

Akutagawa Ryunosuke:

Three Themes

by

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to examine the workings of three themes within the fiction of Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892-1927), to explore how these themes interrelate to form a portrait of their author's alienation from the world and from himself. These are: nature's hostility to the artist and his efforts to combat that; woman and her association with nature, disease, and death; and the Double as a mockery of the authored self by the authoring self. Each theme is discussed in a separate chapter; a concluding chapter explores the way in which the three themes merge in one specific short story, "Haguruma" (1927; tr. Cogwheel, 1965).

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Preface

My text for Akutagawa's works is the Iwanami Publishers edition of Akutagawa's complete works, the Akutagawa Ryunosuke Zenshu, Iwanami Shoten, Tokyo, 1954. Hereafter reference to Akutagawa's work will be given as only the volume and page number from this edition. All translations from Akutagawa, Shiga Naoya, and Yoshida Seiichi are my own, as is their inelegance. All other translations are as noted.

I wish to express my gratitude to those I have met in the course of my studies at the University of British Columbia, in particular to the faculty and staff members of the Department of Asian Studies. This present study has in a very real sense been written of ideas generously given to me by others.

How one faces the end of one's life is often more important in demonstrating one's character than how one has lived; this is true in virtually all cultural contexts. Death is the defining factor against which all people must measure themselves, though this is usually done as a denial, or at least a perpetual deferment of the realization of mortality. To grasp this mortality in one's hands, to grapple with sentience and the inevitable loss of one's conscious self, becomes for most an impossibility: they turn to the palliative of religion, mysticism, or thoughts of reincarnation to steal some measure of reassurance that no, indeed, they shall never truly die. Christian mythology postulates an eternal life in a perfect place, a return, in fact, to the place whence all things began. Asian philosophy, specifically Buddhism, insists on the identification of all things with each other; hence, one's 'death' in one form is but a transformational stage into another. But what of those who, while witnessing the cyclical nature of nature, nonetheless perceive the end of each individual existence, and in so doing realize that they too must die; how do these people, innocent of the desperately sophisticated claims of both religion and philosophy, face their ultimately undeniable fate? Camus writes that

there is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question... All the rest...comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer . (Camus, p.3).

This is indeed the problem faced by those without a borrowed ethical code to force a meaning, a value onto life: what is its worth to them? For some, though life is a precious commodity, the pain of illness makes its termination more precious; for others an acute sense of anxiety will push them beyond their limits. Others will live on, enduring all manner of hardships, for the simple pleasure of feeding their cats or listening to the tones of a cello. These people have all through their actions found an answer. For us, those who have chosen to live, who have found a significance to life, even if only a personal one (and of course this is the best one), are no longer here of any interest, save as a background, a norm against which to compare the others, those who, for whatever reason, have chosen to take their own lives. This itself is a curious phrase, 'to take one's life'. It implies that those who do not commit suicide are somehow less responsible for their existence than those who do; and this is rather misleading. I believe, following Sartre, that all people are ultimately in control of their own lives. Even those who have chosen to follow a ready-made set of morals must still choose to implement them. Those who do not kill themselves have chosen not to; those who do have chosen to claim a final proof of their own self responsibility: the choice of the time of their death. For some in the West, suicide is a sin; it gives to man privileges reserved for a deity, the privileges reserved for one who controls. Man's suicide becomes hubris, claiming the status of a god. For those in

other parts of the world, however, suicide receives a more sympathetic eye. In Japan, suicide has long been a potentially redemptive, though still tragic, thing, whereby one could regain, for example, respect lost through an embarrassment, or put an end to one's self-doubts. Many Japanese intellectuals and writers have chosen suicide; Mishima Yukio (1925-1970) is perhaps best known in the West of these for his spectacular, ritualized suicide in 1970. Even without the stigma of Christian damnation attached to it, suicide is not an easily-settled-on solution; how then does one reach this decision? Along which road must one trudge to arrive at this determined end?

Within the life of one Japanese writer, Akutagawa Ryunosuke (1892-1927), death was a haunting presence; Akutagawa too committed suicide, at the age of thirty-five, leaving behind him some 150 short works of fiction which contain numerous clues as to their author's views of the world which influenced his decision to end his life. In his writing a variety of themes recur; among these are a fear of the cyclicity and corruption within nature; a mistrust of woman and an association of her with disease; and a covert division of himself into the writer and the written, into two halves which his use of the Double demonstrates. In Akutagawa's work these three themes merge into a portrait of one who, by virtue of his alienation from the world in which he lived, and fear of what the future held for him, strove to create an existence for himself on the printed page. He always knew, though, that this existence was fictional. This knowledge led to his depiction of the Double as a

pursuing, mocking entity able to live integrated within society and nature, and eventually, I feel, led to his abandonment of the 'fictional' life he had lived for the reality which was suicide.

Akutagawa Ryunosuke was born on March 1, 1892, as the eldest son of a well-to-do family, named Niihara. Soon after birth he was put out in adoption to the Akutagawa family, his mother's maiden house. This adoption was because

Ryunosuke...was born during an ill-omened year. Therefore, following an old superstition, it was decided that the family should conduct the ceremony of 'abandoning' their child...Ryunosuke's ill-starred destiny, over which one may consider a dark shadow to have already fallen before his birth, contained what must be a child's worst fortune. This was his mother's falling ill before his first year had passed...she went insane after Ryunosuke's ninth month (Yoshida, pp.7-8).

Herein we find the first causes of Akutagawa's alienation from the world. What Akutagawa retained of his original home was the knowledge that he was the son of a madwoman.

The influence his mother's insanity had on Ryunosuke's psychology was great. His self-consciousness of being the son of a madwoman and the fears of his having inherited her insanity, together with the decline of his physical condition (in later years) gradually grew severe; that this is one cause which drove him to suicide is fairly clear (Yoshida, p.8).

