

# "The Caterpillar" (芋虫, Imomushi, 1929)

By Edogawa Rampo (1894–1965)





# TA Intro:

- Name: Aydin Quach (he/him)
- MA History Student
- BA Double Major in Honours History and IR, Chinese Language and Culture (from UBC!)
- Research:
  - Masculinity and (Gay) Sex Work in Southeast Asia/Sinophone Worlds
  - Raves, Electronic Dance Music, Drugs, Gaysian Culture (Sensory Studies)



# Agenda:

- Taisho/Showa Period
- Sada Abe Incident of 1936
- *Ero guro (nansensu)*
- Gothic Literature
- “The Caterpillar” by Edogawa Rampo
- Breakout Discussion

# Learning Objectives:

- By the end of this lesson you will...
  1. **Consider** the literary usage of sexuality as a lens of analysis
  2. **Develop** a more comprehensive understanding of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century Japan and the politics of aesthetics
  3. **Rationalize** how writing of the Erotic as well as the genre of (gothic) Horror can be used as a critique of sexuality and politics
  4. **Synthesize** the author's own biography, history, literary allusions, and lived experiences to better understand "The Caterpillar"

# Guiding Questions:

**How** can sexuality/erotics/horror be a lens of analysis to which we understand text/the world?

**What** can we learn about a text from an author?

# Why Sexuality? Why Erotics? Why Horror?

**How** can sexuality/erotics/horror be a lens of analysis to which we understand text/the world?



# Sexuality:

- **Definition:** peoples experiences and expression of themselves sexually
  - **Extension:** Sexuality is ultimately the study of power in (intimate) relationships
- Power is something that exists in all human relationships
  - How this is negotiated, how it forms, and why we become attached to it
- Expressions of sexuality help us better understand ourselves, others, and our own relationship to power
  - **Kinks, BDSM, etc. therefore demonstrate how people relate power (physical and/or emotional) to pleasure.**
  - **What power do we give objects and people (and why)?**





**Izanami + Izanagi  
(Creator Gods)**



**Ebisu/Hiruko (the  
first child/the leech)**



# Taisho Period (1912-1926):

- Period of rapid modernization and westernization of Japan
- Adoption of western clothing styles and literature styles → the mystery novel, gothic literature, etc.
- **Increasing liberalization around sexuality, erotics, and art**
  - Start of women's liberation outside of domestic sphere
  - Protest movement against government policies of warfare, capitalism, and landownership
- **"revolution of emotion"** (*kanjo kakumei*) – Isoda Koichi
  - Exploration and the pushing of limits on what is acceptable



# Showa Period (1926-1989):



- End of “Taisho Democracy”
- Period of great bloodshed and warfare
  - Second Sino-Japanese War (1937)
    - **Nanjing Massacre/Rape of Nanjing**
  - WW2 (1939-1945)
    - Nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- Post-War Economic Miracle
  - Japan becomes 2<sup>nd</sup> largest economy in the world
  - Cultural powerhouse







What are the primary principles  
of Ukiyo-e?

**“The world remains constant over the centuries. But human life is like the dew at dawn or a bubble rising through water.”**

**– Raiden Shogun, Genshin Impact 原神 (2020)**



**Warning: next slide will depict a woodblock print of a naked woman making love with octopi**



## *Shunga (Erotic Woodblock Prints)*



*The Dream of the Fisherman's Wife (Tako to Ama [蛸と海女]) by Hosokai, 1814.*





# The Sada Abe Incident of 1936

# Story:



## Key Individuals:

- Sada Abe (1905 – 1971) → Geisha and Sex Worker
- Kichizō Ishida (1894-1936) → Restaurant Owner and husband

