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**Silver /Purloined Letters**

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# Introduction



## Cultural Borrowing and Japanese Crime Literature

This book is about what happens when writers work in the shadow of a culture they see as more advanced and powerful than their own. When Japan ended its policy of self-imposed isolation in the late nineteenth century, a newly emerging political leadership, alarmed and embarrassed at Japan's apparent backwardness, set to work catching up with the West. To Ōkubo Toshimichi, a member of the famous Iwakura legation dispatched in 1871–1873 to study life in Europe and America, Japan's need to throw off the legacy of its insular past and turn outward was clear. "All the countries of the world are...propagating... 'civilization and enlightenment,'" he observed, "and they lack for nothing. Hence," he bluntly declared, "we must imitate them."<sup>1</sup> As a deliberate policy for bridging the gap between Japan and the West, imitation would prove to have complex ramifications—indeed understanding the modes and meanings of cultural imitation is a central concern of this book. But the policy's immediate effect was clear and dramatic. Japan began a process of Westernization that encompassed everything from the nation's systems of law, government, and education, to industry and commerce, to architecture, literature, and the arts, as well as the more mundane aspects of everyday life, such as diet, bathing, clothing, and hairstyles.

In the realm of literature, writers and critics such as Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935) and Futabatei Shimei (1864–1909), newly inspired by the example of Western novels, pioneered the modernization of the Japanese written language and Japanese narrative. But the very premise of this project—that Japanese literature needed to be modernized to accord with Western models—virtually guaranteed that their writings would be measured

against the models that had inspired them and that they would be found wanting. Shōyō's novel *Tōsei shosei katagi* (The Characters of Modern Students, 1886), for example, was judged by a contemporary Japanese reviewer to be "respectable, but only if one considers that it was written by a member of a second-tier civilization." The reviewer added: "It does not compare to the works being produced by authors from first-tier civilizations in the West."<sup>2</sup> This early judgment upon Shōyō's novel has been long-lived. Donald Keene, writing in the 1980s, observed that "the realism of *Tōsei shosei katagi* is exceedingly limited. . . . Tsubouchi's conception of 'characters' remained closer to the character books of [Tokugawa period writer] Ejima Kiseki than the character of Gertrude in *Hamlet*; he presented a collection of types rather than complex individuals."<sup>3</sup> The late-nineteenth-century episode of contact between the Japanese and Western literary worlds set up a continuing pattern, on both sides of the Pacific, of conceiving literary relations in starkly binary terms and of casting Japan as the inferior, imitative member of the East-West pair. The historical inequality in geopolitical, technological, and military power between Japan and the West has, in other words, been mirrored in the prevailing assessments of literary value and in the dominant explanations of the flows of literary influence. This tendency has perhaps been most conspicuously visible in the modern novel, and it has received considerable scholarly attention in that arena.<sup>4</sup>

But if highbrow writers such as Futabatei Shimei, Tsubouchi Shōyō, or (later) Akutagawa Ryūnosuke found themselves trapped in the shadow of their Western models, and if they often found themselves judged by a decidedly Eurocentric standard, the problems faced by writers working in the genre of detective fiction (in Japanese, *tantei shōsetsu*) were still more acute and persistent. A writer such as Futabatei, who saw himself as remaking Japanese prose fiction in general, could draw with relative freedom upon native traditions of narrative in his work. He whimsically began his novel *Ukigumo* (Floating Clouds, 1887–1889), for example, with an extensive listing of contemporary mustache styles, a rhetorical flourish firmly in the tradition of Japanese *gesaku* narrative (literally, "playful writing"). Writers of detective fiction, in contrast, were working in a genre that employed an imported and novel narrative structure, one whose relative fixity meant it could not so easily withstand hybridization with native Japanese forms and still remain true to itself. This imported narrative structure, now familiar to any reader of the whodunit, was built of two interlocked stories: the story of an investigation and the story of the crime that comes to light through that investigation.<sup>5</sup> This narrative structure had no native precedents in Japan when the first translations of detective stories appeared in the 1880s. Early

Japanese detective writers were thus keenly aware of their status as borrowers from Western sources and of the inevitability of comparison with those sources.

These circumstances of the detective story's production would give it special cultural weight for Japanese authors and critics, despite the tendency to view it as an essentially popular and frivolous entertainment. For many Japanese observers, it became a test case for measuring Japan's fitness to call itself a modern nation, a cultural touchstone for Japan's national identity, its national competence, and its place in the world. The critic Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke (1892–1931) is best known for his association with the proletarian literature movement in Japan, but in the final decade of his life he wrote a number of detective stories and critical essays on Japanese detective fiction. His observations in one such essay from 1925 indicate the range of concerns the genre could sweep before it: "There are certain social conditions that stand as prerequisites for the development of detective fiction," Hirabayashi wrote, in an effort to explain what he saw as the stunting of its growth in Japan. "Development of a scientific civilization, the development of reason, the development of an analytical spirit, the development of a methodical spirit [are all necessary]. There must also be scientific methods used in investigations, court procedures based on the use of incontrovertible physical evidence, and a nation whose order is maintained by the rule of law."<sup>6</sup>

Each of the preconditions for detective fiction that Hirabayashi stipulated would have had special resonance for his audience, given Japan's particular historical legacy. By the 1920s, no one would have suggested that Japan did not live under "the rule of law," but that was a comparatively recent development. It was only in 1911 that the last vestiges of "extraterritoriality" had been expunged from the treaties between Japan and the Western powers. Under the provisions of these unequal treaties, foreigners on Japanese soil had been subject to the laws of their home country—not to Japanese law—precisely because the consistency, logic, and fairness of the Japanese judicial system were suspect in the eyes of the treaty makers. Hirabayashi's stipulation that court procedures in a detective novel be based on "incontrovertible physical evidence" was a grim reminder that the Japanese judicial system had, before the reforms of the Meiji period (1868–1912), relied far more heavily on torture and forced confession than on physical evidence or forensic medicine. For Hirabayashi, the investigations carried out by detectives had to be scientific, rational, analytical, and methodical if they were to measure up to Western models. By implication, Japanese authors and their audience had to have these qualities as well; the

shortcomings of the Japanese detective novel were, for Hirabayashi, shortcomings of Japan. “The reason the detective novel hasn’t developed in Japan,” he went on to say in the same essay, “is . . . that Japanese civilization is scientifically infantile and primitive. That is the root cause of all the reasons people give for the lack of the detective novel’s development in Japan.”<sup>7</sup> Hirabayashi’s views—which are not only the views of a critic, but also the self-criticism of an author—suggest how persistently the question of international comparison could dog writers working in this borrowed genre.

