

“Teaching East Asian Literature in the High School”
East Asian Studies Center Summer Workshop
Indiana University – Bloomington
July 8-13, 2001

Lesson Plan for

**“The Hell of Mirrors”
by Edogawa Rampo**

BACKGROUND READING:

I. Edogawa Rampo or Hirai Taro

http://www.tuttlepublishing.com/title.cgi?title_id=1166

Japanese Tales of Mystery & Imagination

The famous mystery writer Edogawa Rampo took his pen name from the Japanese pronunciation of Edgar Allen Poe--the master of Western mystery and horror stories. Collected in this chilling volume are some of Rampo's best stories, bizarre and blood-curdling expeditions into the fantastic, the perverse, and the strange. A quadruple amputee and his perverse wife; a man who discovers hidden pleasures in a chamber of mirrors; a chair-maker who buries himself inside an armchair and enjoys a promiscuous career of sordid “loves” with women who sit on his handiwork: these are some of the wonderfully strange characters you'll meet in the pages of Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination, each worthy of Poe himself.

About the Author

Hirai Taro (1894-1965), much more familiar as Edogawa Rampo, was the first modern writer of mysteries in Japan. The author's pen name is derived from the Japanese pronunciation of Edgar Allen Poe. He was the author of novels, short stories, and studies of the mystery genre.

http://www.fantasticfiction.co.uk/authors/Edogawa_Rampo.htm

brief listing of stories and collections by Edogawa Rampo

<http://www.sitartmag.com/edogawa.htm>

photo of Edogawa Rampo, but text is in French

http://srd.yahoo.com/goo/edogawa+rampo/7/*http://www.glyphs.com/words/film/95/rampo.html

Edogawa Rampo (Naoto Takenaka) was the premier Japanese mystery writer of the first half of the twentieth century; his name is a phonetic approximation of one of his literary mentors, Edgar Allan Poe. Like Poe's mysterious stories, Rampo's work seems to blend the dark side of human psychology with a vague atmosphere of unrealness.

<http://www.movieweb.com/movie/rampo/rampo.txt>

Rampo was born October 21, 1894 as Hirai Taro, son of a merchant-lawyer. He graduated from Waseda University, Tokyo in 1916, and subsequently tried his hand at diverse clerical jobs without much success.

In 1923, while unemployed, Rampo, who was an avid reader of Western mysteries, wrote a short mystery and submitted it to the only mystery magazine of Japan at that time. It was published immediately and the wide acclaim it received launched him on his highly successful writing career.

When he first started writing mysteries, he chose for his nom de plume the name of Edogawa Rampo after Edgar Allan Poe (pronounced edogah-aran-poh in Japanese). In the subsequent 30 years of prolific writing, he has acquired a reputation among Japanese mystery story enthusiasts that equals -- if not surpasses -- that of his famous namesake. With a canon of work that includes more than 20 full-length books, countless short stories, children's books and essays devoted to the mystery story. He is considered the "dean" of mystery writing in Japan. Among his best known work is the short story collection, *JAPANESE TALES OF MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION*,

Although his position as a literary figure in Japan was initially not very prominent, Rampo achieved great popularity with the general public for his entertaining stories during the beginning of the Showa Period (1926-1989), as well as the post-war years. A literary award bearing his name has been established, which is considered to be the first step to success for young mystery writers in Japan.

<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~gjdemko/japan.html>

Crime stories had a rather early start in Japan as evidenced by the publication of a collection of criminal cases by Saikaku Ihara in 1689. The 1880s, however, marked the real onset of the mystery literary genre as western authors including Jan Christemeijer, Poe, Doyle and Freeman were translated and published. The first Japanese authors also arrive on the scene at this time - Ruiko Kuroiwa published "Three Strands of Hair" in 1889 and also adapted a number of Emile Gaboriau's Paris-based stories to a Japanese context. Also, Rohan Koda published a detective story entitled "Surprise" in 1889. Haruo Sato, a poet, completed a crime story entitled "The Finger Print" in 1919 and wrote an essay in 1924 about mysteries and their "romantic and erotic origins". The essay had a huge influence on later Japanese writers.