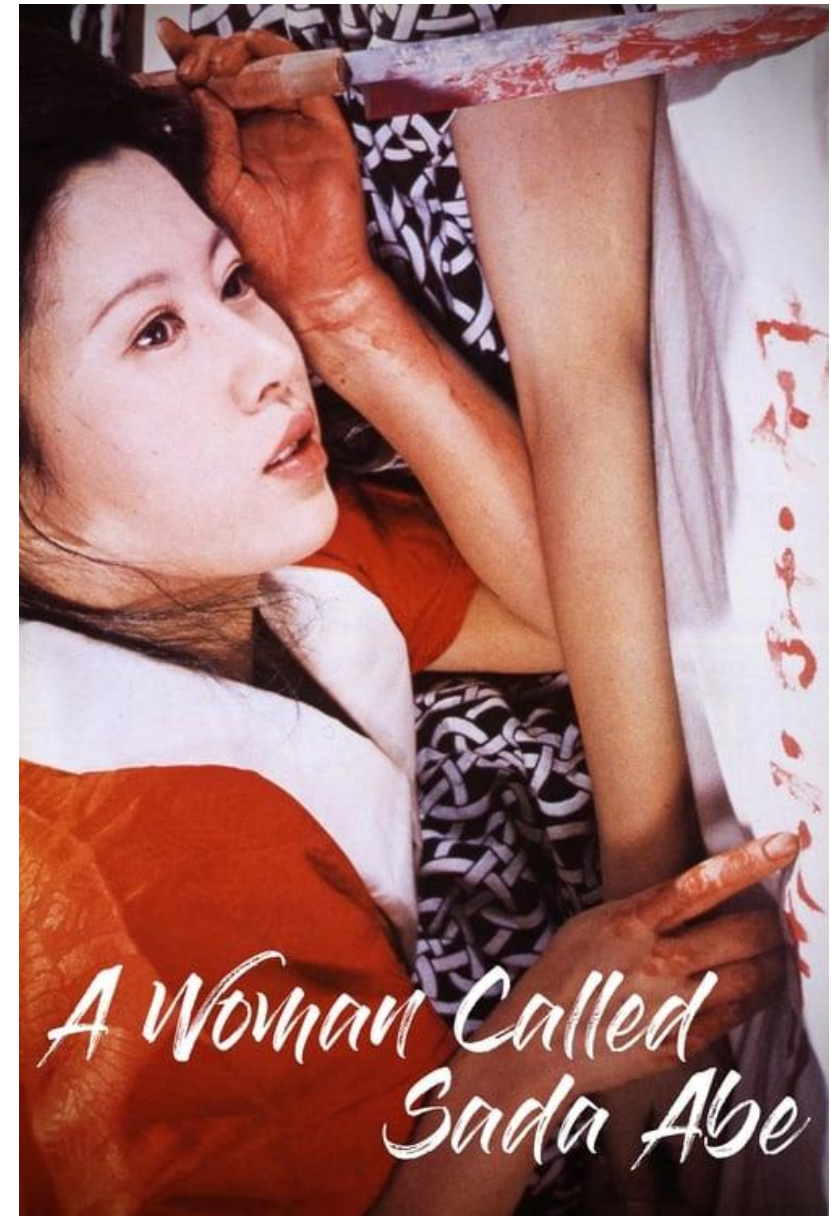
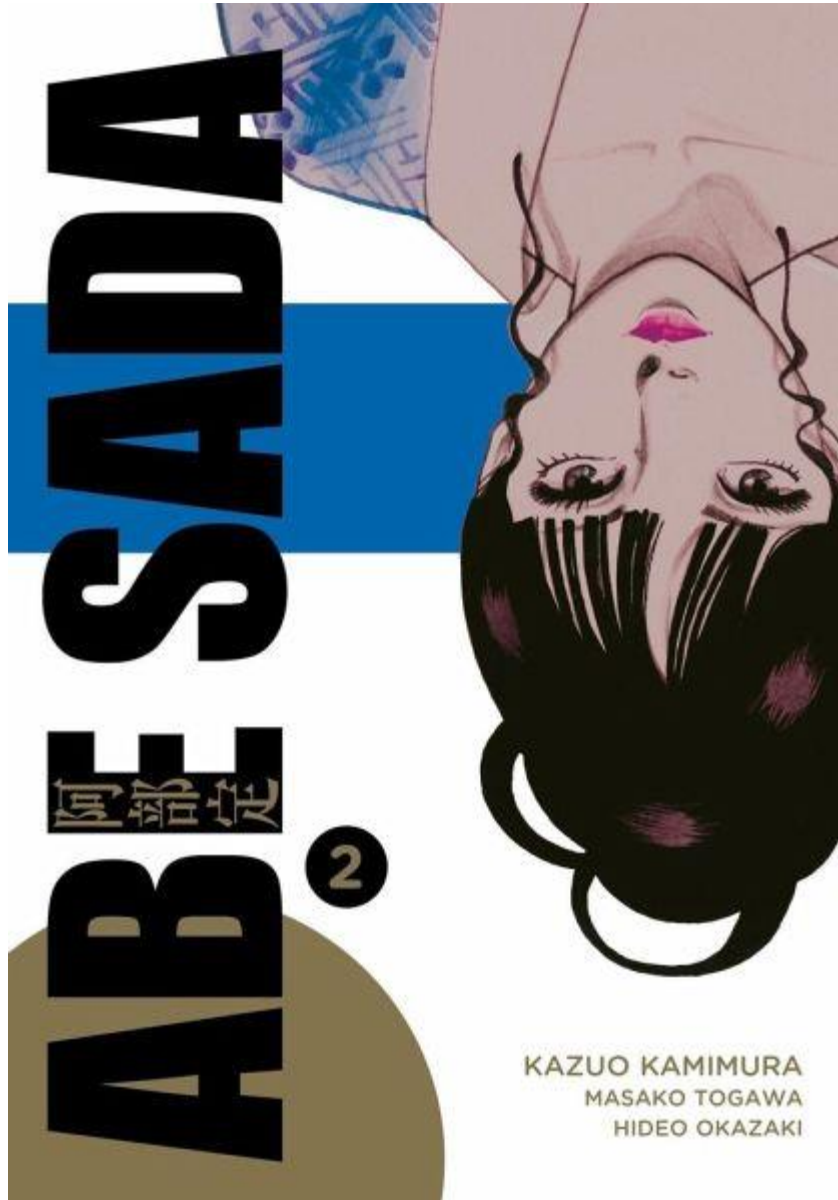
# Story:

- Ishida started making advances on Abe. Leading to him eloping with her for 2 weeks.
  - Teahouse hopping
- After fling, Abe falls in love with Ishida, but is very jealous of his wife.
  - Sees a theater drama about a geisha attacking her lover with a knife → plans to try the same thing on Ishida to push him to leave his wife
- They move in together and stay at an inn, but Abe continues to threaten Ishida with the knife
  - Also partakes in Sado-Masochism (SM) acts which they both enjoy
- Ishida after a choking session said he would like it if she strangled him in his sleep...so she did.
  - Abe killed Ishida, lay with the body, castrated him (and kept them with her until her arrest), carved her name on his thigh and arm, and left the inn
- Was arrested the next day.



# Aftermath:

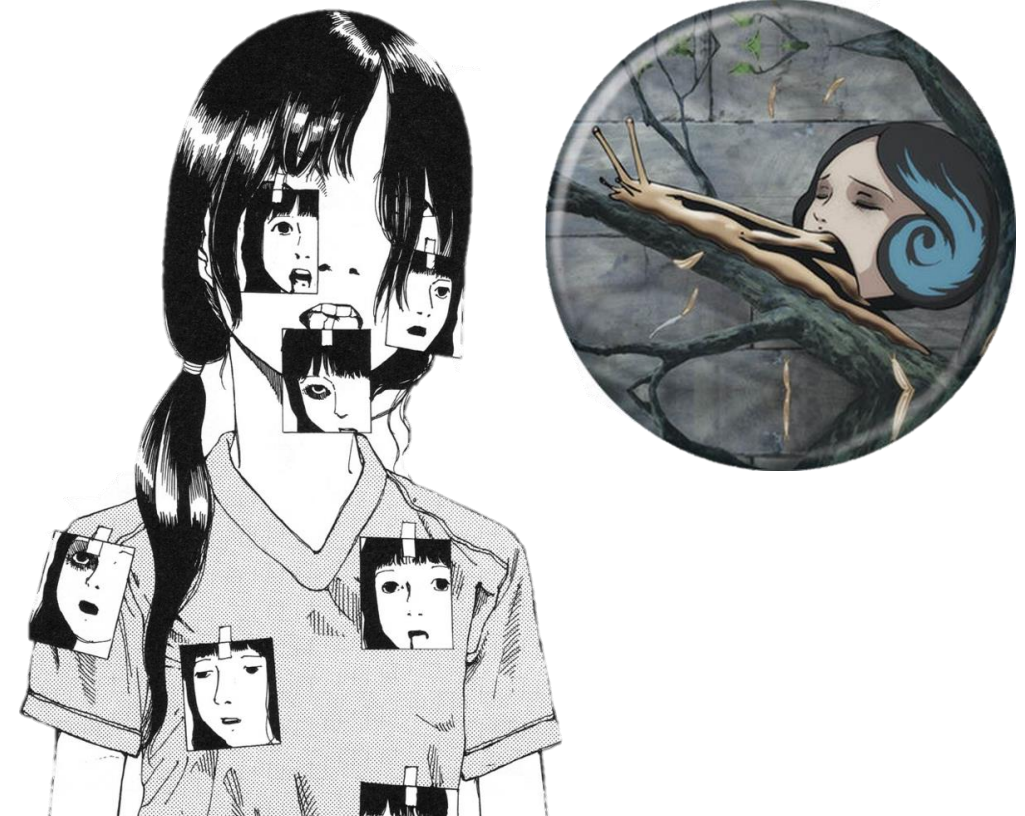
- During court hearing, the judge noted how her retelling of the story was erotic and made him feel aroused
  - "The thing I regret most about this incident is that I have come to be misunderstood as some kind of sexual pervert... There had never been a man in my life like Ishida. There were men I liked, and with whom I slept without accepting money, but none made me feel the way I did toward him." – Sada Abe
- Sentenced only to 5 years in prison
- Became the embodiment of *ero guro* and *dokufu* (毒婦) or "poison woman" stereotype