Detective fiction’s development in Japan is thus an instructive case of literary borrowing between “unequal” cultures. Not only does the absence of a native equivalent allow us to fix the moment of the genre’s arrival in Japan. The genre’s distinctive narrative structure also allows us to trace its subsequent absorption in the way that a radiologist might trace the movements of a marker dye in the body of a patient. This makes for a considerably clearer picture than is possible in studies of more nebulous literary phenomena, such as the spread of realism or naturalism. The picture that results from such a tracing prompts one central conclusion: Japanese literary borrowing in the arena of detective fiction has been remarkably and richly varied in spite of the circumstances of its production—circumstances that all but forced Japanese writers into the role of imitator by their choice of genre.

In some cases, as Hirabayashi Hatsunosuke’s essay shows, one does see evidence of a subtle cultural imperialism—not only what seem to be Japanese attempts at wholesale imitation of Western models but an accompanying self-criticism that suggests the Japanese have completely internalized a set of Western, Eurocentric cultural norms. In other cases, one sees evidence of a resistance to Western cultural influences that threatens to alter or subvert the borrowed narrative form without apology. In still other instances, one sees the borrowed form put to creative uses in the local, Japanese, context—uses that could not have been anticipated in their original Western one—and that defy categorization as either imitation or resistance.

These complications suggest that the conventional models of cultural borrowing and cross-cultural influence, in their persistent focus on the poles of cultural imperialism and colonial resistance, have succumbed too easily to the siren call of monolithic consistency. This is partly because monolithic consistency has an inherent attractiveness. But it is also because the study of highbrow literary influence has occupied center stage in the academy for so long. Broadening our perspective to include peripheral genres such as the detective story can have the salutary effect of upsetting conventional assumptions about the movements and meanings of international and intercultural literary cross-currents.

One noteworthy trend in the scholarship of “unequal” literary relations has been a focus on questioning the fundamentally binary model of influence that underlies such condescending judgments as the one leveled against Tsubouchi Shōyō (“respectable for a second-tier nation”). Miryam Sas, in her study of Japanese surrealism, points out that traditional studies of cultural borrowing “tend to emphasize a single direction of influence and thus lose sight of the process of cultural exchange as a complex and intricate series of relations.”<sup>8</sup> Lydia Liu, too, has championed the notion of what she calls “translingual practice,” or a rethinking of translation in order to emphasize the “productive distortion” of “host languages,” rather than employing the notions of “source” and “target” languages, with their implication of a one-way flow.<sup>9</sup>

Such insights are indispensable for understanding certain episodes in the history of Japanese detective fiction. For instance, Kuroiwa Ruikō (1862–1920), an early translator of Western detective novels (treated in Chapter 3), produced translations in which we see not only the Japanese host language, but also Ruikō’s local political context yielding a quirkily creative product that can by no means be written off as mere mimicry of a Western original. And yet, in other instances, such as that of Edogawa Ranpo (1894–1965) and his contemporaries (treated in Chapter 5), there is little evidence of the sort of exchange or mutual influence that Sas and Liu find in the development of the more self-consciously literary genres they work with (surrealist poetry for Sas and modernist prose for Liu).

Certainly there is no parallel in detective fiction to *japonisme*, the late-nineteenth-century European fascination with the Japanese arts that exerted such influence on Claude Monet and Vincent van Gogh. The Oriental influence on the Western detective story during this period, such as it was, had nothing to do with technique and everything to do with content. The Orient generally figured within stories only as the mysterious “Other” that required investigation and explanation. In Arthur Conan Doyle’s Sherlock Holmes stories, for example, China is evoked as an exotic hinterland. Readers are meant to feel astonishment at the breadth of Holmes’ knowledge when it is shown to encompass even this outer limit, as it does in “The Red-Headed League” (1891). In the story Holmes performs his customary astonishing recitation of facts about a prospective client, deducing, among other things, that the man has been in China: “the fish you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done [there],” he announces. “That trick of staining the fishes’ scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China.”<sup>10</sup> Alternatively, the Orient could serve as a source of malicious impulses or as an enabler of their enactment. In Conan Doyle’s story “The Speckled Band” (1892), it is both. The morose Doctor Roylott is

a returnee from Calcutta, and Holmes recognizes the snake that the doctor unleashes on his step-daughter as “a swamp adder! . . . the deadliest snake in India.”<sup>11</sup> Later, in the mid-1930s, John P. Marquand would put the Japanese detective Mr. Moto at the center of a long-running series of detective novels, but again this is no more than a device to lend the works an exotic atmosphere; anyone looking for signs that Marquand’s plots or prose were influenced by Japanese detective writers will be disappointed.

