

Name: _____

Date: _____

Period: _____

Edogawa Rampo

"The Human Chair" | Background

Directions: The best way to remember authors is to act as though they are people that you know in real life. Try to remember the basics, but also random facts about each author. In the long run, it is the random things that we retain. This is an autobiographical overview of Tarō Hirai (pseudonym: Edogawa Rampo).



Edogawa Rampo (1894-1965)

There was once a man who loved fiction and mystery. He lived in Japan. He was born in Nabari, Mie Prefecture. As a boy, he upheld Western mystery writers like Edgar Allan Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle. He went to college at Waseda University to study economics. While in college, he attempted to translate literary works by those authors into Japanese.

Though his degree was in economics, his passion was in writing. He had a collection of odd jobs on his resume: newspaper editing, cartoon artist, working in a used bookstore, and selling soba noodles as a street vendor. At the age of twenty-nine, Tarō made his big break. He published his first mystery story under the pseudonym, Edogawa Rampo. He said that if you slurred it fast enough, it sounded like Edgar Allan Poe.

Tarō, with other contemporaries, began the genre of Japanese mystery. They incorporated the bizarre, the intriguing, and the at times grotesque. He perfected the art of “ero guro nansensu,” a Japanese artistic and literary movement in the 1930s revolving around the erotic, grotesque, and nonsensical. During World War II, the Japanese government requested that he keep one of his short stories out of a re-printing. This story was called “The Caterpillar.”

He was relocated during the war and began to get involved with patriotic movements and write more patriotic stories. However, he changed his pseudonym for those stories. His former residency was bombed. However, his studio remained standing and still exists today on the campus of Rikkyo University.

Later in life, he and a colleague made a quest to collect as much literature from both Japanese and Western origins regarding homosexuality. He ended up publishing a queer history. Near the end of his life, he and a translator worked to translate his work into English: *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. He ended up passing away from a number of health conditions in 1965. However, his legacy in Japanese mystery and adventure lives on today.