One of the writers deeply influenced by Kuroiwa was Edogawa Rampo (aka Taro Hirai) who became the acknowledged "Father" of the Japanese mystery genre. His pen name was a Japanese phonetic version of Edgar Allan Poe said rapidly with a mouth full of marbles as well as a bit of a funny pun based on the Edo River! His best-known story, "The Two-Sen Copper Coin", published in 1923 became his best-known work although he was a prolific writer and a number of his works were made into films (e.g. "Murder on D Street" and "The Dwarf"). His later stories tended toward the grotesque and erotic but his influence was enormous. Since 1955 the author of the best mystery in Japan has been awarded the Edogawa Rampo prize for Mystery Literature. A sample of his work can be found in *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination* (Charles Tuttle, Rutland, Vt., 1956).

<http://www.jps.net/outsider/r.html>

Rampo, Edogawa

While primarily a mystery/suspense writer, Edogawa Rampo also wrote some of the first Japanese horror tales to appear in translation. In his introduction to the 1956 publication of Rampo stories collection, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, James B. Harris said that this was the first collection of Japanese mystery stories in English. The first

story in the collection, was reprinted in Peter Haining's 1972 horror anthology, *Beyond the Curtain of Dark*. Haining briefly referred to the story as "new" in his introduction.

While "The Human Chair" was not an outright horror tale, it has an interesting plot twist. It shows demented logic of an unbalanced mind. The basic premise, that the protagonist hid himself inside an armchair to touch the object of his obsession, is rather implausible but entertaining.

["The Caterpillar"](#) is undeniably a horror story. The title character is a soldier who lost all his limbs, his hearing and speech in war. The action concerns his wife's shifting attitude towards him from duty to pity to utter sadism. It's a chilling piece of raw human emotion.

"The Hell of Mirrors" is an "over-reacher" plot, the oldest horror device that goes directly back to Frankenstein. There are some things man should not tamper with. Ken Tanuma's obsession with mirrors and optical devices leads him on a bizarre path comparable to the deranged heroes of Lovecraft. *Japanese and Western Science* discusses this tale in the context of the scientific interest in Japanese magic mirrors in the early 20th Century.

"The Red Chamber" and "The Traveller with the Pasted Rag Picture" also have elements of horror fantasy. The former with its story-telling club framing device and latter with its unique use of optics to transfer a character to another place.

<http://www.shinko-elec.co.jp/eng/square/square.htm>

Rampo (real name: Taro Hirai, 1894 - 1965) was born in Nabari in Mie prefecture, graduated from Waseda University, and worked as an office clerk at Toba Dockyard from 1918 to 1919.

Some of his senior workers talked about their memories of him, and the late Mr. Odajima, the founder of Shinko Electric, also talked about him in an interview in the magazine "Akoya-gai" (Pearl Oyster Shell), published in 1966, as recounted below.

"I remember that was the year after I entered Suzuki Shoten (Suzuki Shoten founded Toba Dockyard Co., Ltd. and took over all business including shipbuilding and electric light business from Chuo Ironworks and Yotsukaichi Ironworks). That detective story writer, Edogawa Rampo entered the general affairs section of the company. He was really well built, he looked like a true sportsman type. However, he was not good at sports at all; he was only good at drinking. Even if we drank right through the night, he would be at his desk fresh as a daisy the next morning. He said his body was a result of rowing a boat in the sea breeze in his boyhood. He was young, but he was very smart. Somebody told me that Aijima island (present Mikimoto-shinju island of Toba city), which he could see everyday from the window of the general affairs section, became the model for "Panorama Island Adventure," one of his masterpieces."

Mr. Yoshizo Nakamura, who also worked with him, talked about his recollections of Edogawa Rampo. "First of all he lived in the dormitory at the outfall of Funazu-shinden and worked as record keeper on the spot. Then he moved to a rented house at the foot of the mountain after turning up a small road in front of the Matsuda Clinic that used to stand next to the present Ushigin in Iwasaki. He used to cook for himself. He would arrive at work late as he often overslept. Matsuoka chief engineer would get very angry and always shouted at me to "Fetch him!". I was in charge of fetching him. Kinnosuke Bessho,

Masakichi Sato, Taro Kimura and so on were all friends of ours. Once we all went to see the sports day at the primary school in Sakate island. He fell in love with a lady teacher there and eventually married her." (Shinko Electric Times, first issue).