Japanese detective writers in the 1920s and 1930s therefore stood in a very different relationship to their Western models than did Kuroiwa Ruikō, the early translator. Much of what the writers of the 1920s and 1930s produced was haunted by anxiety about standing up to a judgmental Western gaze—a gaze that, in a further twist, must have been almost wholly imaginary, given the linguistic and cultural barriers. In this case, a model of cultural influence suggested by Shu-Mei Shih—what she calls “asymmetrical cosmopolitanism”—seems more apt than those proposed by Sas and Liu. Shih sees Chinese modernist writers as having entered into “the global arena in a leap of imagination.” She explains that she “emphasize[s] the imaginary nature of this dialogue, because . . . it was very much a one-sided affair, with the Chinese gesticulating energetically without really getting seen or heard.”<sup>12</sup> The one-sidedness Shih describes reaches an extreme in Japanese detective fiction of the 1920s and 1930s. In this literature one often sees a self-conscious imitativeness that is much less at ease with itself than the adaptive creativity in Kuroiwa Ruikō’s mid-Meiji translations. Writers in this later generation were extremely well-versed in European and American detective fiction (Edogawa Ranpo, for example, is known to have maintained exhaustive and systematic catalogs of the ruses employed by murderers in foreign detective stories). But this familiarity was not especially liberating. Indeed, it often resulted in works that seem haunted by doubts about their qualifications for membership in a genre that Japanese writers and critics still tended to view as fundamentally Western.

In the case of Ranpo’s generation, then, one does at times see a remarkable consonance between literary relations and international power relations. In the 1930s, especially—just as Japan is staging its most aggressive bid to join the club of modern, imperial nations once and for all—Japanese detective writers were carrying out their replication of Western techniques and conventions with a self-consciousness that reached new heights. These works suggest that relations of political power strongly shaped Japanese detective writers’ sense of what was most worth doing in their chosen genre.<sup>13</sup> But at the same time they also reflect the ambivalence that accompanied Japanese admiration of Western cultural achievement.

### Anxious Imitation and Cultural Identity

Edogawa Ranpo's novella *The Pomegranate* (*Zakuro*, 1934) demonstrates how large ambivalent imitation and anxiety about cultural identity could loom in Japanese detective stories of the 1930s.<sup>14</sup> The story's playful but keenly self-conscious imitativeness represents only one possible mode of response to the problem of writing in a borrowed genre. Nonetheless, Ranpo's story illustrates its particular mode of response with great clarity, and it therefore usefully establishes the broader parameters of this study. Ranpo's story is deeply affected from the start by the problem of positioning itself in relation to Western precedents in the genre of detective fiction. *The Pomegranate* does not only recycle plot elements taken from a Western example of the genre. By focusing on a case of murder involving suspected impersonation, the story makes imitation, originality, and eventually national identity into explicit themes. Its meditations on these themes give it a distinctly self-referential quality so that the story's ending, in which the main character confesses to two fraudulent impersonations, takes on an unmistakable resonance when read in light of Ranpo's own incorporation of borrowed material into the story.

Signs of self-referentiality crop up in the story almost immediately, in the framing narrative with which it begins: this framing narrative sets *The Pomegranate* up as a story about telling a story. The first-person narrator, a former detective, explains how he recently had occasion to recall one of his most interesting cases. While on vacation at a hot spring, he tells us, he struck up a conversation with a man he had noticed reading a detective novel. This man, named Inomata, introduced himself as a connoisseur of crime and detection. Asked by Inomata to recount one of his past triumphs, the detective settled on the ten-year-old Case of the Sulfuric Acid Murder, which he tells for us as he told it to Inomata.

At the center of the case is the corpse of a man killed by forced ingestion of sulfuric acid. When the body is discovered, the victim's identity cannot be determined because his face has been so burned by the acid as to be unrecognizable. The victim's fingerprints are taken but match none on file.

A day later, the detective hears from a woman named Tanimura Kinuyo. Her husband, Tanimura Man'emon, is the owner of a generations-old bean-cake (*manjū*) business. Kinuyo is alarmed because her husband is missing. She is convinced that he is responsible for the murder and that the victim is a man named Kotono Sōichi. Kotono and Man'emon have been archrivals since childhood. Kotono's family also runs an equally old bean-cake business, and the two enterprises are in direct competition.

She tells the detective that she last saw her husband early on the morning after the body was discovered, as he was leaving their bedroom to go on a business trip. The previous afternoon and night he had shut himself in his study to work until very late, but she has realized he could have left the house without her knowledge. Kotonon it turns out, is also unaccounted for, never having returned home on the night the murder occurred. Since the kimono worn by the corpse proves to be one of Kotonon's, everything points to Tanimura Man'emon's guilt. A manhunt for him, however, proves fruitless. The police are at their wit's end when the detective has a breakthrough.

On a visit to Kinuyo, he discovers a fingerprint on a page of her husband's diary. The print is distinctive, and he recognizes it as a match for a print from the faceless corpse. In light of this discovery, the detective arrives at a new theory about what happened: it was not that Tanimura Man'emon killed Kotonon but rather the reverse—the faceless corpse is that of Tanimura, and it is Kotonon who was his murderer. No one had considered this possibility before, since Tanimura had been at home with Kinuyo—or so she thought—the morning after the corpse was discovered. Kotonon, the detective now realizes, must have killed his rival Tanimura, disfigured his face with acid, exchanged clothes with him, and then gone to Tanimura's house, where he then impersonated his own victim. By sleeping with his rival's wife Kinuyo and making an early morning departure, Kotonon made it appear that he himself had been killed. When the detective questions her, Kinuyo has to admit that she never had a good look at the man in her dark bedroom that night and that, moreover, he seemed more tight-lipped than her husband usually was. Now it is Kotonon who is put on the wanted list.

There is, however, another reversal in store. Inomata, after hearing the detective's solution to the case and learning that the ten-year-old search for Kotonon has turned up nothing, suggests still another way of looking at the facts. Perhaps, he suggests, the fingerprint in the notebook was planted by Tanimura in order to lead the detective to his theory about Kotonon's impersonation. Since Kotonon had sometimes visited Tanimura's house, it would have been easy for Tanimura to cause Kotonon to handle various objects and leave his fingerprints on them. Tanimura could then have carefully removed any remaining fingerprints of his own. After killing Kotonon and returning home to his own bedroom, Inomata explains, "Tanimura would behave as if he were Kotonon impersonating [Tanimura]; without saying a word and while taking the most careful precautions not to show his face... he would have consummated the strangest possible of illicit bonds with his very own wife."<sup>15</sup>

