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## JLL FORUM

### An Unsolved Mystery: The Paragraphs Omitted from Edogawa Ranpo's "The Human Chair"

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The story began more than half a century ago, but I became aware of the mystery only in 2008, through an act of reading. The scene: I am taking a course on theories of the body and modern Japanese literature. One of the assigned texts is Edogawa Ranpo's (1894–1965) story "The Human Chair," in James B. Harris's (1916–2004) translation, as reprinted in the *Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature*.<sup>1</sup> The instructor of the course also makes available a Japanese version of the text, from a 1960 collection of Edogawa's works.<sup>2</sup> At the time—in 2008, less than ten years after I began studying Japanese—I still found it useful to have a crib, although I had reached the point where I could read the Japanese version of a text first, and then "clean up," as it were, by reading the English.

And that, as I recall, is how I proceeded with Edogawa's story: I read the Japanese, and then the English. It was an eminently suitable text, incidentally, for a course on theories of the body. More importantly for present purposes, the story happens also to have an intricate, compact narrative structure, one that is designed to be inconclusive. To summarize the story briefly: an omniscient narrator tells of a writer named Yoshiko who receives a letter in the mail one day, from someone who identifies himself as a maker of furniture. As the letter indicates—for Edogawa's story now becomes the text of that letter—the writer specializes in making chairs, and one day he comes up with an idea: he builds a chair so large that he can conceal himself inside it. His chair is taken to a hotel in Yokohama that caters to wealthy foreigners, and at night he comes out



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from his hiding place and steals whatever valuables he can lay his hands on. In this manner, he rapidly amasses a fortune so great that he could live comfortably for the rest of his days, if he wished. However, the hotel is sold to new management: his chair is auctioned off, purchased by a high-ranking Japanese diplomat, and hauled away with its builder, our letter-writer, still inside it. In the diplomat's home, the chair is used primarily by the diplomat's wife, who is a noted fiction writer. The man inside the chair falls in love with the woman and confesses his love in a letter to her. With that admission, the first letter ends.

At this point, as the narrator informs us, Yoshiko is horrified, for the writer of the letter has identified *her* as his beloved. Then, however, a second letter arrives: it is from the same sender, who now claims that his first letter was a fiction, a draft of a manuscript, about which he would like to learn Yoshiko's expert opinion. Edogawa's story ends with the second letter's closing, and the reader is left uncertain about what is real and what is fiction.

That metafictional question, however, is not the mystery to which the title of the present essay alludes. Rather, what I noticed when comparing the Japanese and English versions of Edogawa's story was that, in the English translation, four paragraphs of the Japanese original had been omitted, without a footnote or any other explanation. Below, I will introduce those paragraphs in greater detail. For now, though, I want to focus elsewhere: why was the passage omitted? Did the translator omit the passage intentionally—and if so, why? Or did the translator base his English version on a Japanese version that was different from the one I had read, and if so, why were there multiple versions? And—most importantly—what steps would an inquisitive reader need to take in order to get to the bottom of this mystery?

### **Putting Students on the Trail**

The conventions of sequential narrative presentation have made it seem that the mystery to which I have alluded in the previous paragraph came to my attention when I read the story as a student and first noticed the omission. Nothing could be further from the case. I observed the omission, perhaps gave it a moment's thought, and then I set Edogawa's story aside. For me at the time, Edogawa's story was merely an assigned reading, one that was unrelated to the subject that I was then researching—modern Japanese poetry. And besides, some other investigator, I assumed, must have already found an explanation for the omission. My assumption, as I later learned, was incorrect; but more about that below.

It was only several years later—in the early months of 2022, in fact—that I returned to Edogawa’s story. I included Edogawa’s story on a syllabus for a course I was teaching, on media and Japanese popular culture at a small liberal arts college, for reasons that will be clear to anyone who has read “The Human Chair”: it memorably toggles between first-person and third-person narration, in a manner that renders transparent some of the quite distinct affordances and limitations of each. In that sense, it demonstrates effectively the problems that are raised when the written word is used as a medium for conveying a narrative.

In my syllabus, the module on textuality—on the written word as a medium—was near the end of the semester, a placement that was ultimately fortunate: by the time we were reading Edogawa’s story, other topics we had already discussed included cross-cultural localization, adaptation, and translation. (There was no language prerequisite: all the texts were taught in English translation.) By focusing on the paragraphs that had been omitted from “The Human Chair,” our in-class discussion of Edogawa’s story could shed new light on our earlier discussions of localization and transcultural adaptation. So, on a handout—which I distributed to the students partway through our session on Edogawa’s story—I provided my own translation of the four omitted paragraphs. Below, I copy the text of that handout, which also includes information about the story’s publication, to give point to the questions with which the handout concludes:

**Translation of the omitted paragraphs:**

Aside from this experience of having my affections thus transfer from one woman to another, I had strange experiences of an altogether different sort.<sup>3</sup>

To mention just one of these, there was the time when the ambassador of a powerful European country (whose identity I learned from listening to the gossip of the Japanese bellboys in the hotel) sat his enormous body on my lap. He was even more famous as a writer of world poetry than as a political figure; the simple fact that I had come to know the feel of his flesh was enough to cause in me a thrill of pride. Seated upon me, he spoke for some ten minutes or so with two or three of his countrymen, then stood up and departed. Of course, I had no idea what they were saying; but every time he moved his hands while speaking, the resulting slight displacements of his body—which was warmer, or so I imagined, than that of a normal person—caused an almost ticklish sensation, which was indescribably stimulating to me.