Warning: next slide will depict examples of ero guro that may be disturbing to viewers

# Ero Guro (Nansensu):

- "Erotic, Grotesque, (Nonsense) literature and art
- **Key themes:** Kinky sex, gore, medical sensationalism, defilement of the body, monstrosity
- **Deviance and decadence as a result of modernity**
- Develops as a cultivated artform among the wealthy elite of Taisho/Showa Period as a way to push the boundaries of sex, gender, and sexuality and as a **warning on liberalism** (femme fatale, monstrous sexuality, uncontrollable desire, unbelonging, war, etc.)
- **Famous artist/writers:** Junji Ito, Edogawa Rampo







*Spirited Away*  
(2001)



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NO  
LONGER  
HUMAN





Gothic Literature/Horror



# Literary Style: Gothic Horror

- Gothic Literature: **Revolving around a higher, unknown power and what happens when that power is being questioned or defied (the “haunting”)**
  - Female repression of sexuality and the “monster” within
  - Male sexuality as a source of evil and violence
- The foreign and the mysterious is dangerous (sexuality, ethnicity, locales)
- Use of either really claustrophobic, small spaces or really big sublime settings (small cabins, big castles, etc.)
- Sanity/Insanity
- Fascination with the Occult → supernatural, mystical, or magical beliefs, practices, or phenomena)

**Notable Writers:** Bram Stoker, Edgar Allan Poe, HP Lovecraft, Mary Shelly



“Further Observation  
Diary” from *Resident Evil  
Village* (2021)

“The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown”

– HP Lovecraft, *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927)