After presenting this alternative solution to the mystery, Inomata offers the most convincing of proofs that it is correct, and he does so by revealing yet another impersonation. He suddenly reaches into his mouth and removes a full set of false teeth, altering the shape of his face dramatically. (“His face became so pathetic as to induce disbelief at the extreme changes possible in human appearances.”) Inomata asks the detective to study his face carefully: “First, imagine that my eyelids are not creased. Imagine the eyelashes much thicker. Think of the nose as being a bit flatter. Now get rid of the beard, and in its place grow thick, short-cropped hair on my head. . . . Well? You don’t see? Is there no such face anywhere in your memory?”<sup>16</sup> Inomata turns out not to have been a casual visitor to the hot spring who has met the detective by chance; he is Tanimura Man’emon himself. After killing Kotonno, he reveals, he left his wife Kinuyo to run off with another woman, who has recently died. With nothing left to live for, he announces, he has searched out the detective to make a gloating confession before taking his own life. He then immediately makes good on his intentions, hurtling himself from the high rocky precipice where the two have been seated and plunging into the river far below.<sup>17</sup> The story takes its title from its most gruesome image—that of Inomata’s bloody remains spreading over the surface of the river, which the narrator likens to the sight of a cross-sectioned pomegranate.

The impersonation at the center of this case—the one by the killer of his own victim—is inspired by one of the seminal works in the tradition of the English golden-age detective novel *Trent’s Last Case* (1913), by Eric C. Bentley.<sup>18</sup> In Bentley’s book, John Marlowe, secretary to the wealthy financier Sigsbee Manderson, is desperate to clear himself of suspicion in Manderson’s death. By wearing Manderson’s clothes and mimicking his voice during two carefully planned encounters with Manderson’s butler and his wife, Marlowe makes it appear that Manderson was still alive hours after he had in fact died. By changing the supposed time of Manderson’s death, he is able to divert attention from his own role in the affair.

Ranpo has, of course, worked variations on this material. In Bentley’s book there is no corpse defaced by acid, and there is no sexual encounter between Marlowe and Mrs. Manderson. (Manderson and his wife are estranged; Marlowe pulls off his impersonation by briefly exchanging words with her while she lies half asleep in the next room.) And Ranpo’s story goes Bentley’s one better—or is at least more convoluted—in its solution. Ranpo’s killer, rather than impersonating his victim, only pretends to be impersonating his victim. Ranpo has borrowed other things from *Trent’s Last Case*, too. The idea of making a man leave fingerprints without his

knowledge, a lecture on particularly distinctive types of fingerprints, the idea of dentures dramatically changing a man's appearance, and the confession by the true killer that bowls the detective over at the story's end are all important elements of Bentley's original.

But Ranpo forges the truly unmistakable link to Bentley near the beginning of his story, when Inomata first attracts the narrator's attention at the hot spring. Inomata is reading a novel at that moment, and it is none other than *Trent's Last Case*. When the detective's eye falls upon the spine of Inomata's book, the title of Bentley's book and Bentley's own name are reproduced, in capital roman letters, within the Japanese text of Ranpo's story.<sup>19</sup> Later, after Inomata has revealed his past, Ranpo has his character rather laboriously explain that he was holding Bentley's book in order to influence the detective, through "a memory present beneath consciousness," to respond with the story of Tanimura and Kotonno when invited to recount a case.

Ranpo's incorporation into the story of these references to Bentley points to the potential ambiguity of many acts of cultural borrowing. One might read the references as knowing and ironic gestures toward the fundamentally imitative and repetitive nature of the detective story itself, based as the genre is on a relatively limited set of conventions. Or one might read them as an homage to a story that has been so influential as to act as a persistent memory beneath consciousness for a host of subsequent practitioners. Then again, one might read the references to Bentley as a playful nose thumbing at Bentley's dominant status, an act of appropriation carried off with the intent of ostentatiously going Bentley one better. The story certainly revels in its own virtuosic spinning out of dizzying hypothetical possibility and in its conspicuous reworking of Bentley's materials.

Interpreting the meaning of such gestures becomes largely a matter of discerning the spirit in which they are made, and it can be difficult to do so while avoiding entrapment in the well-known "intentional fallacy" of impugning psychological motives to authors based on their works. Nonetheless, Ranpo's literary diary provides some telling clues about the circumstances of this story's composition, clues that suggest Ranpo was acutely aware of his status as a marginalized heir to Bentley. In addition—and more important—the story itself is so conspicuously preoccupied with the theme of guilty impersonation that even if one cannot be certain of the spirit in which the references to Bentley have been made, their ultimate effect is to suffuse the text with an uneasy self-consciousness about the literary impersonation the story perpetrates. Emphasizing this uneasy self-consciousness in Ranpo's work has about it a semblance of ethnocentrism that may make some readers uncomfortable. But there is in fact considerable evidence to suggest that Ranpo was powerfully fixated on Western models and that his

difficulty in fighting through the anxiety of their influence left him perennially dissatisfied with his own work. To gloss over this aspect of Ranpo in the name of avoiding all semblance of ethnocentrism seems no less grave an offense than ethnocentrism itself.

Ranpo's famously detailed literary diary, which he published in increasingly longer versions as he lived out the latter half of his life, devotes several pages to his composition of *The Pomegranate* and its reception. In the diary Ranpo explicitly mentions his debt to Bentley, saying that, "at that time, though I should have done so sooner, I read Bentley's *Trent's Last Case* and was extremely impressed." He continues: "I sketched out a plot [for *The Pomegranate*] with the idea that I was showing how I would have handled the trick in [*Trent's Last Case*] if it had been my own, demonstrating how the work would turn out if it were rewritten in the Japanese style. It was not so much a matter of imitation as it was a matter of saying, 'Have a look at how I would treat this same trick.'"<sup>20</sup> One might conceivably read this as a statement of positive and triumphant cultural appropriation. Yet Ranpo appears here to be fending off the accusation of copying ("It was not so much a matter of imitation..."), which suggests a perception on his part that his story appeared derivative, as does the hypothetical premise on which he says his composition of it was based ("I was showing how I would have handled the trick in that work *if it had been my own*").<sup>21</sup>