Suddenly I had the following thought: what if I were to take a slender dagger and push it through the leather of the chair so that it found its

way to the man's heart? What would happen then? The wound would of course be fatal: never again would he stand up, from his seat in the chair. There would be an uproar among Japanese politicians—to say nothing of those in the man's own country. The newspapers would run articles all breathless with the news.

The incident would have a profound effect on relations between Japan and the ambassador's country. Seen from the perspective of the arts, too, his death would be a loss felt all over the world. And I myself could make this great event a reality. I could not but feel a peculiar elation at the thought.

- The above paragraphs are a translation of a passage that can be found in Japanese at *Edogawa Ranpo kessakusen* 江戸川乱歩傑作選 (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1960), 236–237.<sup>4</sup> The whole story of “The Human Chair”—in Japanese, “Ningen isu” 人間椅子—appears on pages 220–244 of that volume, and is otherwise an evident match on the English translation that we have read for this class.
- On page 372 of the English translation by James B. Harris (1956), the passage translated above would appear immediately after the first complete paragraph (the one that ends “... I was perpetually shifting the object of my passions”).
- The original Japanese version of the story appeared in October 1925 in *Kuraku* 苦楽 magazine. Edogawa would have composed the story, therefore, sometime before October 1925.

Two questions:

1) If we try to identify the precise point in the text's history at which someone decided to omit the paragraphs that are given in translation above, we discover that there are many different possible agents who might be responsible. Identify as many of these as you can.

2) For what reasons might those various decisionmakers have omitted the paragraphs above?

Below, I discuss the students' answers to these questions. For now, however, let us raise some further questions of our own.

### Same Chair, Different Models

The mystery of the omitted paragraphs, I hypothesized, might be explained by the existence of another, different Japanese version of the text. Perhaps the translator, James B. Harris, had translated a version of the text that was different from the one that I had read.

As a hypothesis, this is surprisingly difficult to prove or disprove.

Unfortunately, Harris's translation anthology does not identify its source text; at this point in my investigation, then, I had little choice but to locate and examine the various versions of Edogawa's story. Now, since Harris's translation was published in 1956, there was, I concluded, no need to seek Japanese versions published later than that year.<sup>5</sup>

However, as my online searches discovered, there are over a dozen pre-1956 Japanese versions of Edogawa's story, many of which are not readily available in North American libraries. My university's library has what I would describe as scant holdings in Japanese—a not-atypical situation, for a small liberal arts institution. The interlibrary loan department, therefore, has been a constant support for my research; but interlibrary loans can be time-intensive—the wait can be as long as several weeks. Fortunately, the website of the National Diet Library (NDL) of Japan has digitized much of its material. Although some of that digitized material is available only from within the NDL itself, other materials are openly available to the public online.

Based on my investigations, which have relied on (1) the basic research tools that the Internet makes available and (2) interlibrary loans, I can say that every Japanese version that I have consulted has included the four paragraphs that were omitted from Harris's English translation. Below, in tabular form, are the pre-1956 versions that I consulted (Table 1).

Unless I travel to Japan, I will probably not be able to examine all the extant printings of “Ningen isu” in Japanese—by which I mean, to be clear, all the extant printings of the story that I have been able to locate by using database searches. (Other versions, not recorded in the databases that are known to me, might also exist.) It bears noting that, since the onset of pandemic conditions in early 2020, a short trip to Japan for research purposes has become, while not impossible, certainly impracticable, for someone who is a U. S. citizen. Hence, I will not be able to establish, beyond a shadow of a doubt, whether there is an extant Japanese version that lacks the four paragraphs about the assassination.

This doubt would still remain, however, even if I were able to travel to Japan and examine the holdings of *every* archive: it is possible that once-available versions have been lost. One tends to pin one's hopes on the national archive and its extensive holdings, but I should observe that even in the case of a comparatively recent and popular text such as “Ningen isu,” the NDL's holdings are not as complete as one might wish.

