticism his work received in Profile, it was not completely ignored either. Upon broaching Kim’s work, one of the reviewers speaks with skepticism about his identity as Korean (hontō ni chōsen no hito desu ka). He considers Kim’s skillful writing in the genre (anna rippana tantei shōsetsu ga kakeru) with respect to Kim as a foreigner (gaikoku no hito) and compares him to other new Japanese writers (nihon no shinjin) who lack daring. The reviewer’s interlocutor corrects him, stating that Korea is not a foreign country. The first reviewer concedes his mistake, responding “That is true, well I stand corrected. Korea is a Japan with a different spoken and written language” (sō desu ne, ja teisei shimasu, kotoba ya moji no chigau nihon desu ne, chōsen wa). From this brief exchange, we can see some of the tensions that Kim’s work faced with respect to the colonial situation that framed his writing. Despite the rhetoric of assimilation that was common—to the point that it reemerges at the end of the conversation—a Korean writer writing in Japanese was a signifier of difference. This difference was something to be both marveled at, as well as something threatening. According to one of these critics, that someone like Kim writes such a “splendid” work of detective fiction should spur Japanese writers into action, into more boldness in the service of genre.

The competition that was part of the genre, seen for example through the popular literature, the work of resident Korean writers who have been identified as such has been predominantly in the sphere of highbrow literature (However, many zainichi writers do not claim this identity). In his analysis of Reira’s (Chon Jun Mun) 1979 historical novel, The Wailing of Mountains and Rivers (Sanga aigō), Kawamura argues that high brow fiction tends to rely on the individuality of the writer and attempts to disavow as much as possible historical consciousness, but this tends to be a more fraught proposition in the hands of a minority writer. For instance, in her dissertation, Kwon looks at the celebrated Kim Saryang who was nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for highbrow literature in 1940 and his reception among metropolitan critics. Kwon specifically examines how these critics read Kim’s work as allegorical of Korea’s political situation suggesting Kawamura’s argument and further deepening it. As she writes, “If the minor text cannot but be read as national allegory as the Akutagawa Prize judges and the ‘first world’ critic seem to argue, it is because these texts cannot be read in this way in the metropolitan critical encounter,” pp. 43, 31-81. That Kim Nae-Seong’s work is firmly planted within genre precludes these kinds of readings, but only in the content of the text. As the brief discussion above suggests, Kim’s minority status is not ignored, rather it is mentioned as a curiosity that is also allusive to political tensions.

We may recall Deleuze and Guattari’s Kafka: Towards a Minor Literature, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1986) where they mention that for a minor literature—a literature written by a minority in a major language, “everything in them is political…every individual matter is immediately plugged into the political.” This emergence of politics is what we are seeing with how Kim is being read, where his work cannot but be considered alongside the efforts to assimilate Korea.

Kawamura’s analysis of the exchange unearths a certain parallelism between the framework of Japanese detective fiction with its suspicions of the stranger, an outsider which invades an enclosed space, and the non-Japanese writer. In doing so, he reveals the ambivalent position of the colonial writer. In Kawamura’s view the figure of the resident Korea joins the ranks of suspicious characters like the criminal and even the detective himself who come from unrecognizable, distant worlds (mishiranu tōi sekai) inhabiting boundary spaces:
regular contests, emerges here underwritten by colonial politics. However, despite the mention of Kim as a Korean writer, the genre and its renewal preoccupy the reviewers in the final instance.

Perhaps a strategy to allay reviewers’ unease, apart from an adherence to the conventions of genre, was through the invocation of recognized models within the genre. In a section titled “Words from New Writers” (Shinjin no kotoba) in Profile, Kim stressed his admiration for Edogawa Rampo.\(^{142}\) He writes, “I do not remember reading a detective fiction story twice, but I have. These were the early works of Edogawa Rampo. Could I write works like that? If I could, I would like to. But if I cannot?”\(^ {143}\) Kim makes a distinction with the early works of Rampo, which hew more closely to the ratiocinative paradigm. Rampo was clearly influential to Kim, who upon his return to Korea, adapted his work and set it in Seoul.\(^ {144}\)

Kim discusses his view of the genre in more detail in the 1936 essay “The Essential Requirements of Detective Fiction” (Tantei shōsetsu no honshisuteki na yōken), published in the magazine Detection Monthly (Tantei gekkan).\(^ {145}\) In his essay, his intervention into debates on the genre, Kim argues that even detective fiction that focuses on a crime should include elements outside the simply mundane. He divides the “requirements” (yōken) of detective fiction into “formal” (keishikiteki) and “essential” (jisshisuteki) requirements. By “form” Kim refers to the plot conventions of detective fiction, its inclusion of a riddle that is solved through a deductive method. At the base of these conventions, however, are the essential requirements—namely that the work “oppose[s]” (hankō) the banal and instead anchors itself in the extraordinary. According to Kim, conventions are simply the most convenient means for the genre to achieve its hold on readers. Certainly, “The Oval Mirror” and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” veer from normalcy or the reality within the text through their appeals to the readers. The manner in which the mysteries unravel—drawing upon coincidences, memories, and bizarre events—push the bounds of what is considered normal. At the same time, the stories seem to superficially align with the conventions and elements of the genre.

Kim argues that there has been too much focus on the formal requirements of the genre to the detriment of the essential elements of the extraordinary. The honkaku subgenre of detective fiction suffers the most in his view. Kim distinguishes detective fiction from literary forms such

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\(^{142}\) "Kakeru ka?" Profile, November 1936, p. 25.

\(^{143}\) Ibid.

\(^{144}\) Ikeda, p. 32.

as haiku or tanka, which have a “strict” (genkaku) form. For him, it’s enough that a given work exposes the strangeness of a criminal’s personal motives. As he elaborates, it is sufficient for a story to exhibit the idiosyncrasies of the criminal’s plot more than the idiosyncrasy of the “deduction” (suiri).

Kim assigns here more value to the criminal’s machinations than the detective’s investigation of the crime. There is a central crime in both stories, but it is only a point of departure for the discovery of more convoluted actions by the criminal. The process of discovery, what Kim refers to as deduction, is less significant in the text than the twists and turns the criminal’s actions take. Accordingly, Kim’s stories spend more time revealing the outlandish methods of the crime than depicting the rational investigation that leads to its solution. This distinction is important because it distances the stories from the realism implied by the focus on investigation. Instead, it further anchors his works as fiction. The generic affiliation of the stories then emerges from the reader’s recognition of the conventions and tropes deployed.