Indeed it is the latter reading that takes on the greater weight when one attends to other signs of dissatisfaction with the story's derivativeness in Ranpo's diary account. Ranpo's account makes mention more than once of his having committed to a deadline for delivery of the piece without any fresh ideas in mind. "Although I was excited at the request [from the journal *Chūo kōron*]," he writes, "nothing that could be called a new concept came to me."<sup>22</sup> Reflecting on his completed novella a few lines later, he remains unenthusiastic: "[*The Pomegranate*] didn't have any ingredient in it that would enable me to display it with a flourish and announce, 'This is my new work.'"<sup>23</sup> Ranpo also reproduces at considerable length, in the style of a scrapbook, contemporary reviews of *The Pomegranate* from several leading Japanese newspapers and journals, including the *Yomiuri*, the *Tokyo Asahi*, and *Bungei shunjū*. These reviews are overwhelmingly negative. They refer to the story's cheapness, its tired recycling of tricks, its consequent mustiness, and Ranpo's evident decline as a writer.<sup>24</sup> "This work uses the device of fingerprints," one of these reviews observes, "which has gotten quite old by now, and looking beyond this it has little in the way of new flavor... The detective story is prone, no matter what one does, to smelling like an adaptation of Western material" (*dōshite mo seiyō dane no hon'an kusaku naru*).<sup>25</sup> Ranpo's response to these reviews is notably resigned: "That

*The Pomegranate* is done in my same old style and that it has nothing new in it," he says, "the author himself has acknowledged."<sup>26</sup> And at the end of this section of his diary, Ranpo records that the publication of *The Pomegranate* prompted him to "think that I could no longer write anything that detective story readers would read and that I no longer had the desire to write detective stories."<sup>27</sup> In fact, this realization seems to have been temporary, since Ranpo continued to turn out commercially viable serialized works in the genre for some years to come. Nonetheless, the evidence in his diary provides ample support for a reading of the *The Pomegranate* that emphasizes its self-conscious preoccupation with originals and copies and, by implication, with its own literary debts to Western predecessors.

And indeed, for all of the story's verve and brio, these preoccupations are everywhere apparent in the text of *The Pomegranate*. The story can be read as an elaborate, troubled meditation on the differences between imitations and originals, and on the threats to personal and cultural identity implicit in the denial of those differences.

Imitation and originality first come into the story as the crux of the rivalry between the beancake businesses owned by Tanimura and Kotonno. Both families claim to have the original recipe for "Mujina" (literally, "badger") beancakes. The families' storefronts are side by side, and they both display large signs with identical (and therefore mutually contradictory) slogans proclaiming "Original Mujina Beancakes." Neither family wants to be stigmatized as an imitator, and the generations-old feud over the issue has resulted in incidents of violence and sabotage. With this thematic material, Ranpo installs in the story a starkly binary notion of originality and imitation. The dispute over which family is the originator and which is the imitator is never resolved, but it is clear that in the world of the story each family must be one or the other, that the status of originator is superior to that of imitator, and that the distinction matters enough to become a motive for murder.

The figures of Tanimura and Kotonno themselves, set up as nearly interchangeable versions of each other, further underline the problematic of originals and copies. It is this basic interchangeability that creates the initial confusion over the identity of the faceless corpse and of the killer. The story's fascination with originals, copies, and personal identities becomes truly baroque when it presents the competing, mirror-image-like theories of the charade played out in the Tanimuras' bed. We are invited in these passages to contemplate first the possibility that Kotonno, as a copy of Bentley's character Marlowe, made himself into a copy of Tanimura, and then the possibility that Tanimura made himself into a copy of Kotonno copying him as a copy of Marlowe would.

This episode carries the story across the boundary between realism and farce. It stretches credulity to the breaking point to imagine that Tanimura's wife, Kinuyo, could be fooled by either man. That the story crosses this boundary anyway suggests its deep concern with the question of whether a copy could somehow pass as a viable original. It is particularly telling in this regard that the story should end up presenting as its solution the scenario in which Tanimura engages in an act of double impersonation, thereby rendering the bedroom charade an essentially harmless deception between husband and wife rather than an act of half-recognized rape or adultery. In this scenario the distinction between impersonator and original proves false; the supposed copy turns out not to have been a copy at all.

Read as an allegory of Ranpo's own borrowing from Bentley, this scenario—the very one in which Ranpo has introduced the additional reversal beyond Bentley—becomes a sort of self-absolution, a vindication of Ranpo as an original in his own right and a wish-fulfilling enactment of precisely the sort of reconciliation between originator and imitator that had seemingly been ruled out as an impossibility in the perpetual feud between the families of Kotonno and Tanimura.

But subsequent developments in the text threaten to undermine this admittedly dubious self-absolution. By the story's end, the paradigm of absolute distinction between impersonator and original reasserts itself, and Tanimura, as we have seen, confesses to his crime and plunges to his death. Tanimura not only confesses to the murder of Kotonno (by which he hoped to obviate the latter's threat to his own claim of originality in beancake making); he also confesses to another impersonation—an impersonation that is not reducible, as his earlier one is, to impersonation of himself.