Year	Title	Publisher	“Ningen isu” is on pages...	Assassination passage is on pages...	Availability
1925	<i>Kuraku</i> vol. 4 no. 4	Osaka: Puratonsha	352–369	363–364	ILL borrowing (mailed from Japan)
1926	<i>Sōsaku tantei shōsetsu shū</i> , vol. 2	Tokyo: Shun’yōdō	261–287	278–279	NDL (digital)
1927	<i>Edogawa Ranpo shū</i> ( <i>Gendai taishū bungaku zenshū</i> , vol. 3)	Tokyo: Heibonsha	385–409	402–403	ILL borrowing
1931	<i>Meiji Taishō bungaku zenshū</i> , vol. 56	Tokyo: Shun’yōdō	74–89	84	ILL borrowing
1937	<i>Gensō to kaiki</i> (author Edogawa)	Tokyo: Hankakusō 版画荘 (?)	65–94	85–86	NDL (digital)

Table 1. Pre-1956 Versions of “Ningen isu” Consulted.

The first entry in the table above gives information about the first serialization of “Ningen isu”—but that version is not available at the Tokyo branch of the NDL. According to my online searches, the prewar series of the magazine *Kuraku*, in which Edogawa’s story was first published, is held at the Kansai branch of the NDL, in microform. It appears that the library of Waseda University, too, has a microform of *Kuraku*—which I ascertained by checking the Waseda University Library database.<sup>6</sup> The point I want to make is simple: if a researcher wishes to determine a fact about a popular and often reprinted text such as Edogawa’s, the difficulty of merely identifying all the extant versions can be prohibitive, perhaps even insurmountable, to say nothing of actually being able to acquire and examine each of those versions.<sup>7</sup>

### Was It the Translator, in the Library, with a Wrench?

Finding and acquiring all the early versions of Edogawa’s story would seem to be a straightforward task, but, as already mentioned, interlibrary

loan takes time. Available online databases suggest that many editions of Edogawa's work are held only in non-circulating archives in Japan. These points have a discouraging effect: why begin this quest when I cannot complete it without traveling to Japan and visiting at least one archive, preferably more than one?

I now try a different tack and turn my attention to the translator, James B. Harris (1916–2004). Translators, after all, are actors in their own right: it is usually the literary translator, for example, who chooses which texts to translate in the first place. The translator exercises many other varieties of agency, as well: when translating a given text, a translator sometimes excises words, sentences, paragraphs, or even longer segments of text, in order to create a readable whole. Arthur Waley, for example, silently omitted an entire chapter in his translation of *Genji monogatari*.<sup>8</sup> Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel translated Murakami Haruki's two-volume *Andōguraundo* as the considerably shorter, one-volume *Underground*.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps when translating Edogawa's story Harris exercised his judgment and shortened the text.

It is difficult, however, to ascribe the omission to Harris with certainty, because—by Harris's own admission—the translation was produced in somewhat unusual circumstances. In the preface to his 1956 anthology of Edogawa's stories, Harris described his translation practice:

A brief description of the manner in which this book was translated may also prove to be of interest to the reader, for it was undertaken under unique conditions. Edogawa Rampo [*sic*], while fully capable of reading and understanding English, lacks the ability to write or speak it. On the other hand, the translator, a Eurasian of English-Japanese parentage, while completely fluent in spoken Japanese, is quite unable to read or write the language, as he was educated solely in English schools. Hence, for each line translated, the two collaborators, meeting once a week for a period of five years,<sup>10</sup> were forced to overcome manifold difficulties in getting every line just right, the author reading each line in Japanese several times and painstakingly explaining the correct meaning and nuance, and the translator sweating over his typewriter having to experiment with sentence after sentence until the author was fully satisfied with what had been set down in English.<sup>11</sup>

What Harris describes here is indeed most accurately termed a collaboration. Therefore, Edogawa himself may have had a say in the omission—a possibility that I will further examine below. But first, a few more words about Harris himself.

Harris, as he explains in this passage, was the son of a British father and a Japanese mother. His Japanese name was Hirayanagi Hideo 平柳秀夫; but Harris never learned to write Japanese, and received all his education in English. In his memoir, for example, Harris observes that he “spoke Japanese almost completely without impediment; but everything I thought and wrote was in English.”<sup>12</sup> Edogawa’s collected works include his own autobiographical reminiscences, which corroborate the point about Harris’s English and Japanese language abilities.<sup>13</sup> Harris—by means that Edogawa does not recount—came to be employed as a sort of amanuensis for Edogawa, handling Edogawa’s English-language correspondence for a time, and it was this relationship that led to Harris and Edogawa collaborating on the English translation of Edogawa’s stories.<sup>14</sup>