Domesticating the Unfamiliar: Pyongyang’s Urban Space and Genre in “The Oval Mirror”

Kim debuted in Profile with the story “The Oval Mirror,” which was warmly received by the editors. In the afterword column “Tidings from Ginkakuji” (Ginkakuji tayori), Satō Genba writes on the editorial board’s behalf about Kim. “The Oval Mirror,” he states, has been given the magazine’s seal of approval and Kim himself is recognized as an outstanding talent (itsuzai) among the new writers that the magazine recommends. The story was mentioned again in the next month’s afterword and compared with the work of another writer, Katō Hisaaki, with both works being judged as magnificent (dōtō). In the July issue, the story was also reviewed positively. Critics praised its “striking form” (keishi no kibatsusa) which is “without precedent” (ruirei) and noted their high expectations of Kim’s future output.146 When speaking of its form, the critics were probably referring to the way the text involves readers in the investigation of the mystery by using a magazine’s contest as a self-reflexive frame. This contest invites readers to find a solution to a crime committed in the past. While “The Oval Mirror” is unconventional in this self-reflexivity, it depicts the colonial space of Pyongyang within familiar trappings to a metropolitan audience. Kim does not meditate on what his metropolitan audience would see as Pyongyang’s otherness, but presents it as first and foremost an urban site of mystery. The signifiers of urban space play a significant role in the process the main character uses to solve the crime.

The character’s trajectory through urban space functions as the catalyst for him to piece together the way the crime occurred. Detective fiction usually depicts crime as seemingly irrational and subject to the detective’s intervention to give it intelligibility. However, “The Oval Mirror” elides rationality and irrationality in favor of the contingent process enabled by the dynamic urban landscape. Through navigating this space, the details of the murder become clear to the amateur detective. Contingency in this context is a creative, speculative process that is nonetheless subject to certain limitations provided by the crime itself. While in all detective fiction intuition plays an important role, particularly an intuition based on metonymic thinking—which organizes the clues to an ordered narrative—what we see in “The Oval Mirror” is closer to what has been called metaphorical thinking.147 The character who takes on the amateur detective role, Ri Kōei, reaches his conclusions through experiencing random events in the city that

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146 “Profile of Profile: Nisaku no” Profile, April 1935, pp. 115-116.
remind him of an aspect of the crime. Instead of opening up to rational laws, metaphorical thinking maintains the focus of the narrative on the world of the story. The main interpretive framework comes from the play of resemblances enabled by the character’s engagement with urban space, which calls up memories. In the final instance, the explanation does not make an appeal to an objective reality outside the narrative.

This enclosure within the fictional world of the narrative is where the story’s self-reflexivity lies. “The Oval Mirror,” in fact, begins by providing a report of the crime in the form of a call for reader submissions for the solution of the mystery that occurred five years before. The ad explicitly asks for readers’ contributions in reconstructing the narrative of the crime: “as armchair detectives (shijô tantei, lit. paper detectives), when we reconsider this incident, should we truly consign it to oblivion as one mystery in the world?” The final lines of the advertisement also address readers directly: “we await with hope submissions from the gentlemen detectives (tantei shoshi) and the general public.” In doing so, the ad calls attention to the reader’s position in the story, the way the reader follows the detective in solving the crime. In this particular instance, the ad is inviting the readers to solve the “real” crime as if it were a fictional one complete with a prize for the winning entry.

Although the story begins with a gesture towards the reader, it develops more conventionally in the later parts, and the frame becomes integrated into the story itself. According to the documents that readers are provided with in the first section, the victim of “The Oval Mirror” was an actress, Tô Ei, wife of the writer, Mô Kentetsu. Tô Ei was found strangled in her room. The second section follows the accused poet and friend of the couple, Ri Kôei, who upon reading of the contest wanders through Pyongyang devising his own narrative of the crime where the husband emerges as the killer. He eventually concludes that it was Mô who killed his own wife, but the story does not end there. As he celebrates, the breaking of a mirror jogs Ri’s memory. The final section offers a twist—not only did Mô kill his wife, but it is he, under the guise of the editor of the magazine, who initiated the contest. The self-reflexive opening reveals itself as more than a frame—as part of the story.

The competition that frames “The Oval Mirror” was initiated by a detective fiction magazine in Seoul, Person of Mystery (Kaijin) to its readers. This detail reminds readers that we are encountering this account in a detective fiction magazine ourselves. The unconventionality of the setting—that a magazine published in Seoul narrates events that occurred in Pyongyang—becomes obscured by this implicitly self-reflexive gesture. The colonial space of Korea appears as extensions of the metropolitan space where detective fiction magazines circulate. No mention is made for its audience differing in any manner from an audience in Tokyo.

The content of the account would also seem familiar to metropolitan readers of detective fiction magazines. Notices of real crimes with speculation over perpetrator, methods, and motives frequently appeared in the pages of these and other general interest magazines. These real-life accounts of crimes were treated as fiction, as fodder for the type of active engagement that readers have with mysteries, where they try to anticipate the narrative the detective will

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149 While during the 1920s and early 1930s the temporary easing of colonial repression lead to an increase in Korean journals, detective fiction was by no means as popular as it was in Japan at the time. See Lee, Kenji, “1930nen-dai chôsen bundan: Naze Kim Na Seong hitori ga chôsen tantei shôsetsu wo taigen shita ka,” Kansei Gakuin Daigaku Sentan Shakai Kenkyû Sho Kiyô, vol. 9, (March 2013).
150 See for example New Youth, which includes a roundtable of detective fiction enthusiasts, Edogawa Rampo among them speculating on the mysterious death of a Japanese diplomat in China.
construct with the available clues. By enlisting the participation of their readership in solving a murder as part of a contest, “The Oval Mirror” gestures to its own participation within the context of a detective fiction magazine, Profile itself. This creates a type of self-referentiality or *mise en abyme* that anchors the text within the sphere of detective fiction. The story is explicitly concerned with the narrative of the crime; it begins by asking for its readers to help in constructing it, therefore interpellating them as participants. However, in the final instance, the discovery of the “right” story is not based on concrete clues. Instead, it relies on recollections that are randomly triggered by the experiences of the protagonist in Pyongyang’s urban space. The story maintains itself within the circumscribed bounds of the text.

That “The Oval Mirror” should rely on this method does not become clear until the second section. The first section encourages a metonymic approach to solving the mystery through the detailed presentation of evidence, but the evidence itself will eventually be called into question when Mô’s identity as both the murderer and the editor is disclosed. The advertisement provides a description of the setting and the witness accounts of the incident by the maids, Kei Kyoku and her mother, Sei Yô. It also includes the accounts of both, the husband to the ill-fated Tô Ei, Mô, and Tô Ei’s lover, Ri Kôei. This information is included in a stark, almost bullet point, form. Along with a listing of all involved and their testimonies of the fateful night, the magazine provides a sketch of the house. As Michael Cook states, “The sketch plan has two broad functions: it is often introduced early in a story as a guide to the layout of the crime scene…this device may be seen as a way of reinforcing the idea of enclosure by concentrating attention on the scene of the crime.”