An important period for him as a detective novelist.

The records of Kadokawa Bunko tell us that, "He was employed by Toba Dockyard Electric machine division in Mie prefecture in November 1917. Uhei Masumoto, who was the head engineer there, recognized his talent and Rampo started to edit the company journal (Hiyori)."

Rampo himself also wrote in his autobiography (40 Years of Detective Stories) that office clerk at Toba Dockyard in Mie prefecture was one of the jobs he had from 1916 to 1924 after he graduated from the university. "I was working at Suzuki Shoten in Toba, Mie prefecture around 1917 and 18 because the father of Mr. Yoshio Inoue (detective story translator) worked at the same place. He was much older than me and we didn't know him very well, but I visited his house two or three times. I met a guy called Yoshio there. Yoshio had two sisters, and his elder sister married one of my colleagues. This colleague's name was Shigeru Suzuki. He was great at reading children's stories. We gathered primary school students at the theater in Toba and held a children's story meeting.

He also wrote, "I read Dostoyevsky when I was working at Toba Dockyard (1918) practically without putting the books down, starting from Crime and Punishment and then The Brothers Karamazov, in the compact little volumes of translations published by Shincho." It seems that the days at Toba Dockyard were important in maturing him as a detective novelist.

II. Reference and Criticism

<http://www.jps.net/outsider/shoshigaku.html>

Reference works in English

Addiss, Stephen. *Japanese Ghosts and Demons*. New York: Braziller, 1985.

Aston, William G. *A History of Japanese Literature*. Tuttle: 1972.

Reprint of 1899 original. Perhaps the first book in English that made a comprehensive look at Japanese literature. Aston claimed that direct knowledge of Japanese literature was a recent event. No English-speaking person could read a single page of Japanese prior to the 1860's!

Davis, F. Hadland. *Myths and Legends in Japan* Dover: 1992.

Reprint of 1913 classic study includes 32 illustrations and a bibliography.

Hearn, Lafcadio. *In Ghostly Japan*.

_____. *Kwaidan*.

Iwasaka, Michiko and Toelken, Barre. *Ghosts and the Japanese*. Logan, Utah, Utah State UP: 1994.

Le Nestour, Patrick. *The Mystery of Things: Evocations of the Japanese Supernatural*. New York: Weatherhill, 1972.

Watanabe, Masao. *The Japanese and Western Science*, translated by Otto Theodor Benfey. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania Press: 1988.

Contains an interesting discussion of Japanese magic-mirrors and their relationship to a story by Edogawa Rampo.

http://www.columbia.edu/~hds2/BIB95/00poplit_sato.htm

Edogawa Rampo, *Nihon tantei shôsetsu jiten*. Ed. Shinpo Hirohisa and Yamamae Yuzuru. Kawada shobô shinsha, 1996.

Call no.: PL 826 .D6 N54 1996

In spite of its name, this is not really a dictionary, but rather a collection of previously published reviews and criticisms that Edogawa Rampo wrote on various authors and works of detective fiction over the years. The work is organized by the author's name. What is interesting about this work is that the entries for the authors also contain a review or criticism that the author has written on Rampo. Although this may not be a useful work for gathering basic information on detective fiction, it is nonetheless a very interesting work for anyone who is an avid reader of detective fiction.

Nakajima Kawatarô, *Nihon suiri shôsetsu jiten*. Tôkyôdô Shuppan, 1985.

Call no.: REF PL 770.6 .D45 N35 1986.

A good place to turn for factual information on detective fiction

Nakajima Kawatarô, *Nihon suiri shôsetsu shi*. Tôkyô Sôgensha, 1993-1996. 3 vols.

Call no.: PL 747.67 .D45 N35 1993 v.1-3

Spanning from the beginning of Meiji to the postwar period, *Nihon suiri shôsetsu shi*, a collection of past articles written by the author, provides a comprehensive literary history of detective fiction in Japan.