Let us return to Harris’s description of his collaboration with Edogawa in the introduction to *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. The description raises many questions, as Harris seems to anticipate. The phrase “manifold difficulties” elides much: what difficulties? Seth Jacobowitz has observed that “three of the five years [during which Harris and Edogawa collaborated] took place during the American Occupation as Tokyo slowly recovered from the air raids that had destroyed substantial portions of the capital city.”<sup>15</sup> The fact that the collaboration between Harris and Edogawa began during the Occupation (1945–1952) might explain the omission of the paragraphs about assassination: perhaps the expectation of being censored by Occupation authorities, who restricted what could be published in Japan, might have led Harris or Edogawa to cut the possibly offensive passage preemptively.<sup>16</sup> However, the collaboration between Harris and Edogawa ended *after* the Occupation; therefore, in the absence of more information about the chronology of their collaboration (was “Ningen isu” translated during the Occupation, or after?), one can only speculate. Mark Silver, writing about a different story by Edogawa (namely, “Akai heya” 赤い部屋), mentions a passage that was omitted in Harris’s translation but attributes the omission to Edogawa himself: “This passage [in the story ‘Akai heya’] is omitted in James B. Harris’ translation into English in the volume *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*. The omission was presumably made at Ranpo’s own direction, since Harris’ preface to the translation describes an unusually close collaboration between translator and author.”<sup>17</sup> Silver’s “presumably” is a justifiable interpretation, but it still does not answer the question: *why* make the omission? If Silver is correct, then Edogawa would be the only



person who could give a firsthand explanation of the omission. And Silver's interpretation—that Edogawa himself would have authorized the omission—is only one possible interpretation of the case.

As the last point about Harris's collaboration with Edogawa on the English translation, a detail mentioned in Edogawa's autobiographical reminiscences about Harris suggests that Edogawa may not have known that some passages were left out of the English translation. Edogawa writes that Harris himself was a writer of short stories, some of which he arranged to have published in Japanese: as Edogawa observes, Harris "frequently" had his "thrillers" (*surirā shōsetsu*) published in such magazines as *Tankai* 譚海 (Sea of stories). What is interesting here is that "Harris was constantly venting his frustrations" (*Harisu-kun wa itsumo fuman o morashiteita*) at the fact that his stories, when translated into Japanese, tended to be abridged: most of Harris's published stories appeared as *shōyaku* 抄訳 or "abridged translations," as Edogawa recalls.<sup>18</sup> (One, at least, of Harris's writings was translated in its entirety [*shikkari shita mono*], in a Japanese version by Tatsunokuchi Naotarō, as Edogawa reports.)<sup>19</sup> Significantly, in Edogawa's descriptions of the anthology of his own stories as translated into English by Harris, those translations are *not* described as *shōyaku*.<sup>20</sup> That fact suggests—although I go no farther than suggesting, on this evidentiary basis—that Edogawa may not have been aware that there were discernible divergences between the English and Japanese versions of his stories.<sup>21</sup> On that view of things, Edogawa would have had no hand in making the omission.

### Student Views

There are other possible explanations for the missing passage in "The Human Chair." Might the editors at Tuttle Publishing have objected to the mention of assassination? That was one scenario proposed by my students; I subsequently attempted to contact Tuttle directly, to learn whether the publisher might still have in their possession any materials pertaining to the editing of Harris's translation anthology, but I received no reply to my queries (an email and a telephone message).

Other scenarios were also mooted. One student, knowledgeable about the history of politics in the 1930s in Japan, wondered whether, at some point during that decade, political assassination became a topic too hot to touch; perhaps, as this student surmised, a 1930s version of Edogawa's story would have been published without the paragraphs about assassination, and that expurgated version would have become the basis of

Harris's translation.<sup>22</sup> As noted already, however, all of the 1930s versions of the story that I have examined have contained the passage about the assassination.<sup>23</sup>

A few students wondered whether a criterion related to public morality could have played a part in the omission of the passage. One student offered that the passage about the contemplated assassination seems to glorify wickedness (“glorifies killing” was the phrase the student used), and the maker of the chair does seem to revel in the prospect of committing a crime with impunity, the implication being that an unpunished murder—of a high-profile diplomat, no less—would have been a crime too far, from the censors' point of view.<sup>24</sup> Another student observed that the omitted passage includes hints of what might be homosexual proclivities in the letter-writer: the passage describes the “thrill” and the “indescribably stimulating” sensation that the man inside the chair feels when he is sat on by the European ambassador, who is explicitly male. The evocation of the ambassador's male body stands in gendered contrast with other passages in the story, in which the man inside the chair describes a more heteronormative delight that he feels when in proximity with the bodies of the females who have sat on him. Now, in my course syllabus, the Edogawa story was not paired with a reading on twentieth-century censorship policies in Japan, but such a secondary reading could give point to speculations as to the reasons why the text might have been censored, on the assumption that censorship actually was brought to bear on “The Human Chair.”<sup>25</sup>

One point that the students in my class did not raise: the possibility of what might be called scribal error. The four paragraphs of omitted Japanese text are, in many formats, almost exactly one page long. It is just possible that, in some versions of the text, the four omitted paragraphs were printed on exactly one page of text, which then was inadvertently passed over. Now, I have not seen a version of Edogawa's text in which the four paragraphs about assassination appear on one page exactly; but, as already noted, I have not yet seen every printed version of the story.