The plain language with which the magazine presents the facts of the case grants the text the semblance of realism, forcing the reader to focus on the details provided as pieces of a puzzle that yield a coherent narrative. It is this appeal to realism that the narrative will later question when it reveals that what has been offered to the readers comes from the murderer’s perspective.

The second section, “Ri Kôei’s Submission,” leaves the enclosed space of the advertisement and Mô’s house in favor of the streets of Pyongyang, turning into a more conventional narrative that follows the protagonist as a detective through the urban landscape. His journey in fact leads to his breakthrough. Out in the anonymous city space, after going to a café and later ambling on the banks of the Taedong River, Ri has an epiphany that leads him to the murderer’s method. The description of both Ri (as he wanders consumed by his doubts) and the dark and cold city space would not be out of place in any detective story set in Tokyo, save for the brief reminder of Pyongyang as a node of empire:

Ri Kôei who dashed out of his Pyongyang apartment to get some fresh air, felt numbed by his mind and so pushed open the door of the Shangri-La Café. When he came out, it was around the time that the countless lamps flickered opaquely in the smoke. He stumbled. He ambled in confusion while the cars rushed, shouting…for the first time he realized he was walking on a gently sloping tree-lined street leading to the direction of Botandai Hill. After pulling the collar of his coat up, he took a cigarette out of his pocket and lit it. October in the north of Korea was cold. Under the moonlight while sounding its shrill whistle, the express to Mukden crossed a plain field to the north. Ri Kôei, who was gazing dimly at the silvery waves of Taedong River flowing at his feet, leaned against the banister of Òtsumitsudai Hill, trembling in spite of himself.152

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152 Ibid., p. 43.
The landmarks Botandai Hill and Ostumitsudai Hill would have been known to the Japanese populace through media such as newspapers and tour guides. Although these are historical sites in Pyongyang, the narrative does not describe them or dwell on their difference. While the mention of the weather similarly distinguishes the geographic area of northern Korea, it does not present this as anything other than a regional variation. In including the train heading to Mukden (Shenyang), the story depicts Korea as another region of empire. The train emphasizes the connection between Korea and Manchuria, and implicitly to Japan, the site of the story’s consumption. In this passage, the story brings to the fore the urban markers of the city, the smoke-filled café, the rushing cars, and the train as alienating on an individual level. Ri interacts with no one while at the same time gesturing to a larger web of empire.

Near the end of the story another brief mention reminds readers of the specificities of the story’s Korean setting without dwelling on cultural differences. This time Ri is accompanied by police at an upscale Korean restaurant celebrating his solving the case. Kim presents the scene without much detail: “The sound of the janggu [Korean hourglass drum], the melody of the kayagumu [Korean zither-like instrument], the kisaeng performing the sword dance.” The scene could invite exoticism, but the music from the Korean instruments is rendered nondescript by the plain terms, “sound” (oto) and “melody” (senritsu). Even the geisha-like figure of the entertainer or kisaeng, a figure often sensationalized, is simply performing a “sword dance” (kenbu), which is also left without description. Although these brief mentions add local color to the narrative, the focus on the scene is rather the epiphany that the activity around Ri engenders. This narrow focus maintains the narrative within the detective fiction story frame.

Even these moments of local color are put to use in conventional ways, not only constructing a familiar character—Ri as the typical introspective and isolated bungaku seinen or literary youth, but also demonstrating how urban space can spur mystery solving. Ri wanders through the city, eventually looking down at the Taedong River as he reflects on the murder and its culprit. The moonlit scene recalls similar scenes in literature of the 1920s. The reminders of the interconnections within the Japanese empire, the description of the moonlit river below and its glittering waves would seem familiar to a metropolitan audience.

The epiphany that follows Ri’s wandering through the city cements the theme of intuition, which is closely related to his background as an artist. Ri is not a detective à la Rampo’s Akechi Kogorō, nor is he a disinterested audience member viewing the murder as a puzzle. Instead, from the beginning, Ri has been the leading suspect, although the authorities had not found any direct evidence. As such, his approach to solving the crime cannot be extricated from his desire to absolve himself, whether in the court of public opinion or from his attachment to the murdered Tō. Knowing the events of the night, Ri already has a suitable suspect based on his and Mō’s presence in Tō’s room that night. Ri sets out definitive goals to come up with a new narrative, regardless of his lack of concrete proof of Mō’s guilt:

153 Kenneth Ruoff, Imperial Japan at its Zenith: The Wartime Celebration of the Empire’s 2,600th Anniversary, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010), p.112 In the 1930s, the Government Railways of Korea and the Japanese Tourism Board intensified their efforts in promoting tourism to Korea through the use of film.  
154 “The Oval Mirror,” p. 49.  
He would clear himself completely of the suspicions that had been poured on him by society. He would have vengeance on Tō Ei’s behalf! As a member of the public, he would make them believe he was not the criminal. Then he would make them believe that Mō Kentetsu was. No matter how difficult, he would establish the theory of Mō Kentetsu as the criminal and erase the theory of Ri as the criminal in its entirety.\(^\text{156}\)

It is not just a matter of being presented with suspects based on the situation. Ri himself is a suspect and sets out to prove his innocence by discovering Mō Kentetsu’s culpability. After all, if Ri did not commit the crime, the only other logical option is Mō. Even in his testimony provided in the previous section, Ri confesses that he had “intuitively” (chokkanteki ni) thought of Mō as the killer. Thus, instead of beginning from clues the amateur detective figure in the story begins with the suspect. Ri’s “investigation” focuses not on arranging clues into a coherent whole, but in crafting a narrative of the crime that corresponds to his hypothesized suspect. The coherency of this narrative would then supplant or erase (massatsu) the previous narrative of his culpability. For this reason, in Ri’s thinking what is significant is not proof, but the “theory” (setsu) or narrative that he can craft.

To inject suspense after so forcefully foregrounding Ri as a victim and cementing his status as a familiar bungaku seinen, Kim depicts his growing doubts of his involvement in the crime as he walks through Pyonyang. Yet these doubts vanish once a possible solution for the crime occurs to him. The circumstances that lead to this moment of inspiration are a chance encounter enabled by the urban landscape. As he is considering the possibility that he might have murdered Tō Ei while sleepwalking, he stumbles upon the shooting of the film adaptation of the Meiji period’s (1868-1912) popular novel, The Gold Demon (Konjiki yasha) in Rungna Islet, located in the Taedong River.\(^\text{157}\) Ri witnesses the exchange between the actors and the cantankerous director. The director accuses them of not realistically portraying the violence of the scene. In response, one of the actors accuses him of being a “director of a murder, not a movie” (eiga kantoku de wa naku satsujin shi kantoku). This statement leads Ri to develop his theory of the method through which Mō killed his own wife and framed Ri himself.\(^\text{158}\) The odds that Ri should happen upon such a scene that would trigger his flash of insight continue to take the focus away from rational logic to the sphere of coincidence. Chance ultimately brings Ri near to where a scene is being filmed and an even greater chance that such a scene would then call to his mind a possible scenario through which he became framed for his lover’s murder.