Itô Hideo, *Kindai no tantei shôsetsu*. San'ichi Shobô, 1994.

Call no.: PL 747.57 .D45 I86 1994

Examining the development of detective fiction from the early Meiji to the Shôwa 20s

<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/jmurphy/JPT3120.html>

... there is nothing in the experience of the USA that can correlate with the way Japan experienced modernity. That is to say, in fast forward, under pressure. In the 70 years between 1860 and World War II Japan instituted in the most wrenching way the whole modern thing, from schools, railroads and constitutional government, to hygiene, colonialism and symbolist poetry. And so, oddly, it's often in the reaction to what seems

the most natural and self-evident in modern life, rather than in the exotic differences, that the unsettling quality of our object lies.

The Origins of Modern Japanese Literature by Joseph Murphy

Kato Shuichi, *A History of Japanese Literature: Volume 3*, (NY, Kodansha, 1978)

Fragments of a Past, by Yoshikawa Eiji

"Constructing the Japanese Ethnography of Modernity." by Silverberg, Miriam

"The Machine" by Yokomitsu Riichi

"Hell of Mirrors" by Edogawa Rampo

"A Mirror and a Bell" by Lafcadio Hearn

III. Historical References

Murphey, Rhoads. *East Asia: A New History*. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 2001.

page 260 – Dutch Learning “Western learning was known as ‘Dutch learning’ (rangaku), since that was the source of nearly all the Japanese acquired, via the Dutch traders at Deshima.”

page 287 – “The Meiji era, which lasted until Mutsuhito’s death in 1912, was in fact a period of astonishingly rapid change which remade Japan from top to bottom and left it at his death already a major industrial power, employing all the technology pioneered by the nineteenth-century West, and also an imperialist power, following the Western example in that respect as in so many others.”

page 301 – 1900 poverty

page 302 – Ito was an enthusiastic modernizer, especially after his visits to the West, but he also understood the need for compromise in politics and for adapting Western ways to Japanese traditions, circumstances, and values. He saw the need for foreign ideas, but never at the expense of strong Japanese identity.”

page 351 – Japan in the 1920s: Taisho Democracy and Its Fate

page 353 - Concerns About Modernization

The novelist Natsume Soseki (1867 – 1916) speaks through a character in his novel, *Passersby*, about the disturbing pace of change, called “modernization,” which reached full speed in twentieth-century Japan:

You know, our uneasiness comes from this thing called scientific progress. Science does not know where to stop, and does not permit us to stop either. From walking to rickshaws [oddly enough, a foreign introduction], from rickshaws to horse-drawn cabs, from cabs to trains, from trains to automobiles...to airplanes—when will we ever be allowed to stop and rest? Where will it take us? It is really frightening.

IV. Magic Mirrors

<http://www.grand-illusions.com/magicmirror/magmir4.htm>

<http://web.syr.edu/~aslow/mirror.html>

The Japanese produced particularly fine "Magic Mirrors" made from bronze. These gave a perfect image when observed from straight on. Their "Magical" properties could be observed by reflecting light off the surface, and on to a wall or screen. Bright, "strange" images could be seen, that supposedly were reflections of the past and the future. The secret of the "Magic", was eventually found out. Images were engraved on the reflecting surface and subsequently polished away. Upon reflection, the images reappeared due to remaining inequities of curvature, thickness, and density of the metal.

<http://www.tarot-decks.com/mirrors.htm>

Magic Mirrors - They enabled, it was said, to see the present, the past and the future. They are of great variety, and of great antiquity.

V. Miscellaneous

http://www.amanosworld.com/html/amanos_work/rampo_edogawa/frame_main.html

Rampo Edogawa

These are drawings for the 65 volume collection of the entire works of Rampo Edogawa. Influenced by Rampo, most especially his statement, "The present is a dream, the dreams of night are reality", Amano freely expresses the essence of Rampo's world based on his inspiration from each title.