*Wanderer above the  
Sea of Fog* by Caspar  
David Friedrich, 1818

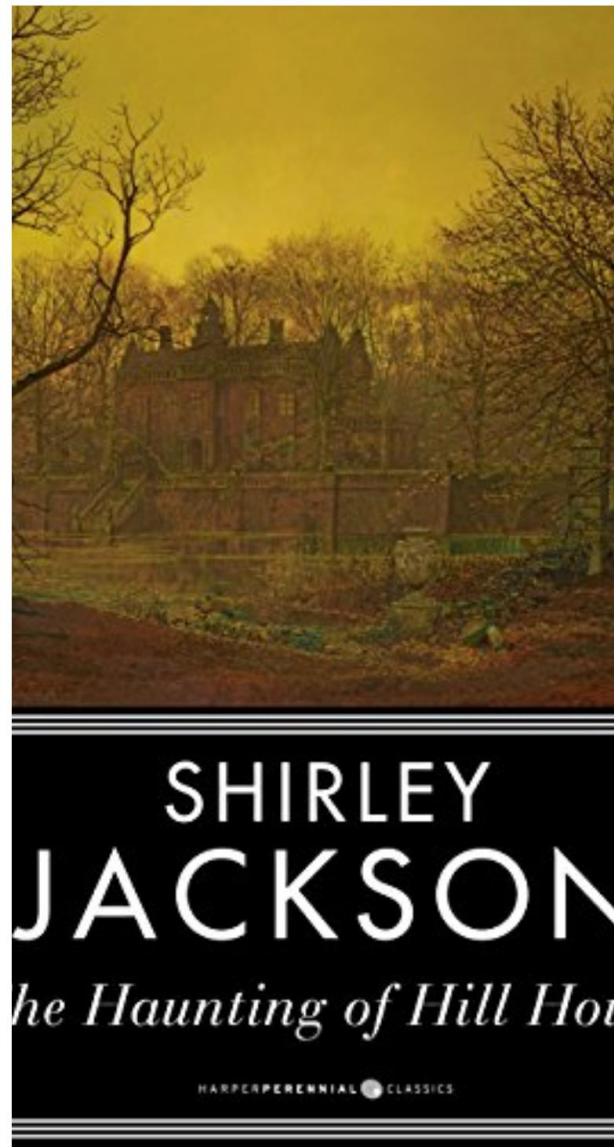
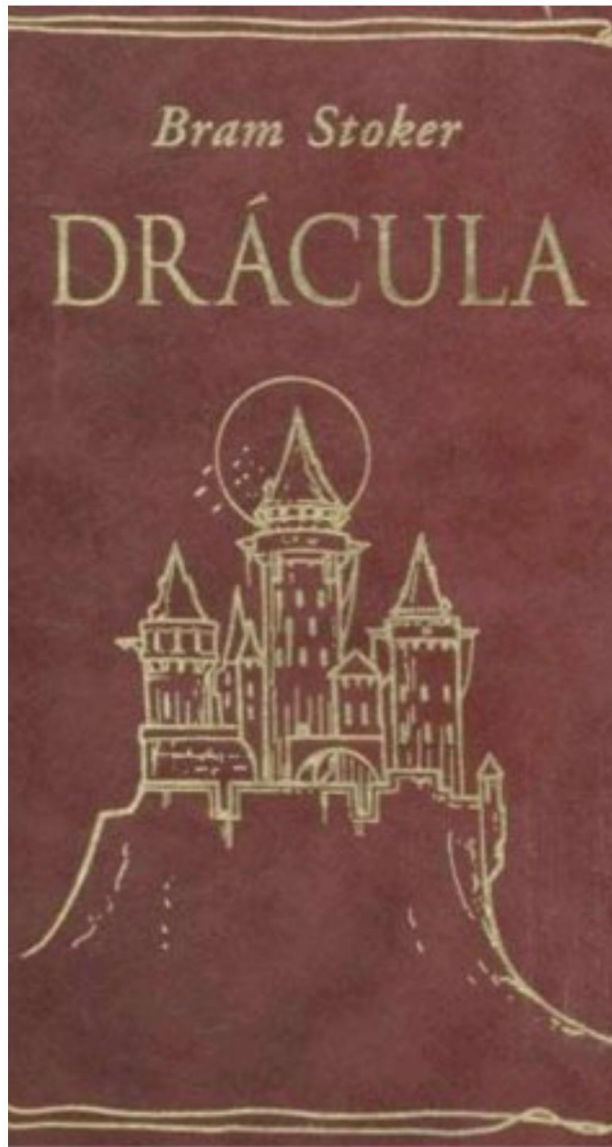
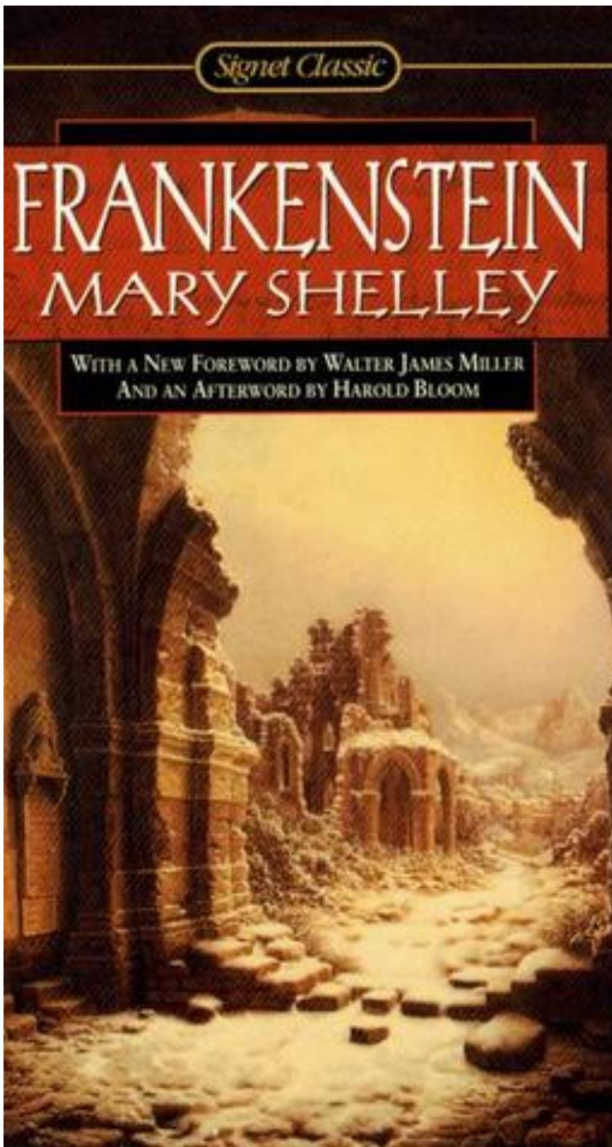
