The mention of the film shooting that Ri sees also continues drawing on familiar elements to Kim’s metropolitan readership. The movie works as an easily recognizable allusion. The Gold Demon had garnered widespread popularity not only in Japan, but also in Korea, where

\(^{156}\) “The Oval Mirror,” Profile, March 1935, p. 43.

\(^{157}\) Although Korea had been the subject of travelogues and documentaries prior to the 1920s, Korea’s first film company Chosun Kinema Co. was established in 1924, but movie theaters had been screening movies for the Japanese and Korean public since the 1910s. For more on the film industry in colonial Korea see Dong Hoon Kim, “Eclipsed Cinemas: Colonial Modernity and Film Cultures in Colonial Korea Under Japanese Rule” (PhD Diss., University of Southern California, 2008). Ozaki Kōyō’s wildly popular The Gold Demon (Konjiki yasha) was serialized in 1887-1903 and adapted to film in starting in 1912. The Korean translation, Changhanmong by Cho Chung-Hwan in 1913-1915, was a bestseller and highly influential among Korean writers. In the 1913 cover of the 1913 Syech’ang sokwan edition the iconic scene of Kan ’ichi kicking Miya has been moved to the banks of Taedong River in Pyongyang—this is the scene that Ri is witnessing. For more on The Demon Gold’s publishing history, see Jonathan E. Zwicker, Practices of the Sentimental Imagination: Melodrama, the Novel, and the Social Imaginary in Nineteenth Century Japan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. 176-191.

\(^{158}\) Ibid., p. 44.
it was disseminated through translations. Its popularity continued when it was brought to life as a play and, later, film. That the shooting of this iconic scene occurs in Pyongyang reinforces the city’s cosmopolitanism. There is no mention of whether the actors or the director are Korean or Japanese; the director is simply described as having a “kaizer mustache” and the lead actor is described as looking like “Emmanuel Kant.” These descriptions point to an amalgam of Western and Japanese elements that characterizes Japanese modernity and serves as a common point of reference between the colony and metropole. Furthermore, the filming occurs in a heavily crowded area—Ri sees the shooting from amongst the mass of spectators. In this respect, Pyongyang does not seem different from Tokyo. The filming brings to mind the distinctly modern entertainments found in urban space, as well as the dynamism of the modern city and its ever-changing landscape. That the movie in question is a well-known and -loved melodrama both in the mainland and beyond reinforces the links between center and periphery at an affective level.

This is not the only chance encounter that proves pivotal for the story. The final twist—that Mȏ has not committed suicide as it was assumed and is the editor behind the magazine advertisement—occurs in a similarly coincidental manner. Ri is at a restaurant with the detectives when a waitress drops a mirror. As in his witnessing of the actors’ exchange with the director, the dropping of the mirror triggers a new insight in the form of a memory. The morning the incident, Ri had seen Tȏ go out to the garden and drop an oval mirror she was using. However, this oval mirror reemerges in the documents based on the initial account of the condition of her room provided in the magazine’s advertisement. Since the oval mirror had shattered earlier that day there is no way that the author of the ad could have seen it after the murder. This suggests to Ri and the detectives that the writer of the ad knew that the mirror had existed. Because the information in the advertisement is inaccurate, Ri and the police realize that Mȏ is alive and behind the competition—no one has met the editor of the magazine. The coincidence of Ri witnessing the mirror shattering at the restaurant and associating that occurrence with his memory of Tȏ’s mirror brings the story full circle. Readers are once more led to the ad qua framing device, this time as a compelling clue that the criminal is still at large.

Despite this surprising revelation, the criminal continues to be on the loose. “The Oval Mirror” ends there. Its final line depicts crime as an urban adventure: “In this darkening wintry city, what kind of crime will life offer next?” The focus on the story is not law, but crime as a challenging and pleasurable puzzle to (try to) solve. The marginalization of law in “The Oval Mirror” centers the story on crime as an aesthetic event intimately linked to genre. Detective fiction magazines are the building blocks between these narratives and genre through their circulation and the participatory activities they encourage. This story emphasizes this sort of enclosure through the method of the murder, itself a mise en abyme, a narrative (a play) within a larger narrative. Through its self-reflexive positioning (the magazine advertisement of the crime within the story itself in a detective fiction magazine that frames the investigation), “The Oval Mirror” itself interpellates its readers, inviting them to do the creative work of the detective.

While its appeal to readers occurs primarily through detective fiction, even the sparse mentions of colonial space and icons of popular culture contribute to this sense of familiarity, making detective fiction inseparable from the trappings of empire. In the story’s closing Pyongyang is referred to as a “darkening wintry city,” a general description corresponding to the landscapes of detective fiction, urban spaces shrouded in mystery. Korea appears as another region of empire, connected not only through shared space (that implied by the train headed

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159 Ibid., p. 51.
towards Mukden), but also through a shared popular culture implied through the inclusion of *The Gold Demon* and an urban milieu.

**Obviating Colonial Space: Genre as Performance in “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder”**

Just a few months after his debut work appeared in Profile, Kim’s “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” was published in the December 1935 issue. The short story was presented among the five winners of Profile’s call for detective fiction submissions for its two-year publication anniversary. However, the editorial board’s evaluation was more lukewarm than the one given to “The Oval Mirror.” While affirming that Kim still holds promise as a detective fiction writer, they find that “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” is not quite satisfactory (monotarinu ten mo aru).\(^{160}\) The board does find the story to meet their standards and appreciates that Kim attempted to “trim conventional a priori-like angles” (jō ni apurioriteki kakudo wo kirō to suru). With this critique, the board was referring to the unique structure of the story, which relies on self-reflexivity through moments of performance.

The text positions readers explicitly as the arbiters of the amateur sleuth’s theories; these theories are presented first through a convincing theatrical drama staged in Seoul. However, the colonial city and the Korean identity of its cast play almost no role in the story. Seoul is less distinctive in “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” than in “The Oval Mirror”; it is not as central in the mystery-solving process. We see the main character leave the confines of interior spaces for the city, but it does not bring him the epiphanies Pyongyang did to Ri. The few mentions of places in Seoul, such as Hommachi (the Japanese district) only evoke familiarity in the Japanese readership. Once he ambles away from the city center, the main character’s strolling exposes him to a bizarre incident seemingly disconnected from the murder that opened the story, which could happen anywhere. This generic space broadens the scope of the mystery, both in terms of space and the plot.