<http://cave3.red5interactive.com/cgi-bin/catalogmgr/152163188065025309/browse/item/2298/4/0/0>

3 stories by Edogawa made into animated or anime
Animated Classics of Japanese Literature

<http://www.filmsondisc.com/LaserReview/mystery.htm>

info on film *The Mystery of Rampo*

<http://movieweb.com/movie/rampo/>

quote from Edogawa and info on movie made in 1995 *The Mystery of Rampo*

“The Hell of Mirrors” short story by Edogawa Rampo (1894-1965); published in 1926. This science fiction tale recounts the macabre fate of Tanuma, a man obsessed with optics

ACTIVITIES

1. **WRITE** – a daily diary entry following your visits to see your friend, Kan Tanuma. Include your feelings – fear, surprise, admiration, scorn....in the following suggested entries:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| Diary Entry #1 | In physics class, concave mirrors are passed around. Write about your and Tanuma's differing reactions. |
| Diary Entry #2 | After visiting Tanuma's small observatory and looking through his telescope into the private lives of his neighbors, write your reactions. |
| Diary Entry #3 | One day you visit and see Tanuma looking through his periscope into his maids' rooms. Then he instructs you to look into his microscope at the insects. Write your feelings about these two incidents. |
| Diary Entry #4 | In the afternoon, you walk into Tanuma's dark laboratory and see the monstrous human face projected on the wall by the stereopticon. What do you think of it? Want to try? |
| Diary Entry #5 | You enter Tanuma's new experiment, the "chamber of mirrors," a small room lined with six mirrors. What do you see and think? |
| Diary Entry #6 | After visiting Tanuma's glass working plant, you tried to dissuade him from squandering his fortune. Tell about your conversation. |
| Diary Entry #7 | Next you see Tanuma in a giant mirror with 5 holes and then doing a dancing ritual beneath a kaleidoscope. Write your concerns or admiration. |
| Diary Entry #8 | FINAL – You are called by a messenger to Tanuma's home where you encounter a huge sphere. Explain what you think happened. |

2. **VIDEO** – create your own video following the entries listed above or create a video of one or two of the scenes – for example, the monstrous human face projected on the wall or the giant mirror with 5 holes or the ritual dancing under a kaleidoscope using a disco ball and recreating his weird laugh.

3. DRAW – your own image of Tanuma, perhaps the monstrous human face as described on page 112 or the transformed Tanuma described on page 118.

4. WRITE - Using concave mirrors, look at the distorted image of yourself and write a creative description of what you see.

5. ART - Using different materials, create Tanuma’s laboratory room.

6. RESEARCH and WRITE – Research optics . Explain and give examples of the following from the short story:

mirrors: concave/convex/corrugated/prismatic

microscope

telescope

periscope

stereopticon

kaleidoscope

7. WRITE – After brainstorming the dangers of advanced technology, create your own sci-fi fantasy story based on the dangers of one topic which you select.

8. WRITE – Based on the interesting opening line of “The Hell of Mirrors,” create your own short piece of writing. “One of the queerest friends I ever had was Kan Tanuama. From the very start I suspected that he was mentally unbalanced. Some might have called him just eccentric, but I am convinced he was a lunatic. At any rate, he had one mania --....”

Discussion Questions

Prereading Discussion:

I. Title “The Hell of Mirrors”

Based on the title, what do you imagine the story might be about?

What visual image does a hell of mirrors evoke for you?

If this were a ghost story, how could mirrors contribute to a sense of eeriness?

What does a mirror reflect? How could that be scary or hellish?

II. Repeat aloud the *author’s name*: Edogawa Rampo.

On the board, write the Japanese pronunciation- edogah-aran-poh.

Brainstorm, writing on the board the student responses to the following –

What do you know about Edgar Allan Poe? What stories do you know by Poe?

Among his short stories, most students are familiar with at least “The Tell-Tale Heart” and with others in which the main character is a ‘madman’ or mentally unbalanced.

Now read the opening lines of “The Hell of Mirrors.”

“One of the queerest friends I ever had was Kan Tanuma. From the very start I suspected that he was mentally unbalanced. Some might have called him just eccentric, but I am convinced he was a lunatic.”