In the course of this confession, Tanimura explains that immediately after the murder he escaped to Shanghai and in the ten years since has lived under a false identity, "eras[ing]," as he puts it, "the man Tanimura from the world and creat[ing] an entirely new and separate person." He continues:

There are some very good hospitals in Shanghai. They are mostly run by foreigners, and I picked out, from among the ones that were, the most convenient dentist, eye doctor, and plastic surgeon, and paid visits to them faithfully. First I...drastically thinned my hair... Next I had my eyelashes made much thicker. Then the nose. As you know, my nose was, besides being flat, not much to look at. I had them, by means of rhinoplasty, create for me this Grecian nose. Then I thought about changing the lines of my face...I had all my teeth taken out...and put in a full set of dentures with gums made thick where they had been thin before....After growing the beard, all that was left was the eyes. Eyes are a real bother to disguise. First I had surgery done to

change the creaseless lids to creased ones....I sacrificed one of my eyeballs... [and] had a glass one [put in]....In other words my face is, in every respect, an artificial creation.<sup>28</sup>

Ranpo loads Tanimura's transformation into Inomata with conspicuous signifiers of ethnicity and cultural identity. At the story's opening, when the detective tells us how he first met Inomata at the hot spring, he describes the connoisseur of crime as "somehow not quite Japanese" (*doko to naku nihonjin-banare*).<sup>29</sup> Tanimura's story confirms that the narrator has every reason to form this impression. Tanimura presumably effects his transformation into Inomata to disguise his old identity; but in doing so, he takes on—almost, under the logic of this story, as a matter of course—a new, artificially assumed identity as a quasi-Westerner, or as an Asian-Western hybrid. (And it does seem clear that the cultural categories in play here are not much more specific than the "Asian" and the "Western.") The plastic surgery Tanimura has performed on his nose renders it more prominent, "Grecian" rather than Japanese. The surgery performed on Tanimura's eyes rids him of his Asian creaseless lids. These surgeries are carried out in hospitals run by presumably Western "foreigners," and Tanimura is then able to hide in the cityscape of Shanghai. This last detail, given Shanghai's reputation in the 1930s as a site of quintessential cosmopolitanism, suggests a fantasy of acceptance in a zone of cultural ambiguity, a zone where one's claims to hybridity, being relatively commonplace, would not come under especially close scrutiny, and where a Japanese might successfully impersonate a part-Westerner.

Having first effected a self-absolution in which copy and original collapse into one, the story now undoes that self-absolution by exposing the copy as an obvious imitation. In Tanimura's second impersonation—the one made possible by his plastic surgery—there is a starkly obvious difference between his own Japanese identity and the Western, or quasi-Western, identity he attempts to assume. No longer harmlessly impersonating himself, Tanimura is now guiltily impersonating another and must resort to conspicuously artificial methods in order to do so.

If we read this segment of the story for its implications concerning Ranpo's own borrowing from Bentley (a maneuver that the story's own self-referentiality invites), Ranpo here seems to represent himself as a full-blown impersonator, one that—given the glass eye, the dentures, and the rhinoplasty—has become a vaguely monstrous hybrid. (This hybridity is consistent with that of Ranpo's punning pen name, which also hints at an act of only partially successful impersonation. Ranpo's actual name was "Hirai Tarō." "Edogawa Ranpo" is a slightly distorted rendition, in the Japanese

phonetic system, of “Edgar Allan Poe.”) In this case Ranpo’s bid to position himself as a Japanese participant in the genre of Western detective fiction, to offer something in the style of the work that defines that genre, almost seems determined to doom itself to failure. Ranpo’s story all but insists that, once its claims to belong to the genre of detective fiction are closely examined (just as the narrator closely examines “Inomata’s” face), the result will be the revelation of a well-disguised fraud; not only will the story collapse into an imitation of *Trent’s Last Case*, we will realize that it has actually advertised this eventuality almost from the beginning, where Bentley’s title first appears in the text. Carrying this reading to its logical conclusion, the burst of bloody remains on the surface of the river at the story’s end serves not only as a sign of Inomata’s suicide but of the anxiously self-destructive tendencies of *The Pomegranate* itself. It is a strangely apt image to set above the whole as its title.

This story’s continual mulling through of its own position vis-à-vis Bentley and its nearly obsessive, self-conscious fixation on the problem of imitation and originality are typical of much of Ranpo’s writing. As Chapter 5 demonstrates, Ranpo’s stories present an impressive array of variations on the basic theme of impersonation, regularly expanding it to include the themes of cultural hybridity and monstrosity.

The self-consciousness and the undercurrents of anxiety in Ranpo reflect more generalized Japanese anxieties of the 1920s and 1930s: anxiety over Japan’s place in the modern world, over the meaning of Japan’s Westernization and the threats it posed to Japanese cultural identity, and over the mixed success of Japan’s attempts at colonial expansion in a manner that both followed Western example and asserted Japanese interests. (Cosmopolitanism was not all that Shanghai signified for readers of *The Pomegranate*. The city was also a site of such Japanese imperialist aggression as the first Shanghai Incident of 1932, an attack designed to support the larger colonial project in Manchuria.)

*The Pomegranate* together with Ranpo’s larger oeuvre thus aptly sets up the central questions of this study: How persistently do “borrowed” literary genres maintain their exotic identity after they have begun to filter across intercultural boundaries? If Japanese detective writers tended to view their genre as an essentially Western one, how did they place their own work within the membership of that genre? And to what extent do national identity and relations of international power become significant subtexts for authors writing in a genre that is not only borrowed, but borrowed from a culture that they perceive as more powerful than their own?<sup>30</sup>

Ranpo’s oeuvre does not, however, by any means provide the only answers to these questions. Although many of Ranpo’s works offer striking

examples of the self-consciousness that the task of writing in a borrowed genre could provoke in Japanese writers, it would be wrong to let the patterns of response represented in Ranpo overshadow other possible patterns. In fact the close match discernible in the 1930s between the Japanese emulation occurring at the national level and the sorts of emulation one finds in writers such as Ranpo poses a potential danger to students of “unequal” literary relations. The fit here between international power relations, on the one hand, and textual production and consumption, on the other, may prompt us to assign too much weight to those power relations in our analysis of cross-cultural influence and to overlook the possibility of other, quite different, configurations of cultural interchange and borrowing. Such an exclusive focus on any one mode of response (whether uneasily imitative or radically subversive) risks falsifying the variety of Japanese borrowing in the arena of crime literature and impoverishing our understanding of Japanese cultural borrowing in general.