Akutagawa's mother lived for ten years after her son's birth. During that time he had occasion to visit her. Looking back on those visits he wrote later that

I never felt a maternal intimacy for my mother. My mother, while sitting alone...her hair done up, ...would smoke tobacco in a long pipe. Her face was small, her body was small. Somehow that face was an absolutely lifeless, ashen colour. When at some point I read the Seisoki [a prose work from Tang China] and came across the words 'earth', 'mouth', 'spirit', 'mud', 'stink', and 'taste', I thought of precisely my mother's face -- that emaciated profile (quoted in Yoshida, pp.8-9).

One should note the associations here between the mother and earth or mud; such a connection between the mother and the earth will recur time and again.

The period into which Akutagawa was born too is significant in his life (Sartre writes of one's era:

it is... a waste of time to ask what I should have been if [I had been born in a different time] for I have chosen myself as one of the possible meanings of the epoch... I am not distinct from that same epoch; I could not be transported to another epoch without contradiction (Sartre, p. 709)).

Akutagawa was born in 1892, twenty-four years after the Meiji Restoration which marked the beginning of a revolutionary period in Japanese history. In 1600 Japan had closed its borders to all foreign contact; this condition, known as 'sakoku' or 'the closed country', was maintained for over 250 years until in 1853 Commodore Perry of the United States Navy forced Japan's then military government to open the country to trade. Internal tensions led to a civil war in Japan (the first in over 200 years) which saw in 1868 the overthrow of this military government and the return of the emperor from titular to actual head of the state. The Meiji emperor issued a number of decrees urging the modernization of Japan, notable of which was the Charter Oath, a document which contained clauses abolishing class distinctions and promoting the adoption of Western-styled political institutions. The Oath stated that "base customs of former times shall be abandoned and all actions shall conform to the principles of international justice.

(Furthermore,) knowledge shall be sought throughout the world" (Schirochauer, p.120). In the years after 1868 Japan experienced a period of cultural, technological, and social

change virtually unparalleled in world history. Every aspect of daily life was touched by the tidal wave of new, foreign ideas which swept over the country. Where for 250 years no foreigner had even been seen, now foreign residences sprang up. Rail lines were built, modern Japanese industry was born, and new forms of literature appeared as Western works became available in translation. Japanese writers began experimenting with forms and subjects previously unknown to them, writing in a Japanese language which itself had to undergo drastic revision to capture the bluntness of the Western works it now tried to express. The scope of the changes to the Japanese social fabric is today almost impossible to grasp; it truly was revolutionary. Into this ferment of activity then Akutagawa was born, literally in the heart of an imported culture, for the section of Tokyo in which his family lived "had by that time become a foreign nationals' residence. According to Ryunosuke's sister's memoirs there were only three homes of Japanese in the area, including that of Akutagawa's" (Yoshida, p.7). Wherever in Tokyo Akutagawa had lived, though, he would not have been immune to foreign influence.

While at school Akutagawa excelled. "His school work was excellent. In particular, because he was accustomed to reading Japanese and Chinese classics at home, his abilities in Chinese literature were distinguished" (Yoshida, p.22). Akutagawa was drawn to literature from an early age. While still young he read Western works, at first in translation, later in original languages. He was also an avid reader of new Japanese writing, being familiar with the Japanese

Naturalist school, and the works of Natsume Soseki (1867-1916) and Mori Ohgai (1862-1922). Natsume Soseki, who held a chair in English Literature at the Tokyo Imperial University, shortly before his death in 1916, read and praised some of Akutagawa's earliest pieces, becoming something of a mentor for the young man who, with some associates while still at school, had begun a small journal, the magazine "Shinshicho" (Dawn of the New Thought). From here Akutagawa's literary life truly begins.

Over the next 11 years, Akutagawa's highly polished short stories appeared at a rapid rate. These works cover a wide range of subjects and experiment with many different systems, from brief, two or three page sketches, to lengthier, historically-inspired reworkings of older tales, to social satire, to very original, often bizarre pieces. During Akutagawa's life the general trend in Japanese literature was towards an autobiographical, confessional style known as the shi-shosetsu, the 'I-novel'. This was a form wherein an author would simply record the events of his daily life (though in actual fact these recordings were often considerably more spicy than the reality they purported to describe) or his observations, and so present a believable literary expression of truth. Often the I-novel had no easily recognizable plot or goal, existing as merely a diary of the author's life. Akutagawa, though, rejected this form of writing in favour of a highly-crafted form, preferring to construct his pieces in accordance with the Western criteria of progressive plot structure and developing characters. However towards the end of his life

Akutagawa did take up an autobiographical form, as the despair in which he lived increased his self-doubts as to the merits of his literary opus.

Akutagawa's literary influences are as varied as his output. He was well-read in classical Chinese works, often drawing on these to provide himself with the material from which to construct a new work. These rewritings though generally bear little resemblance to their usually much shorter sources. Akutagawa too was very familiar with Western writings. In a short essay entitled "Furansu bungaku to boku" (1922; French Literature and Myself), for example he lists the French authors who most touched his youth: Anatole France, Flaubert, de Maupassant, Gautier, Rousseau, Voltaire, and Baudelaire. Poe was no stranger to him, nor were classical Greek philosophers and more contemporary German writers. Akutagawa's graduating thesis from Tokyo Imperial University was written on the English William Morris, and he "of course was familiar with four or five of Dostoevsky's books" (VIII:85).

As, year by year, Akutagawa's opus grew, so too did his fame. He was able to support himself as a writer; he married, had children with his wife, and was able to support them too. But then, towards the end of his life, while he was in his early thirties, he began to entertain doubts about his life, about his fate. "Beginning to think is beginning to be undermined" (Camus, p.4), and undermined Akutagawa was. He wrote in his suicide note "Aru kyuyu e okuru shuki" (1927; tr. A Note to a Certain Old Friend, 1961), that "I have for these past two years thought of

little but dying" (XV:170). Camus notes that

It is hard to fix the precise instant, the subtle step when the mind opted for death... In a sense... killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much... that it 'is not worth the trouble'...What, then, is that incalculable feeling that deprives the mind of the sleep necessary for life? (Camus, p.5).

Akutagawa contends that

for the most part those who commit suicide... probably do not know why they do so. It probably concerns motives as complex as those for anything we do. However in my case at least the reason is merely a vague unease. It is some vague unease about my future (ibid).