But the theories are central in the narrative. The foundations of these theories are constantly called into question as the plot unfolds. Like Kim’s previous work, “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” demonstrates an awareness of itself as detective fiction, a fact apparent from its title. The story shares this self-reflexivity with “The Oval Mirror” for the same ends: to craft a close relationship to genre and thus its community of readers. This relationship depends as much on their familiarity with the conventions therein as with the deviations that give the story its appeal. The story also shares with “The Oval Mirror” a reliance on chance and imagination to propel the plot. Nevertheless, instead of taking the form of memories and associations to ascertain the method of the crime, the work of imagination here refers to performance as yielding multiple narratives. These are deployed not only by the main character and detective fiction writer, Ryū Furan, but also by the antagonist, Ra Unki, and, in the final instance, the police to identify the perpetrator.

The play that opens the story creates distance from the real event of the crime by blurring it with entertainment similar to what we saw with the ad in “The Oval Mirror.” At the same time, by virtue of it being a performance, the play presumes a relationship with the audience. These are not only consumers; much like the detective fiction magazine readers in “The Oval Mirror,” the audience of “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” also take part in the mystery, not so much as detectives but as judges of the plausibility of the protagonist’s theory, of his imagined scenario brought to life on the stage. The play that opens the first section of “The Detective Fiction

\(^{160}\) “Henshū goki,” *Profile* December 1935, p. 144.
Writer’s Murder‖ provides a detailed rendition of the night’s events and the successive state of the crime scene. It already distances the readers from the fact of the crime itself. The circumstances are the following: the director of the theater has been found shot dead in his study with no signs of forced entry and no prints on the gun. The play also includes quotes from the police report and eyewitness testimonies, which position his actress wife and Ryū’s beloved, Muran, as the suspect. Ryū’s play means to undercut this narrative by putting forth a new suspect, the actor Ra, also interested in Muran. From the beginning the crime scene—so central to the detective fiction formula—is mediated by the imagination of the detective fiction writer and playwright. The reader sees the crime scene only through Ryū’s play and his own ambitions to clear Muran of wrongdoing, which generates distance between the event and its representation.

The inclusion of the program in place of a diagram in the first pages of the story emphasizes the degree of separation between the event of the crime and the acts represented on stage. The program calls attention to the crime and its solution as a Ryū’s “view” (kenkai) and his “reconstruction” (kumitate) of the crime, which he presents to the audience for their judgment. “As for the writer,” the program declares bombastically, “he possesses tremendous passion and appears in this play. The evidence will be shown to you gentlemen [with] the recent spectacle as it happened…”161 The focus is on the product of his imagination and on advertising it to the audience. The program shifts the central material of the story from the crime and its solution to Ryū and his own motivations as a means of engaging the audience. In doing so, the audience is explicitly positioned as the ones to consider the dramatization as “evidence” and judge the plausibility of Ryū’s theories based on it.

The engagement the play invites has with its audience further distances the events from reality. The play creates an analogous relationship between the audience watching the play and the readers of the story. This is where we find its self-reflexivity, as the play brings home its own fictionality through its mimesis of the events and in doing so, points to the larger narrative’s own fictionality. Both the audience and the readers, as a collective, are being asked to judge Ryū’s proposed solution to the crime. Yet this judgment is not a coldly rational operation, but one marked by sensationalist thrills:

That night when the first and second acts of the detective fiction play “Two Gunshots” that was the great attraction in the program’s current performances at the Neptune Theater, the audience was enveloped in a whirlpool of excitement akin to a storm, as well as by an unfathomable doubt. If the wife was not the murderer of the theater director, then who could it be? Could the criminal in the play really be the true criminal in the incident as the original author imagined it?162

This openness at the center of the story caused by the gap between the crime and its representation emphasizes the process of narrative and its consumption. This process lies at the center of the detective fiction genre itself. The central concern of the genre is, after all, the formulation of a narrative that will render the crime’s seeming incoherence and irrationality intelligible. The opening of “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” immediately reveals the central mystery framing the narrative: who killed the theater director’s wife? It also shows how the audience views the gap between the crime and its representation. For them—and by extension the readers—this gap draws them in. They are potentially excited at the prospect of
witnessing the crime happen before their eyes, but at the same time they cannot ignore the
distance implicit between what they are seeing and the crime that has occurred. The tacit
knowledge that what they are witnessing is a narrative (which may or may not) be true
invigorates the audience and readers because it opens a space where they can make the final
decision on the validity of the detective’s theories. In beginning, with an emphasis on the
dynamics between the audience and the performance, the story mirrors those between the reader
and the text, commenting on the appeal of the genre.

The text facilitates correspondence between the audience and reader at a formal level as
well. Apart from the actual play in the narrative, “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” itself
becomes more like a script at several moments. The second section, for instance, opens with a
brief description of Ryû pacing around his study, but devotes most of the space to his long
monologue, only interrupted briefly to describe his actions. In this manner, the reader glimpses
the play that the audience is seeing and is forced to rely on the monologue as the externalization
of Ryû’s thoughts. The reader is not granted any more or less access to the protagonist’s thoughts
than the audience itself.

The story also demonstrates its self-awareness through the method of the crime that Ryû
imagines, one already familiar to Kim’s readers. Ryû’s conjecture of what happened the night of
the crime draws explicitly from Kim’s previous story, “The Oval Mirror,” which Profile readers
would no doubt have recognized. Ryû Furan even mentions the magazine Profile where the story
appears as he ponders the method of the crime in a monologue for the audience’s benefit:

This is it. The detective fiction magazine Profile, the March issue, this is it. Inside there
should be this story by some writer or other called “The Oval Mirror.” I have seen this
magazine in that person’s study. In this story a husband who was also a writer wrote a
one act play to kill his own wife. He made the name of the man in the play Ryû, the very
same pronunciation of the name of the writer’s rival, a certain Ryû. Because his wife was
acting out the play, he feigned to the people in the next room to be conversing with the
victim until just before the murer. But no doubt he was keeping his natural voice low.
And no doubt he made his wife call his rival’s name. How about if there was a gifted
ventriloquist (giseikanôsha) here? Isn’t that the case? Who would say that person
is not? Especially since he’s a great actor. And this very magazine was in his study.¹⁶³

Perusing his copy of “The Oval Mirror” and remembering how the script written by the murderer
induced the victim to call the name of an innocent man and thus, frame him, it occurs to Ryû
Furan that a similar masquerade might be at work here.¹⁶⁴ Knowing that his rival Ra’s feelings
for Muran provide the motive, Ryû endeavors to think of how he managed to make it seem as if
Muran was the murderer. Ryû finally hypothesizes that Ra concealed his handiwork through
imitating the voices of the victim and the person he means to incriminate, a theory he reaches
through a rehearsal of the previous story’s plot. Further, Ryû implies that the criminal’s method
in “The Oval Mirror” itself must have inspired Ra’s ventriloquism by beginning and ending his
reasoning with the presence of the magazine in his study as the smoking gun. His approach
suggests by extension that any reader of Profile has the potential for criminality. This notion

¹⁶⁴ Ryû makes a mistake in his retelling, confusing Ri’s name for Ryû, which would of course recall Ryû Furan
himself.
contributes to the instability that marks the story, as the alignment of writer-detective will change to writer-victim and writer-criminal at several points.