Ask students to draw their own comparisons.

III. Review briefly *Japan in the 1920s* and the conditions of the time period.

Murphey, Rhoads. *East Asia: A New History*. New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc., 2001.

page 287 – “The Meiji era, which lasted until Mutsuhito’s death in 1912, was in fact a period of astonishingly rapid change which remade Japan from top to bottom and left it at his death already a major industrial power, employing all the technology pioneered by the nineteenth-century West, and also an imperialist power, following the Western example in that respect as in so many others.”

page 302 – Ito was an enthusiastic modernizer, especially after his visits to the West, but he also understood the need for compromise in politics and for adapting Western ways to Japanese traditions, circumstances, and values. He saw the need for foreign ideas, but never at the expense of strong Japanese identity.”

page 351 – Japan in the 1920s: Taisho Democracy and Its Fate

Rice riots protesting the steep wartime rise in rice prices had erupted in 1918 which had to be put down by the army; the government was clearly at fault in offering only repression instead of efforts to improve the lot of factory workers and the urban poor.

Japan, in the 1920s, was characterized by poverty, rioting, labor disputes, and issues of universal suffering. The society seemed to be falling apart. The importing of items from other countries was affecting Japan negatively, distorting the Japanese image of themselves.

The main character in “The Hell of Mirrors”, Kan Tanuma, “had one mania—a craze for anything capable of reflecting an image....”

How might the reflection of an image be distorted by “magic lanterns, telescopes, magnifying glasses, kaleidoscopes, prisms, and the likes”?

How might the distortion of an image relate to the conditions of Japan in the 1920’s?

---the distortion of a society falling apart

---the importing of foreign ideas and western items distorting the Japanese image

Why might the author have included the fact that “Perhaps this strange mania of Tanuma’s was hereditary for his great-grandfather Moribe was also known to have had the same predilection. As evidence there is the collection of objects—primitive glassware and telescopes and ancient books on related subjects—which this Moribe obtained from the early Dutch merchants at Nagasaki. These were handed down to his descendants, and my friend Tanuma was the last in line to receive the heirlooms.”

Perhaps the author is referring to the distortion of the Japanese image of themselves by specifically mentioning the early Dutch influence—the first to trade and import to Japan.

page 260 – Dutch Learning “Western learning was known as ‘Dutch learning’ (rangaku), since that was the source of nearly all the Japanese acquired, via the Dutch traders at Deshima.”

IV. Brainstorm ideas of fear of advanced technology

page 353 - Concerns About Modernization

The novelist Natsume Soseki (1867 – 1916) speaks through a character in his novel, *Passersby*, about the disturbing pace of change, called “modernization,” which reached full speed in twentieth-century Japan:

You know, our uneasiness comes from this thing called scientific progress. Science does not know where to stop, and does not permit us to stop either. From walking to rickshaws [oddly enough, a foreign introduction], from rickshaws to horse-drawn cabs, from cabs to trains, from trains to automobiles...to airplanes—when will we ever be allowed to stop and rest? Where will it take us? It is really frightening.

Review how Edogawa Rampo worked as an office clerk from 1916-1924 in the Toba dockyard (the predecessor of the present Shinko Electric Co., Ltd.

<http://www.shinko-elec.co.jp/eng/square/square.htm>

Do you know of any other science fiction stories which relate to fear of technology?
--refer to Ray Bradbury's recurring themes; for example, in "A Sound of Thunder" or "The Veldt" or to Stephen King's theme; for example, in "Trucks"

READING THE STORY:

How does the narrator view Tanuma's interest in optics?

"...when I spotted an extra-large concave mirror mounted in the far distance I took to my heels in holy terror." (110)

"He completely isolated himself in his weird laboratory...." (111)

"...his malady was going from bad to worse." (111)

"morbid craze for optics..." (111)

Why do you think the narrator remains Tanuma's "only friend who ever visited him"?

What are Tanuma's most eccentric activities or inventions?

Why might we consider these beyond social norms or taboo?