### **A Few Observations on Pedagogy**

For raising questions about translation as a form of localization, a history of unexplained textual discrepancy such as we find in the English version of “The Human Chair” can be effective. Localization, because it refers to so many processes, is not easy to define, but it might loosely be described as what happens to a cultural property when it is prepared for distribution

in a context sufficiently different from its point of origin. In my course on media and Japanese popular culture, questions of localization tended to center on phenomena such as the subtitling of films, or the mirroring of graphic narratives (in those instances when a *manga* that had been printed from right to left in Japan ended up being presented, in English translation, as reading from left to right). Early in the semester my students and I had read together a theoretical text on localization—the introductory chapter of Anthony Pym’s *The Moving Text*—and the theme of localization had recurred frequently over the subsequent weeks.<sup>26</sup> The paragraphs omitted from “The Human Chair” might have been cut as a result, one might surmise, of the text’s localization for mid-twentieth-century Anglophone readerships.

One fundamental consideration: in the case of an *unexplained* textual divergence, the word *omission* might actually not be accurate. In the absence of definite reason to believe that a specific actor—author, editor, translator, compositor, publisher—made a conscious decision to excise four paragraphs from a text, it becomes advisable to suspend judgment as to what happened, in the most basic sense. What might appear to be an intervention on the part of a translator or editor might be simply an error of transcription, just to choose one example.

The passage that has been “omitted” from “The Human Chair” is brief and self-contained, and therefore it lends itself to comparably self-contained in-class analysis. A one-day session on the text can begin with a discussion of Harris’s translation as-is; after that discussion has touched on questions that are germane to the pedagogical goals of the course, a translation of the omitted passage may be distributed, and students still have ample time to read and discuss the new material.

In the case of Edogawa’s story, it so happened that I was aware of the disparity between the original of the Japanese text and its English translation. But this disparity came to my attention serendipitously, only after I had read both versions of the text. Speaking only for myself, I must say that the trust I repose in translators is usually complete and unquestioning; I rarely check a translation carefully against its original. Which is not to say that I approach every translation as some ideal representation of the source text: what I mean is that I rarely have reason to question a translator’s choices, and if I ever do have reason to make a close comparison, usually I can make sense of how a given passage of English translation was inspired by the corresponding passage in the Japanese original. But this is not the case with the omission—which I find

intriguingly inexplicable—of the paragraphs from Harris’s version of Edogawa’s story.

Depending on the course material and the students’ reading facility in Japanese, an instructor might assign students to *seek* divergences between translations and their originals. Such an assignment might sound tedious, on the face of it; but a divergence, once uncovered, can give rise to exciting questions.

### **On Reporting Inconclusive Findings in Literary Scholarship**

In sum, then, based on the evidence that I have been able to amass, I do not (yet) have answers to the questions I posed about Edogawa’s story and its translation. Perhaps the questions as formulated will ultimately prove unanswerable.

There is a genre of mystery writing in which the investigator, far from being an all-knowing and infinitely wise student of human behavior, is a bungler and a meddler. In this genre, the principal suspense of the story arises from the anticipation of the next foolish mistake the protagonist will make. Now, it is clear that no researcher wants to appear like one of those clueless, bungling investigators. As a point about the phenomenology of research, however, it might be useful to admit that there is a nonzero number of researchers who have begun an investigation that came to nothing. At a certain point—after months, perhaps, or even years—one takes stock of a failed investigation: would more time resolve the difficulty? Would access to a different archive solve the problem? Should one, therefore, take steps to secure a greater fund of time or archival materials? Or should one stop throwing good money after bad, as it were, and set the project aside as being unviable—as being unlikely to turn up any definite, publishable results?

The publication of inconclusive findings is a rarity in humanities fields at present. By this statement, I do not mean that one never encounters published essays, inconclusive by design, that raise provocative questions; such essays are common. By *inconclusive finding* I mean something specific: I am referring to a research itinerary that has not yet reached—and possibly can never reach—its hoped-for destination. A researcher has posed a question, has begun a program of research—and has not yet arrived at an answer. Perhaps the answer is not accessible to the researcher, given their present research situation; or perhaps the researcher has discovered that, due to the incompleteness of the archives themselves, the answer can never be attained.

The value of such results should not be underestimated. One obvious reason: the publication of a research program that has turned up no findings would spare other researchers the repetition (perhaps unwitting) of the same itinerary. Another reason to value such non-findings is that their publication would conduce, I believe, to fuller discussions of research methodology: if one approach is seen to fail, perhaps a different one might succeed—and deciding *which* different tack to take is itself deserving of public discussion. The biologist Stephen Jay Gould made the following observations about a problem that he noticed in the sciences a few decades ago:

Few observers outside science (and not nearly enough researchers inside) recognize the severe effects of biased reporting. The problem is particularly acute, almost perverse, when scientists construct experiments to test for an expected effect. Confirmations are joyfully reported; negative results are usually begrudgingly admitted. But null results—the failure to find any effect in any direction—are usually viewed as an experiment gone awry. Meticulous scientists may publish such results, but they disappear forthwith from the secondary literature (and are almost never reported in the press). Most scientists probably don't publish such results at all—who has time to write up ambiguous and unexciting data? And besides, they rationalize, maybe next week we'll have time to do the experiment again and get better results. I call such nonreporting perverse because we cannot gauge its depth and extent. Therefore, we do not know the proper relative frequencies of most effects—a monumental problem in sciences of natural history, where nearly all theoretical claims are arguments about relative frequencies, not statements about exclusivity.<sup>27</sup>

With Gould, I think it would be useful to consider anew the possible utility of publishing “ambiguous and unexciting data,” of writing up and examining the “null results” of one's research projects. While the present essay is comparatively narrow in its focus, I propose that scholars might find value in reading the outlines of projects that have been abandoned by top researchers in the humanities—projects with greater scope, geared toward hoped-for publication as monographs—and learning, further, the precise difficulties that caused those researchers to set those projects aside.

As a final observation, I should note that the nonreporting that I am describing here is different from the so-called replication crisis in the sciences. The replication crisis, as I understand it, has raised questions about certain fundamental elements of scientific practice, because results

that had been reported to be replicated (or replicable) in fact had not been replicated (or were not deemed replicable) according to scholarly norms.<sup>28</sup> That crisis is generating an ongoing, high-stakes debate and continues to have effects in various areas of scientific research. The difficulty that I am trying to represent in this short essay is of another sort—the difficulty of writing persuasively about an as-yet-unvalidated hypothesis. There is an explicit and I think perfectly comprehensible bias toward publishing the *findings* of research and a concomitant bias against descriptions of the *seeking*, especially when that process of seeking has arrived at only inconclusive results—if inconclusive results can be called results at all.

The seeking can be pleasurable in itself. Rather than describing research as a quest for truth or a search for enlightenment, I prefer to think of research as *looking for answers*. Those answers, as we know, will give rise to new questions in turn. However, it is obviously not always the case that one finds the answers that one sought. *Not finding answers* is an inevitable fact of the researcher's life—inevitable, and insufficiently recognized as such. Readers have become accustomed to the inconclusiveness of well-crafted stories such as Edogawa's "Ningen isu"; inconclusiveness of a similar sort would be welcome, I maintain, in written accounts of scholarly research, as well.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Edogawa Ranpo, "The Human Chair," trans. James B. Harris, in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature, Volume 1: From Restoration to Occupation, 1864–1945*, ed. by J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 365–375. Harris's translation was earlier published as "The Human Chair," in Edogawa Rampo [*sic*], *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, trans. James B. Harris (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1956), 1–23. Readers should note that the revised Hepburn romanization of Edogawa's given name is Ranpo; when the spelling Rampo is used by other writers, I follow it with a *sic* but retain that spelling (so that readers can find the materials to which I refer).

<sup>2</sup> Edogawa Ranpo 江戸川乱歩, "Ningen isu" 人間椅子, in *Edogawa Ranpo kessakusen* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1960), 220–244.

<sup>3</sup> Harris's translation seems to include a truncated version of this paragraph. In Harris's translation, the sentence before the omission is: "But not withstanding

the species or types, one and all had a special magnetic allure quite distinctive from the others, and *I was perpetually shifting the object of my passions* [emphasis added].” That last phrase seems to be derived from the first paragraph that I am describing, in this paper, as having been omitted from Harris’s translation. See Edogawa Ranpo, “The Human Chair,” trans. James B. Harris, in *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature, Volume 1: From Restoration to Occupation, 1864–1945*, ed. by J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 372.

<sup>4</sup> Here is the passage as it appears in the Japanese edition that I mention in the handout:

そうして、女から女へと移って行くあいだに、私はまた、それとは別な、不思議な経験をも味わいました。

そのひとつは、ある時、歐洲の或る強国の大使が（日本人のボーイの噂話によって知ったのですが）その偉大な体軀を、私の膝の上へのせたことでございます。それは、政治家としてよりも、世界的な詩人として、いっそうよく知られていた人ですが、それだけに、私は、その偉人の肌を知ったことが、わくわくするほども、誇らしく思われたのでございます。彼は私の上で、二三人の同国人を相手に、十分ばかり話をすると、そのまま立ち去ってしまいました。むろん、何を言っていたのか、私にはさっぱりわかりませんが、ジェスチュアをするたびに、ムクムクと動く、常人よりも暖かいと思われる肉体の、くすぐるような感触が、私に一種名状すべからざる刺戟を与えたのでございます。

その時、私はふとこんなことを想像しました。もし！ この革のうしろから、鋭いナイフで彼の心臓を目がけて、グサリとひと突きしたなら、どんな結果を惹き起こすであろう。むろん、それは彼に再び起つことのできぬ致命傷を与えるに相違ない。彼の本国はもとより、日本の政治界は、そのために、どんな大騒ぎを演じるであろう。新聞は、どんな激情的な記事を掲げるであろう。

それは、日本と彼の本国との外交関係にも大きな影響を与えようし、また芸術の立場から見ても、彼の死は世界の一大損失に相違ない。そんな大事件が、自分の一挙手によって、やすやすと実現できるのだ。それを思うと、私は不思議な得意を感じないではいられませんでした。

The passage above reflects a slightly modernized typography; the earliest version, from 1925, uses pervasive *rubi* and has a higher number of ideographs.