Whence came this unease to a man at the peak of his fame, loved by his family, young, with an infinite potential before him? I will argue here and in the pages to follow that Akutagawa, alienated from both his birth and adoptive family, split between the cultures of Japan and the West, hostilely suspicious of the natural world, sought to create for himself a life through the medium of his writing, sought to live by creating his life on paper, but eventually lost the strength to continue this enterprise. He became aware of the fragility of ink on a page and of its inability to support the weight of existence.

The one who realizes in anguish his condition as being thrown into a responsibility which extends to his very abandonment has no longer either remorse or regret or excuse; he is no longer anything but a freedom which perfectly reveals itself and whose being resides in this very revelation (Sartre, p.711).

For Akutagawa however this revelation of freedom was equally a revelation of his alienation from even himself. The autobiographical style to which he turned at this point, which we shall examine in a later chapter, demonstrates this: he writes of himself from a removed point of view,

from a distance which separates what he is from what he writes.

Totally free, undistinguishable from the period for which I have chosen to be the meaning,...I must be without remorse or regret as I am without excuse... I carry the weight of the world by myself alone without anything or any person to lighten it... I am abandoned in the world, not in the sense that I remain abandoned and passive in a hostile universe like a board floating in water, but rather in the sense that I find myself suddenly alone and without help, engaged in a world for which I bear the whole responsibility without being able... to tear myself away from this responsibility for an instant... To make myself passive in the world, to refuse to act upon things and upon others is still to choose myself, and suicide is one mode among others of being-in-the world (Sartre, pp.709-10).

This mode is both a final acceptance of freedom and an ultimate abdication of responsibility. Akutagawa's vague unease is his recognition of his responsibility in the world; his suicide is his method of making that responsibility something bearable to him.

I should like now to discuss the goals of this present study. While hardly claiming to be a scrupulously biographical portrait, nor again an exhaustive examination of its subject, this work sets out to describe three distinct though interrelated themes in Akutagawa's work in order to arrive at a composite sketch, as it were, of this man who saw fit to end his life. The seeds for Akutagawa's suicide appear to have been sown early on; they are reflected in these three persistent themes. The first of these is his treatment of nature. For Akutagawa, unlike for the majority of his contemporaries in Japan, nature did not appear as the locus for man's integration into something larger than himself, the greater category of Life in which he would become one welcome, small, and relatively

unimportant part. Asian philosophies, from Buddhism in India, to Taoism in China, to Shintoism in Japan, all situate man within a natural frame which itself takes precedence over the essential worth of the individual; indeed this very word 'individual' has only a marginal place in these systems of thought. (Of course I am speaking simplistically though generally truthfully here). Buddhism even goes so far as to say that the individual does not exist: this is the principle of anatman, or the non-existence of the self, and its realization becomes the highest form of enlightenment. Such a view naturally precludes one from fearing one's death, or maintaining an attachment to one's separate, articulated existence: one is only a part of the world, of the greater arena of life, and as such when one's body is exhausted by illness or age one will pass into a merger with the things around one, becoming something else, some other consciousness or energy inhabiting some other shape. As such, one, who never really lived as one, will never really die, for though one's energies will move into another perhaps more diffuse form, they will not be removed from Life. This type of eternally recirculating existence, whereby one becomes (potentially) all other things, is in general the world view predominant in Asia; Asian aesthetics reflect this as well. The works of Shiga Naoya (1883-1971), who in the early part of the Twentieth Century was perhaps Japan's most popular and influential author, attempt to provide a vehicle for their author to arrive at an integrating acceptance of the naturally necessary stages of his life, through which he

would situate himself within the world's eternal, harmonious continuity. This author in particular provides a contrast to Akutagawa, and hence I have undertaken a brief survey of some of the major points of difference between them.

Shiga then representing a more 'orthodox' Asian view, what of Akutagawa? Indeed his opinion of nature is quite different from a harmoniously 'containing' one, and bears certain affinities to a Western view which perceives nature as the now-forbidden Eden, the perfect place barred to man for his arrogant desire for individuating knowledge. A Western view of nature describes a sublime object, a landscape out over which man gazes, but into which he may not enter. There is between man and nature (and here I do mean 'man' for this view is a typically male-centred one, which postulates nature as a female Other) the barrier of otherness, a tension alternately antagonistically hostile or belittlingly alienating. This otherness places man in the position of one seeking dominance, subjectivity, over an incomprehensible object which, through the necessity that man must die and lose his individuality, becomes opposed to his life. The Western individual, removed from nature by the cultural heritage which forms the mythic Adam as his image, has only his individual perspective whence to define himself: hence he is indeed an individual, a solitary being who has no access to the (for example) seasonal cyclicity he observes around him. While each year life renews itself, he witnesses his own linear aging and so fears the finality he discovers in death (again of course I am speaking in broad and simple generalities, but perhaps a picture of the

differences between the Asian and Western view will emerge). From this arises the understandable desire for immortality, which creates a concept of a heaven: if I must die, then I shall frantically create for myself an 'afterlife' wherein a patriarchal incarnation of (my own) masculine authority shall reign. Nature's alienation from me becomes the result of a mythic conflict between my 'god-self' and my mortal self which will be made irrelevant when I subject myself as myself to my own created, benevolent image of myself as eternity. Eden is regained forever after the death which is not final but merely a passageway into myself made divinely all-encompassing. Rather than nature containing me, this view allows me to contain nature. "Man makes himself man in order to be God" (Sartre, p.796), and so too makes himself God forever to be man, to be himself. Hence man gains a reassurance that although he is removed from the cyclical renewal of this life, of this world, he himself shall attain to a better eternity. Man's only regret here may be an attachment to the forms of this world, prompted by the nagging doubts that he has not postulated something which will actually happen.