The self-aware gestures that “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” has done so far to engage with its audience and readers: the play as the mirror of the story, the story’s occasional script-like form, and the references to Profile and Kim’s previous work announce the text’s interest in the genre of detective fiction as opposed to any conception of reality outside the generic system of affiliations. That it is a play initiating us into the world of the crime already suggests a distance from the world outside the text. The emphasis on performance creates its own ambiguity, for its dynamism grants it openness; a performance is never the same twice. Within its shifting terrain, the conventions of genre become more important. As Gale MacLachlan writes with respect to Emile Gaboriau’s Le Crime d’Oricival, moments of self-reflection “remind readers that their reference point is not so much the real world of crime and detection but a fictional world whose truth is related to narrative conventions of vraisemblance.” The focus is not the rational positivistic paradigm that purportedly describes the real world, but that the conventions create verisimilitude with relation to genre. This conception makes credible the outlandish events, foremost of these being solving a crime through staging it.

The story goes even further, since through the staging of Ryū’s conjectures and Ra’s acting, Ryū’s theories exceed the bounds of the play and thus, fiction in the eyes of the audience. Ra’s uncannily convincing ventriloquism within the play immediately horrifies the audience, similarly creating a persuasive narrative that has consequences beyond the stage. His imitation of Muran and her husband lends credence to Ryū’s reconstruction of the crime and draws the audience’s suspicions: “The audience’s hair stood on end. Oh, that was a terrifying phenomenon. Instead of hearing Ra Unki’s own voice or the voice of Ko [the actor] playing Bokueibin, now it was the voice of the departed theater director, Bokueibin himself.” Rather than maintaining the bounds of the play by imitating the actor playing the victim, Ra exceeds that frame to reproduce what seems to be the victim’s voice. Through this excess, he gives the audience the impression that he is not so much acting as recreating the murder scene. Although the underlying truth about the murder is unclear at that point, Ra’s performance appears sufficient enough to function as evidence.

Surprisingly, Ra’s arrest ends the first act, closing what was until then the central mystery, but the story continues, eventually leading to another performance. Ryū’s trek through Seoul leads him to a strange masquerade that ends in murder. The second part maintains the theme of performance and self-referentiality, invoking it through its subtitle “A Mystery Play: The Murder Game.” The type of performance Ryū witnesses and takes part in is not another play per se, but by the end of the whole story, is revealed to be an elaborate ruse. As we depart from the narration that at times resembles a script and follow Ryū and his thoughts in a more conventional manner, the ritual he witnesses and the enigmatic set up seems, at first, a different mystery, having little connection to the initial events that set the narrative in motion. If the first section emphasized the solution to a mystery through performance, this section uses performance to construct yet another mystery. While that performance lacks the self-consciousness of the first, it...


166 “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder,” p. 17.
is mediated by certain tropes of the detective fiction genre, such as the appearance of codes and the phenomenon of tailing which betray its indebtedness to genre.

The code and the impulse to tail appear with relation to one another. Tailing also brings urban space into the forefront, demonstrating how Kim emphasizes aspects of Seoul that would be familiar to his Japanese readership. Fanacying himself a great detective from his triumph with his play, Ryȗ wanders around Honmachi, the main Japanese shopping district in Seoul, where he has a chance encounter that initiates the second mystery. His departure from the enclosed space of the theater to the familiar albeit distant Honmachi introduces the colonial urban landscape. Kim’s metropolitan audience would of course know Honmachi, but more than gesturing to the metropole, in this instance it also gestures to detective fiction. At Honmachi, Ryȗ visits a used bookstore where he looks for new works of detective fiction. Curious about a patron’s haphazard riffing through Edogawa Rampo’s *The Gold Mask* (Ōgonmen, 1930), Ryȗ picks up the book once the man has left it behind and discovers a code.¹⁶⁷ The scrawled number in Chinese characters reminds him of the cryptography of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Gold-Bug.”

The code foreshadows the eerie game that is to come, by being itself a kind of game that attracts Ryȗ. His decryption of the code once more highlights his creativity, as well as the amalgam of Western and Japanese elements that characterizes Japanese detective fiction: “What could the ‘one’ written in kanji mean in that Western-style coded message? And then, as if struck by lightning he constructed (kumitate) a hypothesis.”¹⁶⁸ The narrative refers to his hypothesis as “kasō” (supposition, imagination, or assumption) suggesting once more the distance between his ideas and the actual event or material. At the same time, this moment emphasizes the importance of creativity and chance. There are no hints that Ryȗ uses to decipher the code, only a brief mention of other detective fiction works with codes. The narrative describes the solution coming to him lightning quick (denkō sekka). The work of chance then brings together the writer and detective. That is, his earlier success as a detective gives him confidence. “His hypothesis,” the story tells us, “had found the criminal in ‘The Two Gunshots’ and thrown Ra Unki into jail. [Ryȗ’s] reputation had now become not just one of a detective fiction writer, but a brilliant master detective.”¹⁶⁹ Like many codes in detective fiction, the code here calls attention to the work itself as a game between the reader and the text. The discovery of the code and what it means prompts Ryȗ to follow the second man who comes to look at the book with the markings.

He takes to the streets of Seoul, following the man into a train amidst the shops and neon lights of the city. His pursuit is framed in terms of fictional detectives. Ryȗ is imitating them, engaging in a performance of his own, playing the part of his favorites:

The gentleman with the Turkish hat emerged out into the plaza in front of Mitsukoshi and boarded the train headed to Tōdai Gate, so Ryȗ Furan also got on. He felt he had truly become a detective. The names of the many master detectives in new and old works of detective fiction surfaced [in his mind]. From all of them at the end of the day his favorite was Holmes.¹⁷⁰

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¹⁶⁷ That novel presents the thief Arsène Lupin, star of Maurice Leblanc’s (1864-1945) crime fiction, as Akechi Kogorō’s nemesis, another allusion to the detective fiction genre.
¹⁶⁹ Ibid.
¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 23.
Once more, we glimpse both urban space as a key component of detective fiction tropes and the integration of the colonized space of Seoul, through the Honmachi district, into the genre. The mention of the Mitsukoshi department store further alludes to this bustling, commercial urban space, familiar to metropolitan readers. As Sari Kawana notes, tailing was a fixture of detective fiction fueled by the growth of anonymity in cities. Here, Ryū sees his adventure as proof of his identity as a detective alongside the other fictional detectives he has read about. Not only is the space made familiar to the readers through its markers of Japanese urbanism—through the gesture to imperial consumer culture—but it’s also anchored to genre through Ryū’s invocation of master detectives. What we see here is a triangulation through which Western elements (the Turkish hat, the mention of Sherlock Holmes) are mediated through Japanese modernity as signified through this urban landscape.