### Overview

The primary focus of this book is the description and assessment of Japanese writers’ responses to the problem of writing in the borrowed genre of detective fiction. But since sources of information in English on Japanese detective fiction are so limited, it also has the secondary aim of tracing the development of Japanese detective fiction in Japan from its early native antecedents (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries) to the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937.<sup>31</sup>

I begin, in Chapter 2, by describing the state of Japanese crime literature before the detective story’s arrival. Tokugawa era (1600–1868) crime literature was dominated by the tradition of courtroom narratives such as Ihara Saikaku’s *Honchō-oin hiji* (Trials in the Shade of a Cherry Tree, 1689) and the anonymous *Ōoka seidan* (Ōoka’s Rulings). These stories were written in a climate of authoritarian legal thought, and they generally glorified the state’s authority as it was embodied in the wise judges at these stories’ center. In contrast to the classic detective story’s mystification, traditional courtroom narratives tended to use omniscient narrators who identified the guilty parties early in the narration, thus shifting the suspense away from the question of the culprit’s identity to the question of how the judge would discover it—which he inevitably did. The portrayal of these judges as such unfailingly clear-sighted men tended to shore up a prevailing belief in the infallibility of a justice system that was in fact full of possibilities for abuse. When the justice system was overhauled in the early Meiji era (1868–1912) as part of Japan’s attempt to attain the status of an “enlightened” nation,

the gathering and interpretation of physical evidence for trials superseded the previous emphasis on forced confession. The detective story's popular acceptance in Japan shortly thereafter was in part explainable by a new fascination with this process of evidence gathering.

The other noteworthy native precedent to the detective story is the criminal biography. During the early Meiji era, in particular, there was a boom in such works, especially the biographies of so-called *dokufu*, or "poison women"—alluring, silver-tongued, female flimflammers and murderers. This boom was set off in part by the rise of the tabloid press and in part by the new, Westernizing Meiji government's abolition of legal status distinctions. The anxiety of a society newly confronted with true social mobility found a natural focal point in women such as the notoriously protean Takahashi Oden, who was beheaded in 1879 for allegedly stabbing and robbing a used-kimono dealer after posing as the agent for a client. But these criminal biographies, groundbreaking though they were in such areas as their incorporation and publication of court documents (which would have remained secret under the Tokugawa regime), made no mystery of the identities of the criminals they chronicled.

Mysteries using the characteristic interlocking narrative structure did not appear in Japanese until 1887, when such American works as *XYZ: A Detective Story* (by Anna Katharine Green) and Edgar Allan Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" were partially translated. Chapter 3 focuses on such early translations, particularly those published by Kuroiwa Ruikō, by far the most prolific Meiji period translator of detective stories. Pirating most of his material (thanks to the lack of international copyright agreements), Ruikō turned out dozens of serialized translations and adaptations of American, French, and English detective novels in his newspaper *Yorozu chōhō* (Morning Report for the Masses). Many of these translations were notably free, falling into a category of literature that came to be known as *hon'an-mono*, or adaptations, rather than adhering to the standards of faithfulness we now associate with translation. These adaptations stand out for Ruikō's wholesale grafting into them of original material and for the uses to which Ruikō put the works in his own, quite local context. Ruikō's adaptation of Émile Gaboriau's *L'affaire Lerouge* as *Hito ka oni ka* (Man or Devil? 1888), for example, has an entirely new ending calculated to turn the novel's story of confusion over the true culprit in a murder case into a political tract attacking the death penalty, which Ruikō viewed as feudal, unenlightened, and prone to error.

In Ruikō's hands, the translation *Hito no un* (People's Luck, 1894, based on an unidentified English detective novel) also became a critique of the Japanese Meiji period justice system. He published his translation in serial form on the same pages of the paper in which he was running coverage

of the Sōma scandal, a sensational real-life murder trial involving a huge inheritance and an allegedly insane family patriarch. Ruikō's trial coverage relentlessly accused the wealthy Sōma family of having greased the wheels of the justice system with bribery. By introducing a crucial interpolation into his translation, Ruikō underlined the striking parallels between the fictional story (in which an inheritance dispute also looms large) and the real one. He thus used his translation to add weight to the critique of corruption in the Japanese justice system that he was carrying out in the adjacent editorial and news columns of the paper.

In both cases Ruikō's changes in the course of adaptation illustrate the complexity of his acts of cultural borrowing, which were never mere mimicry of the dominant Western culture. Ruikō's ideals as a muckraker and his indignation at the faults of the Japanese legal system were inspired by a modern, Western view of the relations between citizens and the state. But the uses to which he put the cultural artifacts he appropriated were quirkily creative in their own right and wholly unpredictable on the basis of the artifacts themselves. This element of unpredictability and flexibility in Ruikō's appropriations becomes especially clear through examination of a third translation of Ruikō's, *Kettō no hate* (The Consequences of a Duel, 1889, based on Fortuné du Boisgobey's *Les suites d'un duel*). Here Ruikō again uses European culture as an intermediary for Japanese self-scrutiny, but he does so in a way that makes France into an object of ethnographic curiosity rather than a model to be emulated, and a stand-in for the pre-Enlightenment self that Japan has left behind.

Chapter 4 treats Okamoto Kidō (1872–1939), a Kabuki playwright who saw the detective story as essentially Western and modern but put it to ends that were thoroughly nativistic and protradition. Directly inspired by Arthur Conan Doyle, Kidō wrote, beginning in the 1910s, a hugely popular series of sixty-eight detective stories set in the old city of Edo (as Tokyo was known before the Meiji period). Kidō's stories are narrated as the nostalgic reminiscences of Hanshichi, a private investigator retired from service in the old city of Edo. He continually punctuates his storytelling with wistful observations about the irreversible changes that have occurred since the downfall of the shogun. The stories are thus suffused with longing for a Japan that has been all but erased by the incursions of modernity. The solutions to the mysteries in these stories also turn, as a rule, on some forgotten detail about Edo culture so that the stories become self-contained lessons in (and records of) Japan's premodern history. These solutions, moreover, are arrived at by decidedly unscientific means, and Hanshichi takes a pride in his hunches that sets him in direct opposition to Sherlock Holmes' embodiment of Western, post-Enlightenment rationality.