Akutagawa views himself as alienated from the natural world, and yet in later life came to lack the determination to maintain himself as an eternal, individual form: he was quite aware that when he was to die, he would indeed cease to be. For him nature is that force which causes one to die: it is an entity which reserves eternal cyclicity for itself while necessitating an individual existence's linear aging and degeneration into death. This natural entity is

purely hostile and man's relation to it is purely adversarial. As such for Akutagawa the individual is a privileged being; like the Western individual he is separate from nature and so must create for himself his own self-defined image. Akutagawa does this for himself through his writing; some of his characters do it for themselves through art. For Akutagawa the most complete individual is the artist, one who seeks through his work to correct the flawed (for fatal) face of nature, to create an Eden for himself. The artist in effect becomes a deity, but one well aware of his own mortality. Often the artist in Akutagawa's work has been driven insane by this endeavour to capture or correct an image of nature, as in "numachi" (1919; tr. The Swamp, 1939). In his suicide note "Aru kyuyu e okuru shuki" Akutagawa writes that

in reading Empedocles, I felt how very old is the desire to make oneself a god. In this note, as far as I am aware, I do not try to make myself a god... But do you recall twenty years ago, when we debated (Empedocles) together; at that time, I was one who wanted to make myself a god (XV: 174).

He was one then who wanted to create for himself, as would a god, a world in which he could exist.

Related to Akutagawa's desire to build a world for himself on paper is his fondness for the theme of the Double. In writing, Akutagawa became in effect two people: the author, the god which created the written world; and that person placed within this written world. Akutagawa did not take up a clearly autobiographical subject matter till late in his career, but nonetheless, in that the things and opinions about which he wrote were of interest to him, he had been writing about himself all along. His awareness

though of what he was doing split him into two, into his writing and written self, a situation about which too he wrote through the device of the Double. This theme has a second (doubled) motivating factor, and that is a cultural component arising from Akutagawa's chronological placement. Akutagawa lived during a tumultuous period in Japanese history, a period marked by cultural revolution and colonialism. Such a division between the old and the new, and such a phenomenal adoption of foreign concepts as occurred in Japan could not help but create a 'doubled' psyche in the minds of those who experienced it. Paul Coates, a literary critic at McGill University in Montreal, has examined the impact of colonialism on the colonizing cultures which found themselves in a confrontational situation with difference. I attempt to apply certain of his theories to Akutagawa to gauge what effect the Japanese social conditions of his period may have had in his attraction to the theme of the Double.

The remaining theme I examine is Akutagawa's depiction of women and the Mother. His own mother, dying insane while he was young, had a destabilizing effect on him, which of course finds expression in his work. Woman in general for Akutagawa is an unknowable Other, irrational, often diseased. Often his female characters are either physically or mentally ill, even close to death. This presence of sickness within them, of corruption (typified by the tuberculosis which infects one character in "Niwa" (1922; tr. The Garden, 1952), for example) indicates an association of woman with that other locus of decay in Akutagawa's

world, nature. Akutagawa aligns woman with nature in ways similar to those found in Western thinking, though with a more pronouncedly negative connotation. In fact so strong in this linking, so close is this association between woman and nature for Akutagawa, that one encounters considerable difficulty discussing one without reference to the other. In both the Western and Japanese traditions there is a history of associating woman with nature; this even extends to the hackneyed expression 'Mother Earth'. In Japan the mythic source of the imperial family's power is Amaterasu, a solar deity depicted as female. Shinto in the past has seen women as somehow closer to the natural spirits, although with the importation of the male-centred systems of Buddhism and Confucianism (two imported systems which, like those which moved into very ancient Greece and Cyprus, forced out the indigenous, matriarchal social orders) woman quickly lost her positive connections to the spiritual realm, becoming only that which was opposed to the rational and male. Woman having traditional link with nature in both the cultures which attracted Akutagawa, so much the easier was it for him to make the same association through his matrophobia and the fear of the corrupting insanity he perceived in his own mother.

Throughout this study one may notice an absence of a discussion of Buddhism or detailed Japanese literary themes. This is not to deny that these had an influence on Akutagawa's intellectual outlook or work. Rather, my contention is this: much of Akutagawa's own views and influences were of a Western bent, and as such, permit a

discussion of his work from a Western perspective. A case in point would be the comment he made about Empedocles, and how Akutagawa himself, in his youth, desired to make himself a god, tried to claim for himself an individuated authority over his life as one who felt himself alienated within a hostile world. Such an attempt, such a world view, is not Buddhistic, it is Western and opposed to the integrating impulse in Asian philosophy. Akutagawa's antagonism to nature and his view of death as final find little Asian precedent. Rather they are expressions of his own beliefs which found greater sympathetic acceptance in some of the Western concepts he encountered. Akutagawa when he finally does take up autobiography demonstrates a sophisticated appreciation of and familiarity with Western literatures and cultural icons, and too writes often about Christianity, not as one able to accept its offered eternal existence within an unchanging self-like form, but as one who is intrigued by the concept of Christ, the martyr, the one who is sacrificed for an ideal inaccessible to the common people (in the letter "Aru Kyuyu e okuru shuki" Akutagawa even goes so far as to term Christ's death a suicide, an interesting notion on which unfortunately he does not elaborate). One may see Akutagawa's Western, individuating program clearly in a brief description of his piece "Kumo no ito" (1918; tr. A Spider's Thread, 1930). This piece concerns a thief in Hell to whom the Buddha gives one chance to escape his damnation by climbing out from his purgatory along a single spider thread. He fails through a lack of compassion, and the Buddha leaves him to his fate. Beongcheon Yu ascribes the

source of this tale, which Akutagawa has created out of a borrowed theme, to "a simple episodic parable -- a thoroughly Christian one at that -- in Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov which Akutagawa had recently read" (Yu, p.25). This in itself proves nothing, but Akutagawa's depiction of the Buddha as very much an individual existence dwelling on in an eternal paradise, overseeing the sufferings in Hell of those condemned through their actions, indicates an affinity with Western linearity and perpetual, individual consciousness. This being the case, it becomes possible to read Akutagawa as a Western writer, as one influenced by European tastes, philosophies, literatures, and goals. Indeed Akutagawa's very utilization of the short story form, a linearly progressing, self-contained, 'individual' form, owes much to his exposure to Western writers. For this reason I have chosen the perhaps controversial course of considering Akutagawa's work from a decidedly Western perspective, rather than confining myself to the more obvious realm of his literary precursors within the Japanese canon.