Leaving the bright city center behind, Ryū follows the man to a mysterious house in the outskirts where he experiences a bizarre gathering that pushes the bounds of credulity and renders him vulnerable. The landscape itself is eerie and almost otherworldly from the start, setting the stage for the bizarre events. A large tree “towers like a lay priest” (nyūdō no yō ni sobieteiru) flanked by a building that resembles an “ancient castle” (kojō mitaina tatemono). When he goes inside he describes the space as dark and candle-lit, seemingly spacious but vacant. Those who have assembled in the space not only have masks but also wear identifying numbers on their chests. The atmosphere frightens Ryū, but the alcohol he is given makes him more amenable. When the leader of the masked men invites all those gathered to play a “murder game” (satsujin yūgi), Ryū finds himself unsure of what is real, thinking, “This is a dream, This is a dream. I am in a horrifying nightmare.” What began with him playing the master detective has turned into a situation where he’s a possible victim.

Apart from the eeriness of the setting, the ritualistic aspects of the “game” emphasize the theatrical aspect of the murder to come. They also recall other works of detective fiction sealing the story within the framework of genre. The leader explains that, although the victim has been selected, the murder will be decided at random through cards. The person drawing a card emblazoned with “murder of good fortune” will have the privilege of “attaining” the thrill of murder. And indeed, the night ends with what will be confirmed is a real murder, even as it remains murky from Ryū’s perspective because he does not know who the masked victim was or make clear in the narration who was responsible for the victim’s murder.

The final section turns from this imaginative landscape back to the process of identifying the criminal. The police refute the narrative presented by Ryū’s play, offering alternate theories of who the murderer is based on physical evidence. In doing so, the authorities deliver a performance of their own as master detectives by questioning the initial narrative and eventually settling on the actual chain of events. The evidence, however, proves an unstable point of

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171 *Murder Most Modern*, pp. 29-30.
173 The scenario that Kim presents here resembles Edogawa Rampo’s “The Red Chamber” (Akai Heya, 1925) in its theatricality. But it isn’t simply murder as transgression that suffices, rather murder as part of an elaborate performance, also referred to as a game (yūgi). In “The Red Chamber” T’s story of his many murders is accompanied by an elaborate staging of his own accidental “murder,” occurring in the spooky red chamber. In Rampo’s tale however, performance is revealed as lacking reality and thus, showcases the pervasive disenchantment of those involved. In the case of “The Red Chamber,” T announces, “not that common boredom with stimulation, but a game in a certain world, although to call it that gives an anxious feeling, but to me to call this matter I discovered a game is fine because its enjoyment carried me away,” In *Edogawa Rampo zenshū*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 1998), p. 14.
reference for most of their questioning. Although Ryû’s conjectures about Ra’s guilt are eventually proven correct, he instead ends as the victim of Ra’s convoluted revenge plot. This unlikely twist explains the bizarre ritual he witnessed in the previous section. Even though the police base their reconstructions of the crime on clues and motives, the road to the solution is hardly linear, and they are forced to constantly revise their accounts. This suggests that the police’s interpretations are as fallible as Ryû’s despite their reliance on concrete evidence. Evidence is far from being the trump card; it can be manipulated or supplanted by other evidence.

The police’s turn to Ryû as a suspect at one point can also be considered yet another self-reflexive turn in the story, since it posits an analogy between criminal-writer that supplants the previous of detective-writer. This begins when Ryû’s narrative is questioned creating repercussions for Ra himself. The police accuse the latter of falsifying his confession and relying on physical clues from the murder scene to disprove the play’s account and Ra’s eventual confession. The police note the discovery of a photo taken before the crime that raises doubts about Ryû’s account of the night of the incident. Ra’s confession had drawn upon his rival’s account and is therefore equally suspect:

There is a significant difference between Mr. Ryû Furan’s detective play ―Two Gunshots,‖ which did not doubt the assumption of the clock’s function in common time, and the place of Bokueibin’s murder as a real issue. Therefore, if you completely acknowledge the time, which was the conceit of the stage, as long as you are concerned with the ticking of the clock, it becomes clear that at the end of the day that your confession is untrue.174

Although Ryû’s play seemed to yield the truth about the crime (i.e., that Ra was the perpetrator), the clues the police find suggest its fallibility and status as mere conjecture or fiction. They tell Ryû, the author of this theory, “you can’t talk like a work of detective fiction. Although your intellect surpassed ours, in the final instance it was all supposition (kûsô).”175 In this manner, the police distance their investigation from the play and from the view of Ryû as the detective.

Ryû’s identity as a detective fiction writer and ability to think up elaborate crimes only compounds the police’s suspicions, drawing him close to the position of criminal. When the police disclose that Muran has been murdered, they speculate that perhaps Ryû is the murderer. His motivation could be jealousy at the sympathy Muran may have expressed towards Ra for having come forward on her behalf. The previous instance was not the only moment when the police addressed Ryû’s work as a detective fiction writer in connection to the crime. At another point, they state, “Mr. Ryû Furan is not such a poor writer that he should leave his footprints at the scene.”176 In their statements, the police then view his creativity in coming up with detailed plots as an ability that could be used to commit crimes and to stage their cover-up.

The link that finally reveals the “right” account of the crime is bizarre and at odds with the evidence-driven approach of the police. At this turn of events, we are once again reminded of “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” main concern with the process of creating a narrative. The final resolution reveals that the culprit was Ra all along, the final piece of evidence arriving from an eyewitness account. Ra is not only revealed as the murderer of Muran’s husband, but with the unlikely aid of a “revenge society” (fukushûdan) also indirectly murdered Muran and

175 Ibid., p. 33.
176 Ibid.
framed Ryū, who had witnessed it without knowing in the previous section. The authorities employ the language of fantasy, calling the events “a nightmarish story of yours” (akumu no yō na anata no monogatari) alluding to the incident’s outré nature.

If the ending of “The Oval Mirror” stressed the role of the city as the setting for pleasurable mysteries, the ending of “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” similarly focuses on the thrills of crime, but this is grounded in performance at various levels: the literal performance of the play, the performance of the master detective, and the ritualistic performance of murder. When Ryū hears of Ra’s plot in the final moments of the story, his anguish blends with his antagonist’s glee: “Suddenly an uncanny halfwit’s laughter wove (nūte) with Ryū Furan’s maddened cry and streamed out of Ra Unki’s mouth with evident pleasure (yukai).”

This scene recalls Ra’s performance at the beginning of the story, his ability to impersonate others. In alluding to this connection, this moment once again foregrounds the theme of performance. The performances in the story create distance between the events and the entertaining spectacle, embedding the incidents within the genre and invoking a relationship with the spectators or readers based on their familiarity with the same.