The nativistic longing in these stories is further heightened by their latent unease with early Western incursions onto Japanese soil. One story, for example, re-creates a scene in which a Japanese mob stones a group of foreign visitors to Edo; another centers on hooligans posing as “barbarian expellers” who extort money from the citizens of Edo in order to support their systematic assassination of Westerners. By restaging such episodes of violence but also stopping short of unambiguously endorsing them (the second story, for example, eventually reveals the barbarian expellers to be frauds), Kidō’s works reveal a striking ambivalence toward Westernization.

In addition Kidō’s use of the series form—in which each story ritualistically repeats elements of all the others in the series—also gives his stories an especially backward-looking feel. Since each story is full of stock gestures made familiar by repetition in earlier stories, and some stories even involve sophisticated play on the expectations of readers who know the earlier stories in the series, they point just as insistently to their own, invented past as they do to Japan’s historical one. Indeed, the stories can be understood ultimately as an attempt to insulate Japan from Western modernity by creating an imaginary, remembered world that is as easily comprehended (Hanshichi’s hunches are never wrong) as it is culturally pure. Kidō’s stories thus show that what begins as an imitation need not end up as one. Like Ruikō before him, Kidō put a borrowed form to unexpected uses. But where Ruikō was mostly motivated by Western-style liberalism, Kidō was motivated by a nativistic conservatism that seems to have reflected a more generalized Japanese discomfort with the cultural sacrifices required by Westernization and modernization, a discomfort that was not yet so prevalent during Ruikō’s career.

Chapter 5 takes up the detective fiction and critical essays produced in the 1920s and 1930s by Edogawa Ranpo and his contemporaries. These works suggest that, as Japan’s modernization progressed, Japanese detective writers were increasingly troubled both by cultural changes affecting the Japanese national identity and by their position as practitioners of a borrowed genre, a position that, as we have seen, could lead them to self-indictment for what they saw as a fatal lack of originality. Ranpo’s stories, in particular, show with special acuteness the effects of a dual anxiety about Japan’s cultural hybridity and about their own hybridity as narratives. His stories repeatedly revisit the themes of impersonation, double identity, and monstrous hybridity, and these themes regularly become associated in some nightmarishly twisted way with Japan’s Westernization and with his stories’ own place in the shadow of Western literary models.

Ranpo published many of his stories and serialized novels in the magazine *Shinseinen* (New Youth), one of a number of post–World War I mass-produced magazines for young urbanites. The magazine devoted much of

its space to detective fiction and also to critical essays on the genre. Many of these essays were suffused by the same ambivalence evident in Ranpo's stories. In particular, the question of why Japan had failed to produce a "good" detective novel becomes in these essays a constant refrain. For this generation, the detective novel clearly comes to represent modernity and rationality, and the failure to produce a novel equal to those of the West becomes an embarrassing sign of Japan's rootedness in the premodern world. These essays, not only by Ranpo and the critic Hirabayashi Hatsu-no-suke, but also by Kozakai Fuboku, Katō Takeo, and even the well-known novelist Satō Haruo, offer explanations for this "failure" ranging from the dearth of locking rooms in traditional Japanese architecture (a handicap when it comes to writing locked-room mysteries) to the supposed inability of Japanese to engage in close logical reasoning. This sense of inadequacy evidently still haunted Ranpo as late as 1951, when he wrote that even on the eve of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945), Japanese detective writers were "subject to an unspoken criticism that there were no real detective novels in Japan."<sup>32</sup> Ironically, the cosmopolitanism of the writers in this generation seems to have left them perpetually frustrated with their own seeming inability to be anything more than a second-rate version of the Western writers they admired.

The concluding chapter of the book reviews the responses laid out in the previous chapters to the problem of writing in a borrowed genre and summarizes the case in favor of a more nuanced understanding of the processes of intercultural literary borrowing. This case rests on my contention that the conventional notions of imitation and cultural imperialism are incomplete at best and cannot be applied equally to all the instances of borrowing that this book explores. The asymmetry in power between Asia and the West was perhaps a necessary condition for the importation and subsequent adaptation of the classic detective novel in Japan. And Japanese writers' views of their place in the genre were no doubt shaped by Japan's frustrated ambition to gain equal footing with Western powers by replicating their legal system and their pattern of imperial conquest, a frustration that culminated most acutely in the writings of Ranpo and his generation.

But an impulse toward emulation at a national level did not translate straightforwardly or consistently into emulation at the level of particular texts, and it would be a mistake to confer upon Ranpo and his generation the status of a teleological (rather than a merely chronological) endpoint for the development of the detective novel between the Meiji Restoration (1868) and the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War (1937). Ranpo's continuing reputation as the father of the Japanese detective novel should not allow him to overshadow a more balanced and inclusive understanding

of borrowing by Japanese detective writers during this period as a whole. Although they arrived at starkly different results—one essentially modern and the other essentially antimodern—Ruikō and Kidō stand together as significant counterweights to the tendencies one sees in Ranpo and his contemporaries.

The single gravest mistake we can make in trying to understand the cross-cultural flow of literary influence is to become fixated on a single model of how such influences occur. To let Ranpo's crises of identity and self-perception—or, for that matter, Kuroiwa Ruikō's devil-may-care élan or Okamoto Kidō's unapologetic subversion of the detective genre's post-Enlightenment rationality—dominate our view of these influences is to give short shrift to the multiplicity of the processes of borrowing, to the vagaries of intercultural transfer, to the historical moment at which the borrowing occurs, and to the temperaments and purposes of individual writers. The variety of responses that the writers treated here exemplify, and the variety of uses to which they put their borrowings, show that no one model—whether of Japanese imitativeness or of Japanese cultural triumph, whether of cultural imperialism or of quasi-colonial resistance—adequately encompasses the richness of the possible goings-on at intercultural boundaries, even in a case (such as that of the Japanese borrowing of the detective novel) in which the Western origin of the genre and the perception of international inequality that accompanied its borrowing might seem likely to exert a determinative power.