There is one further controversial practice in which I engage which would find few to support its application. This is a close reading of some of the Chinese characters Akutagawa has used in various of his works. The written Japanese language utilizes borrowed Chinese characters to write, generally, nouns and the non-inflecting, or stem, portion of verbs. Chinese characters are of course complex picto- or ideographs which combine various elements, known as radicals, to create the meaning they express. It is not

the usual practice to break these characters down into their component parts when reading them, much as in English one does not usually analyze the way a word's roots or sound are still present within its meaning. Nonetheless, just as this may be done in English, and is in fact done by certain linguistically-based critical schools, so too is it possible to read the elements within a Chinese character, especially when it appears an author has himself chosen the characters in question for their very richness of potential. It is not problematic to suggest that, in naming a protagonist, for example, an author will pay particular attention to choosing a name which conveys some comment on the character, or reflects some part of his personality. Akutagawa has done this on certain occasions, as we shall see in "Futatsu no tegami" (1917; Two Letters). Here the name indicates a certain trait which affects the working of story, but the kanji (the Chinese graphic system used in Japanese) are read as a whole, are not broken down into their radicals. However, in other works, such as in "Niwa" (1922; tr. The Garden, 1964) or "Haguruma" (1927; tr. Cogwheels, 1961), some very provocative interpretive possibilities lurk within some of the kanji Akutagawa has selected. I would like to emphasize this word 'selected' -- a writer as familiar as was Akutagawa with foreign literatures and languages becomes more aware of possibilities within his own language than one without the benefit of a multi-cultural experience, and hence becomes more discriminating in his use of words. Akutagawa was an intellectual; he was one for whom words had special significance, being, as they were, the method by

which he made his living (this phrase may be taken in several ways). There is evidence to suggest that Akutagawa chose the names of his characters to comment on those characters; hence I believe he also occasionally chose certain incidents and situations simply to place within his works certain kanji which make available to the reader layers and levels of meaning both necessary to and supported by other aspects of the text. To choose one example which I discuss in a later chapter, in the piece "Niwa" one character "turns his back on man and nature" (V:241), we read; he is something of an artist, working to rebuild a landscaped garden. His nephew is named Ren'ichi, a name which may mean (roughly) "the Accusing One". This is fairly straightforward; the events in the text support this name. However, remembering the action of the uncle we have just read, turning his back on the world, we encounter Ren'ichi in one segment crushing ants. 'Ant' in Japanese is ari, written with a kanji the radicals of which are 'insect' and 'ceremony' or 'ritual' (~~蟻~~). Of course, this is a beautifully representative symbol for ants and the social arrangements into which they somehow form themselves: they are truly 'insects with ceremony'. But in the context of this short story, wherein there is no need for Ren'ichi to be crushing anything, let alone ants, despite the fact that it is something a bored young boy may do (but then again so too is stone throwing), the possibility is definitely a tempting one to conclude that Ren'ichi, who follows his uncle's artistic impulse in later life and who too, in turn, turns his back on both society and nature, crushes ants to

reject, through this particular kanji, the natural world (expressed in the 'insect' radical) and the human, social world (expressed in the radical for 'ceremony'). Now given the complexity in English required to explain this, is it justifiable to postulate Akutagawa's purposeful utilization of such possibilities buried within a word? And if it is, must one then read (must one 'unpack') every kanji Akutagawa uses? Well, yes and no: where in the text one finds supporting evidence or events to corroborate the sense obtained through the closer reading of the kanji, it is indeed justified. These significances do not manifest themselves out of thin air, as it were: language exists to be used, and has depths accessible to those willing to sink to them. Akutagawa did not invent these kanji, of course; but he did have them before him as a menu of possibilities from which to select his desired effects. Akutagawa structured his writing in very sophisticated ways; the textual devices and strategies he employs are complex. Whether or not there is literary precedent for his usage of kanji in the Japanese canon is of relatively little importance; there is precedent enough in his own opus. Why then does one not encounter these 'loaded' kanji in each of Akutagawa's works? Why does one not have to dismantle every kanji? In a sense one does, for it is the internal associations of the radicals which give the kanji its (original) meaning (although this is more true of the Chinese written language itself). However, in the more specific sense of the practice I propose here, Akutagawa, it would seem, simply did not select everywhere his kanji for

the same strategic purposes. The care with which he has constructed his plots is found in all his works; the care with which he has named his characters is in greater evidence in some; and in others we discover a deliberate selection of kanji which we may analyze. In the works I have examined here there are at least four separate instances of kanji conducive to this type of analysis; there are undoubtedly more in other of Akutagawa's stories. Were there only one or two instances, it would be possible to dismiss these as coincidence or overreading on the part of the critic; but the greater the frequency and more definite the link between kanji and corroborative plot details, the more plausible becomes the case for Akutagawa's wilful selection of a visually rich, linguistically suggestive kanji with which to thicken the texture of his writing. Such is the case I wish to argue here, before we examine the occasions on which this usage occurs, in the works to which we now turn our attention.

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CHAPTER I

Nature

It is something of an oversimplification to assert that all writers ultimately write of nature, in placing their characters in situations based upon the real world. Such a claim serves only to highlight what more often than not writers take for granted with as great a frequency as non-writes, namely that self-same nature. Nonetheless as a literary device to express elements of a character's personality or foreshadow (or even actively influence) events in the story, nature does indeed find a place in a great many works. In the products of a few writers, however, nature assumes a particular significance, being intimately associated with these writers' very essences, their very centre-most projects. Proust and Hesse, Shelley and Marquez all conduct passionate love affairs with nature, consistently representing it as perfection, as beauty. This view of nature as Edenic is not at all limited to European artists: Asian aesthetics support nature as an ideal and seek to place man into harmony with it. Chinese paintings with their Taoist influences capture this theme best: on a large, misty canvas depicting in subtle shades of ink and subdued hues vast mountains and sublime valleys, enormous though benevolent, man receives a niche firmly within nature's embrace. For Akutagawa however, nature, while still seeming as in the European tradition very much associated with woman, Mother Nature, becomes an insatiable, corrupting hostility, not a sheltering bosom whence to appreciate the fragrant joys of life but rather a place

wherein "a pervasive sense of destitution and decay is unable to conceal itself" (V: 237). This place, this enemy, does not welcome him: it houses a force bent on killing him. Simone de Beauvoir, writing of the human condition in general, makes an observation pertinent to Akutagawa's situation:

Before him man encounters nature; he has some hold upon her, he endeavours to mould her to his desires [though in Akutagawa's case, capturing her image in his writing]. But she cannot fill his needs. Either she appears simply as a purely impersonal opposition, she is an obstacle and remains a stranger [while with indifference charging her cohorts Time and Disease with the task of aging and destroying all things]; or she submits passively [and deceptively] to [his] will and permits assimilation, so that he takes possession of her only through consuming her, -- that is, through destroying her (de Beauvoir, p.129),

only ultimately to stand revealed as her victim in death. For Akutagawa, Nature, the Mother, is always a threat, an opposition against which he pits his characters: the true individual in his works is one who "turns his back on society and nature" (V:241) in such stories as "Numachi" (1921; The Swamp, 1939) and "Niwa" (1922; Tr: The Garden, 1964), one who is willing to struggle against natural forces in a vain effort to reveal nature for what it is, to strip away its verdant mask and expose the rot behind it; this character, the artist, claims the right to define the world through the products of his own endeavour, which shall be works of art either condemning or correcting nature's flaws. The artist's project is to resist nature, to break it to his will and consume it, as it were, in de Beauvoir's terms, before it consumes him. This individual always ultimately fails, of course, leaving behind works which themselves decay or are forgotten by the world in the obscurity of

miscomprehension: in no place is there a compromise, a reconciliation which would allow a character's peaceful assimilation into nature's greater harmony for Akutagawa, who writes in "Haguruma" (1927; tr; The Cogwheel, 1965) that he could not believe in Heaven, in Eden, though he could easily imagine Hell, cannot accept what, for those who believe it to be a finality, is a terrifying prospect: that eventually he must die, must give up himself.

In Akutagawa's earliest pieces nature appears as a bleak backdrop against which a struggle of human morality plays itself out, a setting in which a character must defend his individually ambitious drive to uphold a humane, ethical code against a corruptive force offered by nature as either necessary or profitable. Such is certainly the case in "Rashomon" (1915; tr. Rasha Gate, 1930), wherein the protagonist is faced with a choice of starving to death morally or becoming a thief, preying on the social order as a parasite. The story concerns a servant who has just been dismissed from his position, and now finds himself homeless and hungry beside the Rashomon, an entrance way to old Kyoto, the "Capital City", the concentrated essence of civilization, which is itself experiencing an economic depression. The protagonist has the difficult choice of becoming a thief or finding some scarce, lawful occupation. Deciding to spend at least one warm night out of the incessant rain, he climbs the stairs to the upper, enclosed level of the gate, to where the local people, lacking access to a proper cemetery, have lately taken their dead. There the protagonist discovers an old woman busily stealing hair

from the female corpses to sell as wigs; he confronts her, but she, through rather dubious logic, deflects his outrage. In fact her reasoning, that one must do what one can to stay alive, convinces the servant that he too is justified in pursuing the profitable path of crime: his first act is to rob the old woman, whom he leaves stripped of her clothes, then flees into the night. The servant, now thief, has given in to the temptations of the old woman, who represents the corrupting urgings of nature, to abandon his morality. The apparent ease with which he makes his decision finds explanation in the textual devices which introduce this character, for his very person is marked from the outset by the same corruption laying seige in this piece to Kyoto and threatening the servant's life.

Nature is intent on destroying Kyoto through "such disasters as earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, and famine" (I:36): almost victorious in its attack it has given the Rasho Gate, its coat of red lacquer "flaking away here and there" (ibid), back to the crickets and crows that now inhabit it. It is to this place, then, abandoned by civilization as it is and home to only human corpses, that the protagonist has come to plan his future. He too is abandoned by society: dismissed from his position should he fail to find employment he will end "thrown away like a dog" (I:38), forfeiting his status as a person. Nature appears to have at least partial sway over this man from the outset, for Akutagawa introduces him as an 'underling', written with the characters for 'low', or 'beneath', and 'person'. This word "Genin", designates a servant, a class of people, but a

class nonetheless inferior to the nobility for whom the Capital City exists. Also his face is marked by a "large pimple over which he is fussing" (I:37) while contemplating his choices. His face, like Kyoto, like the Rashomon, is suffering the ravages of dirt and decrepitude: within his skin nature has placed the germs of corruption which will spread throughout his moral fibre. This festering sore sits upon his right cheek: it is this cheek which receives the glow from the torch the old woman uses to illuminate her stripping of the hair from the corpses, hair which itself shall have a role in falseness or deceit, being used to make wigs, artifices.

The old woman, we are told, is like a "monkey" (I:39); her legs are "skin and bone like a chicken's" (I:42), and her voice is alternately "like a crow's cackling" (ibid) or "like a toad's croaking" (ibid): without a doubt she is a personification of nature's malice concentrated into a female package able to justify her defilement of the women's corpses through recourse to something like (human) rationalization: the corpse she is robbing of hair itself (she says) when alive had occasion to cheat people, by selling common snake flesh as eel, a prized delicacy. The old hag argues that whatever one must do to stay alive is justified; she insists that even the woman whose hair she has stolen "would probably wink at what (she'd) done" (ibid). Her persuasive words have some influence over the underling, for the seed of their acceptance, the seed of his decay into a state of predation and thievery, the very state of natural survival into which the woman (as woman, for

Akutagawa) had herself long ago fallen, is already well planted in the pimple on his cheek which "of course [he was busy] fussing over while listening to" (I:43) the hag. When he first confronts her, the underling rails at her; Akutagawa uses the verb nonoshiru, meaning "to abuse, to speak ill of", translatable as "to bark at"; this verb is written with a character containing the "horse" radical, a natural image imbedded in something as human as speech, and hence conveys the same sense of turning a person into an animal as does English "to bark at". The underling cannot escape his choice, which is of course to rob the woman, for his decision is contained within his body, is predestined in the very words which Akutagawa uses to describe him. the underling accepts the woman's (nature's) logic, that whatever one must do to avoid starvation is justified, and steals the woman's clothes, leaving her naked amidst a pile of corpses; that is to say, having stripped her of her human trappings he leaves her amongst humans no longer human. He leaves her in the state of nature (well expressed in the French, au naturel) in which one enters the world, and the corpses around the woman exit it. The underling has turned his back on the civilization that would have "only thrown him away like a dog" (I:38) and taken as his own the proffered corruption of nature's messenger, the monkey-like old woman. The final line of this piece completes the underling's removal from society, for "his whereabouts are unknown to all" (I:43): no person has any further contact with this 'lower person' swallowed up by the darkness of a consuming nature.