<sup>5</sup> Sari Kawana has suggested that Harris’s anthology of Edogawa’s stories was based on “a collection of Edogawa Ranpo’s stories from the 1920s.” See Kawana, *Murder Most Modern: Detective Fiction and Japanese Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 223). However, one of the stories included in Harris’s anthology is titled “The Cliff,” based on the story

titled “Dangai” 断崖, which was originally published in 1950. I grant that all the other stories in Harris’s translation anthology are based on originals which were published in the 1920s; but the inclusion of “The Cliff” in Harris’s selection means that Kawana’s statement cannot be accepted outright.

<sup>6</sup> I received the *Kuraku* version of “Ningen isu” as a photocopy, mailed to me through interlibrary loan. The specialists at my library have indicated that the lender was Waseda University Library. Now, the photocopy contained no pages except those of the story itself; hence, I have no definite record of the volume, or even the magazine, in which those pages originated. The volume and issue number that I have provided in the table are based on the information about the first publication of “Ningen isu” at *Edogawa Ranpo zenshū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1979), 2:313.

<sup>7</sup> Wider searches complicate the issue even further. A search (on July 21, 2022) in the WorldCat database for *Edogawa Ranpo zenshu*, even when limited to 1956 and earlier, turns up 124 hits. Many of these hits do not provide tables of contents, so it is not always clear whether any given volume contains the story “Ningen isu.” A WorldCat search for “*Ningen isu*” (between quotes) returns ninety-four hits; when these results are arranged by publication date, the *earliest* is dated 1951. Such are the vicissitudes of database-based research.

<sup>8</sup> The *Suzumushi* chapter of *Tale of Genji* appears in the translations by Edward Seidensticker (1976), Royall Tyler (2001), and Dennis Washburn (2015), but Arthur Waley (1933) omitted it. A note is no place for a full summary either of the *Tale of Genji* itself or of its reception, but I will observe that *Suzumushi* is brief—some eight pages, in Seidensticker’s translation—and contains, among other things, several moving reflections on the transience of life. Its omission does not render the narrative incomprehensible, perhaps, but surely there is no harm in including it.

<sup>9</sup> Birnbaum and Gabriel’s English translation (2000) combines Murakami’s *Andōguraundo* (1997) and *Yakusoku sareta basho de: Underground 2* (1998) in a single volume, itself titled *Underground*. A comparison of the tables of contents shows that several interviews were cut from the translation of the 1997 volume (*Andōguraundo*)—the English translation omits roughly half of the sixty-some interviews that originally appeared in the Japanese *Andōguraundo*. See Murakami Haruki, *Andōguraundo* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1997), table of contents; Murakami Haruki, *Yakusoku sareta basho de: Underground 2* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1998), table of contents; and Haruki Murakami, *Underground*, trans. Alfred Birnbaum and Philip Gabriel (New York: Vintage, 2000), vii–x.

<sup>10</sup> Edogawa’s autobiographical reminiscence on this period does include a translation of Harris’s introduction to *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, after which Edogawa comments that Harris’s “five years” (the alleged duration of their collaboration) is “an exaggeration” (*kochō* 誇張);



however, Edogawa does not provide a more accurate alternative figure as a corrective to Harris's account. See Edogawa Ranpo, *Tantei shōsetsu 40-nen ge*, (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, [1956] 2006), 587.