The turn of events that concludes “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” reflects Kim’s interest in the extraordinary in so-called “orthodox” or honkaku detective fiction and in detailing the criminal’s plotting over the investigation itself. In the story, a large part of the criminal’s scheme unfolds through performance that draws attention to detective fiction as a bounded fictional genre. That is not to say that the story fits entirely within conventions. While adhering to the basic frame of a mystery and the path to its solution, the structure “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder” marginalizes the central puzzle in order to complicate it creating the labyrinth that critics have observed. The diverse performances are a significant part of this baffling maze. They challenge our expectations with respect to genre and no doubt seemed like a refreshing contribution in the saturated space of detective fiction during the early to mid 1930s.

Kim’s narrow focus on genre, accomplished through allusions of other works and writers of detective fiction, was a strategic choice that allowed him to position himself as a detective fiction writer and marginalize questions of his identity. We see this strategy in Kim’s representation of colonial space. Turning away from the exoticism that such other detective fiction writers as Kyūsaku and Oguri used when depicting the colonies, Kim’s represents of Korea as an extension of metropolitan space and another region of empire that could also be a fitting urban setting for crime and crime solving. In marrying colonial space with the trappings of genre, Kim makes it intelligible to his metropolitan readership.

Conclusion

Kim Nae-Seong’s detective fiction, written in Japanese and published in the detective fiction coterie journal Profile, uses instances of self reflexivity to demonstrate their belonging to the detective fiction genre. The display of indebtedness to genre in “The Oval Mirror” and “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder,” creates a sense of familiarity with the readers. This familiarity is significant considering that both stories are set in Korea and written by a Korean writer, and can thus be considered strategic in his effort to break into detective fiction circles. Although both stories have Korean characters, neither of the stories meditates on cultural or ethnic difference. In fact, the specificity of the Korean landscape, be it Pyongyang or Seoul, is barely addressed in the stories. Instead, aspects of mass culture and empire, which includes the

177 Ibid.
blending of Japanese and Western elements, function as another means of invoking familiarity among the Japanese metropolitan readership.

While at first seeming to follow the rigid structure of a honkaku or orthodox detective fiction in its attention to the crime and pursuit of its solution, the stories eventually veer off to focus on the crime itself. As Kim explains in his essay, his interest lies not in the process of deduction, but in uncovering the often baroque methods that the criminals use to carry out their murders. In both stories, performance is a key part of their criminal ploys. In “The Oval Mirror,” the criminal Mō uses a play to incriminate his rival for his wife’s murder. In “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder,” performance plays an even more important role. The would-be detective puts forth his speculation of a new suspect through a play the protagonist himself wrote and is a victim of a ritualized performance that ends in murder.

The stories’ various performances highlight the imagination of the protagonists and the antagonists alike, as well as the work of chance. This is another way these stories distance themselves from ratiocinative detective fiction. While they pay attention to evidence, this evidence is no more conclusive than the protagonist’s imagination. More than the piecing together of clues, this imagination is depicted as a fountain of creativity that springs from the protagonists’ motivations. In “The Oval Mirror,” Pyongyang plays an important role in enabling this creativity. While the same significance cannot be said of the Seoul of “The Detective Fiction Writer’s Murder,” the main character’s attachment to both his beloved and his self-image of a detective in the mold of other fictional detectives underlies the theories he concocts.

The familiarity that Kim’s work draws upon goes further than mass culture and empire to the specificities of detective fiction. His fluency within the genre led to the acceptance of his work in Profile and its evaluation as detective fiction. Certainly, Kim was recognized as a Korean writer, but this fact was a curiosity, not a framework through which his work was approached. Most criticism, in fact, never alluded to Kim’s identity. As more works by colonial writers emerged in the mass market during the end of the decade, particularly in other literary fields, the question of identity became more than a curiosity, but an interpretive framework for a given work. Kim’s example raises the question of writing within genre, not only as an exercise in translation, but also as a means to establish connections outside the colonizer/colonized dyad.
Conclusion

In 1924, detective fiction writer and literary critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke wrote about what he wanted to see in the then-fledgling genre. According to him, Japanese authors should avoid setting their mysteries in foreign lands:

the setting [should] preferably be in a country’s capital or an important city. It can’t be helped, but India, the South Seas, the savage lands of Africa, and so on should be discarded as settings whenever possible. That makes readers waste a tremendous amount of unnecessary effort.178

Hirabayashi goes on to explain that without a great familiarity with a location, mystery readers would get lost. Hirabayashi’s comments underscore the key theme of this dissertation: the relationship among colonial space, genre, and readership.

By the 1930s, it was through colonial discourses that images of the outer territories took shape in ways that made them understandable to the Japanese detective fiction readership. We have seen in Yumeno Kyūsaku’s work how colonial space was disciplined by tropes of love suicide and heroic suicide in the mold of the Japanese literary tradition, creating intimacy between the works and the reader. Oguri Mushitarō’s debut short story draws from conventions of the detective fiction genre only to subvert them and their underpinning scientific discourse. The failure of science to instill order in the chaotic periphery potentially alienates the audience, compelling them to question the assumptions of the genre and reflect on the hubris of “taming” the colonial. In contrast, Kim Nae-Seong’s narratives eschew the portrayal of colonial space as disordered in favor of a depiction that focuses on similarities to the Japanese metropole through the urbanism of the detective fiction genre. Through these writers and their works set in peripheral spaces, this dissertation has broached the intersection between a popular genre and colonial discourses during the 1930s, revealing how each of the authors engaged with discourses of savagery, science, and assimilation.

Much work remains to be done on the intersection of popular culture and colonial discourses. The three authors that this study has examined are but a few of the numerous Japanese detective fiction writers to set their works in colonial spaces. With the intensification of the war effort in the late 1930s, spy fiction began to gain popularity. The way writers reconfigured nation and colony within this new, yet related subgenre can provide further insights into the historical contingency of colonial discourse. The revival and renewal of the genre in the postwar period and its postcolonial imagination are fruitful avenues for further exploration.

The mid-1920s and early 1930s were also a time when proletarian writing was widely read by the mass public, despite brutal crackdowns by the authorities. Unlike Japanese detective fiction authors, who set their works in the colonies, their leftist counterparts had actual experience living or traveling abroad and drew upon this in their politically committed works.

178 “Watashi no yōkyū suru tantei shōsetsu” in Shinseinen, August 1924, p. 275.
An analysis of how the outer territories were depicted in Japanese leftist writing would yield productive insights into how readership and ideology conditioned representation.

The dynamic mass media of the period brought the colonies home to a wide audience. At the peak of its popularity, detective fiction incorporated these spaces as the settings for their crimes. These themes and settings underscored the diversity of the genre as much as they did the complexity of the contemporary situation. They invited responses from readers, allowed them to negotiate their own web of imaginative affiliations.
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