The characters which Akutagawa depicts as most involved in a resistance to nature are, not surprisingly, those involved in a manipulation of mimetic images of the world around them. Like Akutagawa himself they are artists, though usually (as in "Numachi" or "Shuzanzu" (1920; tr. A Painting of an Autumn Mountain, 1961), they are painters. These are the people whose chosen course in life it is to capture the images of nature within their canvasses on which they may now exercise a control not possible in reality over this otherwise dominant force. These characters are empowered by Akutagawa to present nature as they (that is, as Akutagawa) perceive it to be, stripped of its illusory facade of benevolence, or believe it should be, idealized, tamed, or even depicted as a (corrected) paradise divested of its fangs, no longer threatening to human life. While works such as "Rashomon" or even "Yabunonaka" (1921; tr. In a Grove, 1952) present people at odds with a decay of human morality, or struggling with the human failings of greed or lust, with nature as but a back-drop for or subversive agent in this struggle, the pieces which describe an artist's conflict against nature approach sublimity, for here the battles are between men and the very roots of life. These artists are true individuals who dedicate themselves totally, at the expense of their very lives, to the enforcement of their aesthetic ideals onto a representation of something which either cannot be (in the case of a nature presented as perfected, as a harmonious, welcoming haven, an impossibility for Akutagawa), or is not recognized for what it is (in the case of a nature depicted with no sugar-

coating, without the idyllic face visible to most of the people around, but never including Akutagawa, himself). Though these artists are spurned by the society around them, Akutagawa typically includes one character in each piece who is able to appreciate the quality of the artist's work and vision: this figure is Akutagawa himself, either explicitly revealed or concealed behind a constructed identity. The function of this character is to be a sympathetic witness to the artist's (Akutagawa's own disguised) efforts, a witness who will appreciate what society in the work cannot comprehend: the value of the artist.

In one very short piece entitled "Numachi" ("The Swamp"), Akutagawa describes how "on a rainy afternoon" (III:100) at a group art exhibit the narrator discovers "a single small oil painting... hung as if forgotten in a dreadfully poor frame, in a badly lit corner" (ibid) of the gallery. The work's painter was "not at all famous" (Ibid) and was not strictly speaking a member of the exhibiting group: he had been included in the show after his recent death as a concession to his family, for he had pestered the gallery repeatedly for inclusion. He had been insane, and even while alive "was like one who was dead" (III:101). His painting consists of a depiction of a swamp "so precisely drawn as to make one feel clearly the sensation of walking along the mud of the foreground; one could actually sense the sucking sound as one's ankle became buried in the mud-flat" (III:100). The entire scene contains "not a single brush stroke of green. Wherever one were to look the reeds and poplars... were all coloured in a muddy yellow, an

oppressive yellow just like that of sticky, wet clay" (ibid). It is a tremendously impressive piece for the narrator, who begins "to perceive within this tiny oil the figure of a pitiable artist who tried desperately to capture all of nature... I could see nowhere else a painting powerful enough to rival this single work" (ibid). The narrator meets an acquaintance, an art critic, who descends upon him only to denounce this work as merely a madman's efforts, for, he says, "if not one insane, who could paint such an oddly-coloured piece?" (III:102). This art critic speaks with an imminently sane voice; he is authorized by society through his position of art reporter for a certain newspaper to valorize art, to decide what is or is not acceptable. Clearly, even though the narrator "triumphantly" (ibid) terms the painting a masterpiece, the critic insists on its ridiculousness: its painter, after all, was insane, was outside of society, and was not even a member of the group of artists. For the narrator however, the work's plants "were alive with a terrible passion as if one were seeing all of nature itself" (ibid) and this nature is the sickly, consuming entity which only the insane are able to recognize behind its mask. Akutagawa (through the thin veil of the narrator) feels "a strange shudder through [his] whole body {when for the third time he peers} into this gloomy oil painting" (ibid) which houses the power of a nature captured and exposed, and he is able to empathize with the unknown artist who was "tormented by a fearful irritation and disease" (ibid), the curse of seeing something which only he could perceive. The narrator's

fellow-feeling comes, no doubt, from his own implied exclusion from society, a situation one may surmise from his perception of the horror within the painting and his willingness to defend that work's worth against the "apparently joyful" (ibid) condemnation voiced by the critic, himself favoured by nature with a "good physique" (III:101), that is, favoured with a solidly healthy body free of any illness or abnormality. The critic expresses clearly Akutagawa's opinion of an artist's possible destruction in attempting to force nature to conform to his aesthetic program, for the critic states that "he has heard that because the artist could not paint the scene as he originally wanted to, he went mad" (III:102). The painter was fighting virtually for his survival against a nature intent on preventing his depiction of it without its green mask of life; for him, nature was this mud-clogged, life-sucking, yellow swamp. The fight to depict it as such absorbed his sanity as one's foot would be (inextricably and inexorably, one feels) absorbed by the mud of the swamp, and only an exertion which taxed the sum total of his energies permitted the completion of the oil in the oppressive, muddy yellow reminiscent of Macbeth's "sere and yellow leaf", the decay of his violently ambitious lust for power itself productive of an all-consuming insanity of defiance; here, the yellow is indicative of the etiolated, isolated corruption of the artist's creative energies. This artist is dead, he died insane, and there is not even the suggestion that his work will receive any sort of fame or recognition. In his death (perhaps a suicide? or worse,

'death by natural causes'?) there is no sense of personal satisfaction, no hint of redemption in having "sacrificed his life" (ibid) to receive the "single compensation" (ibid) of a one-piece showing in a forgotten corner of a group art exhibit -- Akutagawa here offers a thoroughly pessimistic view of the act of resistance which art becomes, a view the polar opposite of that of most of his contemporaries in Japanese literature as represented by Shiga Naoya (1883-1971), for whom the "quest to find lasting harmony between human instinct, environment, and personality was the central theme of {their} life and work" (Goossen, p.36). Shiga, in a short piece indicative of his general opinion of nature's validity, "Kinosaki nite" (1917; At Kinosaki), presents that forested, verdant resort town as a place in which one may encounter a paradisaal renewal, a communion with a regenerative force which exists within what is the entrance way to cyclicity: a restorative death.