--peeping secretly through telescopes at neighbors

--peeping secretly through periscopes at maids

--observing insects fighting and mating (gory)

--entering 'chamber of mirrors' with his favorite maid

Tanuma seems to move to further image distortions of himself. Describe these.

--distortion of his face to grotesque size

--small room lined with mirrors "anyone who went inside would be confronted with reflections of every portion of his body."

"...he kept laying in bigger and bigger stocks of mirrors of all shapes and descriptions—concave, convex, corrugated, prismatic—as well as miscellaneous specimens that cast completely distorted reflections."

--giant mirror "creating a weird illusion of a trunkless body floating in space."

"...the laboratory was transformed into a purgatory of freaks"

Compare Rampo's description of the room under the kaleidoscope "...with each rotation of the gaint cylinder the mammoth flower patterns of the kaleidoscope would change in form and hue—red, pink, purple, green, vermilion, black—like the flowers of an opium addict's dream"(115) ---to Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*

"These windows were of stained glass whose color varied in accordance with the prevailing hue of the decorations of the chamber into which it opened. That at the eastern extremity was hung, for example, in blue—and vividly blue were its windows. The second chamber was purple...third was green...fourth with orange...the fifth with white—the sixth with violet...the seventh in black... there stood opposite to each window, a heavy tripod, bearing a brazier of fire, that projected its rays through the tinted glass and so glaringly illumined the room . And thus were produced a multitude of gaudy and fantastic appearances. There were arabesque figures with unsuited limbs and appointments. There were

delirious fancies such as the madman fashions. There were much of the beautiful, much of the wanton, much of the bizarre, something of the terrible, and not a little of that which might have excited disgust. To and fro in the seven chambers there stalked, in fact, a multitude of dreams.”

Compare “like the flowers of an opium addict’s dream.” “Nor did his madness end here-far from it. His fantastic creations multiplied rapidly.” (115)

What happens at the “terrible, tragic climax” of Rampo’s tale?

Tanuma is stuck in the large spherical object of his creation.

How does Rampo build suspense at the end of his tale?
What is the spine-chilling laugh and how will they get him out.

Describe Tanuma’s “horrible transformation”:

“His face was pulpy and discolored; his eyes kept wandering aimlessly; his hair was a shaggy tangle; his mouth was agape, the saliva dripping down in thin, foamy ribbons. His entire expression was that of a raving maniac.”(118)

Discuss the questions raised by Rampo in the story on p.118-119:

“Could the mere fact of confinement inside this glass sphere have been enough to drive him mad?

Moreover, what was his motive in constructing the globe in the first place? (118)

Why would a man become crazy if he entered a glass globe lined with a mirror?

What in the name of the devil had he seen there?” (122)

The ending of “The Hell of Mirrors” can be discussed in terms of the repeated theme of going against natural order, going beyond sacred space, and its consequences.

What is the story of Frankenstein about?

Are there some things man should not interfere or mess with?

“My hapless friend, undoubtedly, had tried to explore the regions of the unknown, violating sacred taboos, thereby incurring the wrath of the gods. By trying to pry open the secret portals of forbidden knowledge with his weird mania of optics he had destroyed himself.” (122)

Connections to other literary works:

Some literary works have already been mentioned in the above discussion:

Edgar Allan Poe -- *The Tell-Tale Heart*, *The Masque of the Red Death*

Natsume Soseki -- *Passersby*

Ray Bradbury -- *The Sound of Thunder*, *The Veldt*

Stephen King -- *Trucks*

A comparison might also be made between Rampo's short story *The Human Chair* and *The Hell of Mirrors*. *The Human Chair* also deals with the demented logic of an unbalanced mind in which the protagonist hides himself inside an armchair in order to touch the object of his obsession.

Edogawa Rampo also wrote, "I read Dostoyevsky when I was working at Toba Dockyard (1918) practically without putting the books down, starting from *Crime and Punishment* and then *The Brothers Karmazov*...."

Themes and symbols:

Themes have already been mentioned in the above discussion.

The Dangers of Advanced Technology

The importing of foreign ideas and western items distorting the Japanese self-image

Withdrawal from society

Violating sacred taboos and destroying self

The Hell of Mirrors

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