*Resident Evil  
Village (2021)*



*Bloodborne  
(2015)*

# Analyzing "The Caterpillar" (芋虫, Imomushi, 1929)

**What** can we learn about a text from an author and their lived experiences?



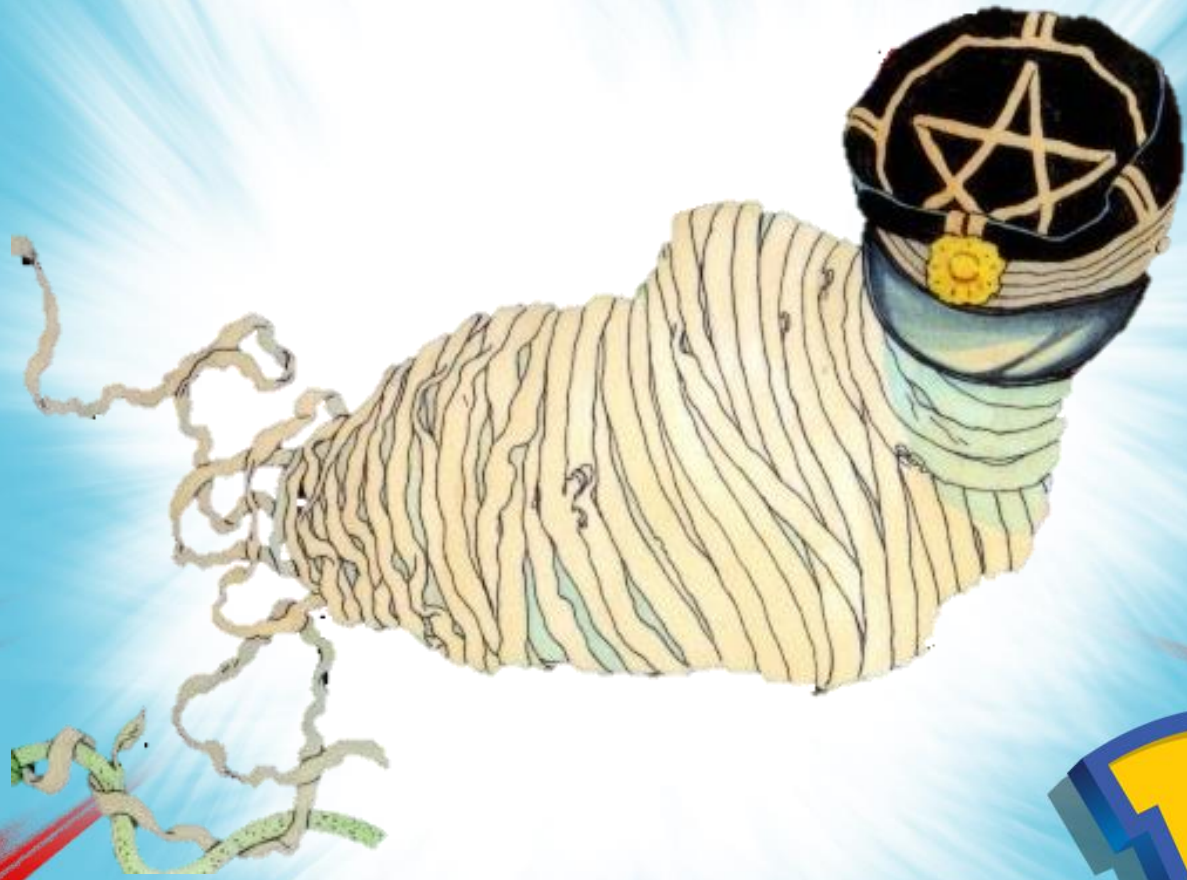
**POKÉMON**





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**POKÉMON**



# Review: “The Caterpillar”

- Key characters and their backgrounds?
- Anything interesting, striking, or surprising about the story?

**Warning: next slide will depict a woman with one breast out + depiction of Sunaga**





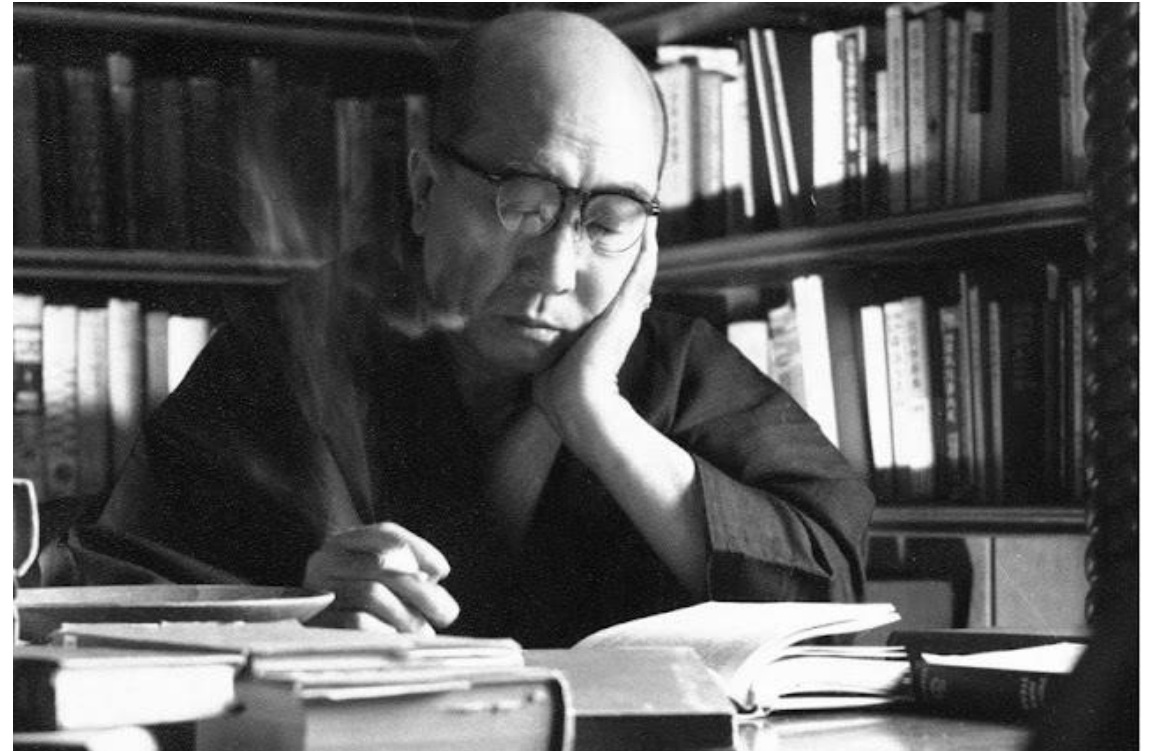
## Themes of the Text:

- Sensory Terror
- War Allegory
- Lust and Carnal Desire



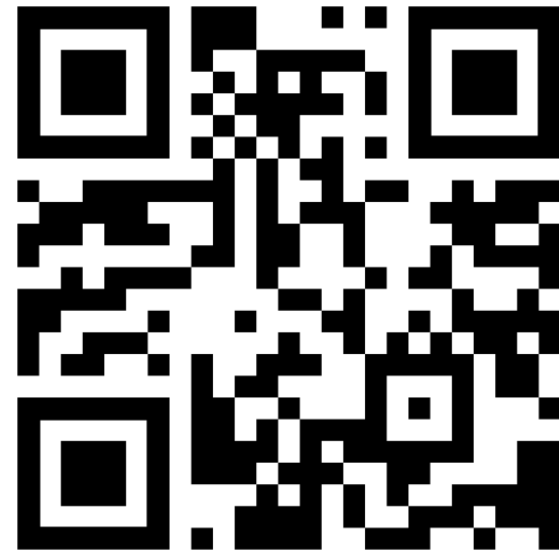
# Edogawa Rampo (1894 –1965)

- Born Hirai Tarō (平井 太郎) in Nabari, Mie Prefecture
- Worked odd jobs as a newspaper salesman, bookstore salesman, noodle stall vendor, and cartoon drawing
- First short story was "The Two-Sen Copper Coin" (二銭銅貨, Ni-sen Dōka) published in 1923
  - Heavily inspired by mystery/gothic literature from Edgar Allan Poe, Arthur Conan Doyle, and G. K. Chesterton
- Fascinated by human sexuality and the power of desire in human relationships → "abnormal sexuality" (変態性欲, hentai seiyoku)
- **Notable Stories:** "The Human Chair" (人間椅子, Ningen Isu, 1925), "The Demon of the Lonely Isle" (孤島の鬼, Kotō no oni, 1930)





“The Human Chair”  
Short Story Link:



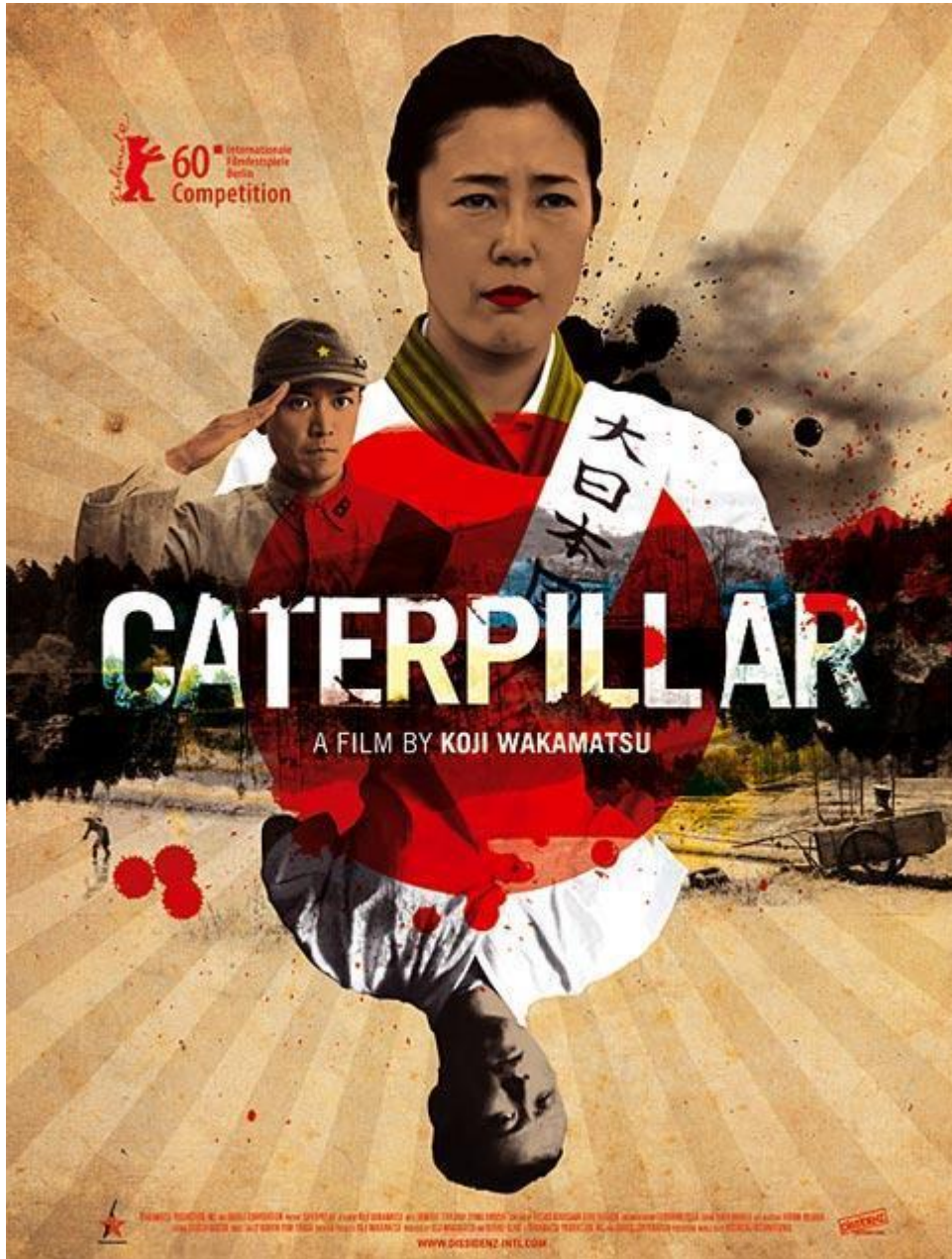
**Warning: next slide will depict insects coming out of a man and woman's body**



# Sensory Terror:

- What happens when all our senses are taken away?
- What are we if we cannot sense our surroundings? ***What is reality?***
- Sight as the “panoptic” sense
  - Being able to surveillance yourself and others with your eyes (Matsuyama Iwao, 1984)
- The power of the senses
  - “**Hearing** them again left an unpleasant **taste** in her mouth similar to what she **felt** when she bit into **eggplant grilled in oil**. It has a slippery taste. And how she detested it!” (407)





# War Allegory?

- What is the value of warfare?
- “Glory” of war
- Machines or living beings?
  - “This man, who had been a **brave and loyal** bulwark of the nation, was now like a kept **animal** or perhaps even a kind of **tool**” (408)
  - —“disabled soldier,” “that poor crippled man,” “crippled husband,” “lump of flesh,” and finally “strange gruesome object.”
- Story was banned in 1939 by Japanese government because it might hinder war effort

**Warning: next slide will depict a naked woman**





江戸川乱歩

芋虫



## Lust and Carnal Desire:

- Tokiko's monster within
  - “– the **hair-raising demon of desire** had dug in and **built a lair** in her heart of hearts” (408)
  - “Tormenting this completely helpless being – contrary to its own wishes – became the greatest **source of joy for her.**” (416)
- A result of geography?
  - The City as a space of sensual repression (Matsuyama Iwao, 1984)
  - Husband and wife move to the countryside
- Gouging of eyes removing his window to the world...an act of lust?
  - “Hadn't she really wanted to turn her husband into a living corpse? Hadn't she wanted to transform him once and for all into a toy top of flesh? Hadn't she wished to satisfy her insatiable cruelty to the core? [...] **He had yet to become her true toy top.**” (418)

# Breakout Discussion (15 mins):

1. How is sexuality depicted as a form of power or subjugation in the story? Who has power?
2. What was Sunaga trying to forgive before his death?



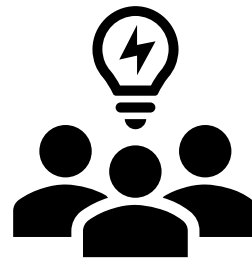
**Think** (by yourself)

**1 min**



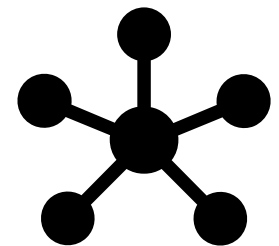
**Pair** (with a partner)

**4 min**



**Multiply** (find another pair)

**5 min**



**Share** (with the class)

**5 min**