- <sup>11</sup> James B. Harris, "Translator's Preface," in Edogawa Ranpo [sic], *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, trans. James B. Harris (Tokyo: Tuttle, 1956), xi.
- <sup>12</sup> James B. Harris, *Boku wa nihonhei datta*, trans. Gotō Shinki (Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 1986), 243. As its title suggests, Harris's memoir is primarily about his time as a soldier for the Japanese side in World War II; it appears not to contain reflections on his literary tastes or his postwar translation work.
- <sup>13</sup> Edogawa Ranpo, *Tantei shōsetsu 40-nen ge* (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, [1956] 2006), 396.
- <sup>14</sup> For Harris's work as Edogawa's amanuensis, see Edogawa Ranpo, *Tantei shōsetsu 40-nen ge* (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, [1956] 2006), 581–582. It is possible that Harris and Edogawa's shared interest in short stories (thrillers, mysteries) was the basis for their connection, but I offer this only as a surmise. I have sought other writings by Harris for clarification, but this investigation has not been as informative as I had hoped. In the 1977 version of *A Handbook of American English Conversation*, to which Harris contributed, the one-paragraph biographical note about Harris makes no mention of his work as a translator. See Kōmoto Sutezaburō, J. L. Shrauger, and J. B. Harris, *Kaitei shinpan Nichibei kaiwa hikkei = A Handbook of American English Conversation* (Tokyo: Ōbunsha, 1977), 2.
- <sup>15</sup> Edogawa Ranpo, *The Edogawa Ranpo [sic] Reader*, ed. and trans. by Seth Jacobowitz (Fukuoka: Kurodahan Press, 2008), 222n4.
- <sup>16</sup> For a recent and nuanced examination of the effects of censorship on Occupation-era writings in Japanese, see Jonathan Abel, *Redacted: The Archives of Censorship in Transwar Japan* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2012), 14–17 and passim. I might add that Abel (177–183) provides an insightful reading of the redaction of Edogawa's 1929 story "Mushi" 虫.
- <sup>17</sup> Mark Silver, *Purloined Letters: Cultural Borrowing and Japanese Crime Literature, 1868–1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 197n34. As Silver observes elsewhere, Harris's "translation[s of Edogawa's tales are] relatively free, and in some places entire paragraphs have been excised" (196n17). Although Silver examines "Ningen isu" extensively—he even mentions the passage about the assassination (196n18)—he does not call attention to the omission of that passage in Harris's translation. I thank Dr. Silver for personally replying to my further queries on this matter in an email exchange.

- <sup>18</sup> Edogawa Ranpo, *Tantei shōsetsu 40-nen ge* (Tokyo: Kōbunsha, [1956] 2006), 396.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid., 581–591.
- <sup>21</sup> I hesitate to conclude too much based on these observations because, for example, perhaps Edogawa did not want to suggest that he was dissatisfied with the translation; or, perhaps, the alterations made in the English translation of Edogawa’s stories were not extensive enough to be considered as abridgments by Edogawa. In any case, in the writings I have seen, Edogawa does not clarify what qualifies as a *shōyaku*. It would, in theory, be possible to compare the English originals of Harris’s stories—if those originals are still extant somewhere—with the versions in Japanese translation, to gauge the extent of the alleged abridgment.
- <sup>22</sup> Patricia Welch has identified Edogawa’s story “The Caterpillar” (“Imomushi” 芋虫) as Edogawa’s “only story to be censored” (“Foreword: Excess, Alienation and Ambivalence: Edogawa Rampo’s [*sic*] Tales of Mystery and Imagination,” in Edogawa Rampo, *Japanese Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, trans. James B. Harris [Tokyo: Tuttle, 2012], 25). For more about the censoring of “Imomushi,” see Mizusawa Fujio, “Satō Haruo ‘Ritsugisha,’ Edogawa Ranpo ‘Imomushi’ no ken’etsu” (*Nihon kindai bungaku* 83 [2010]), 202–204.
- <sup>23</sup> While we are on the subject of political assassination in Japan, I should note that the French translation of Edogawa’s story—“La chaise humaine,” as translated by Jean-Christian Bouvier—contains the passage about the contemplated assassination. Moreover, Bouvier offers a hypothesis—with tongue in cheek—as to the identity of the person sitting in the chair: in a footnote, Bouvier writes that “a French reader will descry here a hitherto unpublicized episode in the life of Paul Claudel, who was the French ambassador to Japan at the time [when the story was published].” See Edogawa Ranpo, *La chambre rouge*, trans. Jean-Christian Bouvier (Paris: Éditions Philippe Picquier, 1990), 43n1. Claudel was, indeed, a widely known author, not unlike the victim of the chairmaker’s would-be assassination.
- <sup>24</sup> I did not push back against the student’s observations on this point, but one could rejoin that the omission of the passage in which the letter-writer contemplates murder in itself does nothing to offset all the other passages about the other crimes—thefts, principally—that the letter-writer claims he did commit.
- <sup>25</sup> It bears observing that the censorship regimes of militarist Japan and of the Allied Occupation—neither of which were monolithic, transhistorically unchanging institutions in the first place—would have had different criteria for censorship. Assuming that the Occupation-era standards are the ones that

mattered most for the translation of Edogawa's story into English, I find useful Mark McLelland's essay "Sex and Censorship during the Occupation of Japan," in his *Love, Sex and Democracy in Japan during the American Occupation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 49–70.

<sup>26</sup> Anthony Pym, "Distribution," in *The Moving Text: Localization, Translation, and Distribution* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2004), 1–28.

<sup>27</sup> Stephen Jay Gould, *An Urchin in the Storm* (New York: Norton, 1987), 37.

<sup>28</sup> One paper that usefully summarizes some of the key issues of the current "replication crisis" in the sciences is John P. A. Ioannidis, "Why Science is Not Necessarily Self-Correcting," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 7.6 (November 2012): 645–654.