The basic plot of "Kinosaki nite" is simply told: suffering from complications arising from a slight injury, the narrator decides to spend a few quiet weeks at that town to recuperate. While there he pursues pastimes best described as 'restive': reading, walking, observing people, and writing down his impressions. He watches bees at work and notes how they deal with the death of one of their colleagues; he watches a group of boys throw stones at a wounded rat desperately trying to escape; and later accidentally kills a salamander, for which he feels regret. From all of this he learns some valuable lessons about the validity of life within nature and the necessary place death

holds in life; he leaves Kinosaki cured of his illness and a wiser, humbler man.

Shiga's piece provides a point of contrast to Akutagawa's work on a variety of themes, most pertinent here being the use of nature as inspirational material for artistic production, and death as a process of reinvigoration or renewal, an integral part of life's cyclicity. Whereas Akutagawa never isolates nature from an antagonistic relation to the human world, never describes a scene for its own sake without contextualizing that scene within a larger picture of opposition between nature and man, for "aesthetic appreciation of scenery only becomes possible when the natural world has been conquered, domesticated, rendered safe" (Keith, p.13) through human dominance and intervention, Shiga's work places man securely within a natural frame which would be every bit as full without his presence. If Akutagawa would be most happy leaving nature out of his work completely, and in a certain sense one may argue that he tried to do just that by writing of a nature encapsulated in a human drama or mediated through human manipulation, the nature of an oil painting, for example or a garden, Shiga would be content with quite the opposite, leaving man out (were that possible) and writing of a pure, natural experience. In "Kinosaki nite" elements of human relation or contact are rather scarce: there is little dialogue, and in most passages the narrator appears as a passive observer merely (ostensibly though not actually) recording a series of events which persuade him that "to be dead and to be alive are not opposites"

(Shiga, II:197). Here man, far from struggling against nature to ensure his own existence, must learn from that nature that his existence will not necessarily end with his death, which itself becomes but one event in an endless series, and a not particularly important one at that. The bees which Shiga observes so closely, the rat he calmly watches, the newt he inadvertently kills, all form facets of the lesson which is Kinosaki, to where he had gone to recuperate from the accident which is his own symbolic entranceway into this natural world of rebirth through death. Indeed the word "recuperate" in Japanese, yojo, contains within its written form the words, or concepts, of "adopting life", of taking on as one's own that which is created by something else and so giving to oneself the responsibility of carefully supervising that life, not an exclusive right of possession: one may be reasonably assured that the phrase yojo with all its connotations occurs nowhere in Akutagawa's opus.

This view of death as but one of life's stages is of course an expression of the Buddhist sensibility of existence. In that philosophy (which of course has complexities and branches far too numerous to discuss here; what follows will strike many as a simplification, but in so far as my present goal is not a critique of Buddhism nor an explanation of Akutagawa as a failed Buddhist, perhaps a simplification will prove sufficient) one's life is an ever-repeated cycle which one may end by realizing one's own essential 'non-existence'. The concept of 'anatman', or the 'non-self', is one of Buddhism's informing principles; one's

life is not distinct, not individuated from the greater realm of 'life' and hence one will not be excluded from life with one's death, for one never truly was 'one' in the first place. This is very much the conclusion Shiga's hero approaches in "Kinosaki nite", and its harmonious integrating quality is responsible for the Asian concept of man as but one small part of nature, that larger category of life which then becomes sacred in all its manifestations.

In Shiga's work nature is a source for the material of one's writing, a resource to be used faithfully; an author (provided he is, as is Shiga, a shishosetsuka, an "I-novelist" or autobiographical writer, one who, theoretically, simply records truthfully the events of his life as the pure stuff of "fiction", and so shares with his readers the significance of a veritable, verifiable daily existence) should be open to the endless stories and possibilities for literature eternally present around him, and so in "Kinosaki nite" the action of the work is provided by the various creatures and their predicaments encountered by the author who spends his time "either reading or writing, or absentmindedly watching the mountains or the comings and goings from the chair outside [his] room, or if not that then in going for long strolls" (Shiga, II:193). Shiga very carefully manipulates these materials to give the impression of an idyllic mountain retreat wherein he is able to acquire a "familiarity with death" (Shiga, II:194), a sense of death's place in life and life's in death, and a peace of mind "not had in recent years" (Shiga, II:193). For him, art exists to record one's approach to and arrival

at an awareness, a profound grasp of truth, such truth being that death and life are necessary components of the same phenomenon. This record is an intensely personal thing which by its very nature rather precludes the inclusion of interpersonal relations or encounters; truth must be experienced alone. (However one may argue that the very act of recording such an epiphanal acquisition compromises its validity and places Shiga very much in the midst of the human rabble not yet any closer to an enlightened awareness of nature's acceptance; that Shiga did in fact give up writing when it no longer served his purposes would appear to redeem his integrity). Art, like death, for Shiga serves to revitalize the artist, and provides a calmness not otherwise obtainable; in recording the natural events around him the artist takes upon himself something like a responsibility for these events, for it is his hand which writes them down. These events then become the artist's life, a life thereby deeply integrated into the natural world and sensitive to its conditions, rhythms, and gifts, and less inclined to think of itself in exclusively individual terms. One such gift which nature gives to the artist is the offering of renewal through the process of death amidst life, as in the case of the bee which died surrounded by its fellow bees, removed but not alienated, not isolated from them; through this process the individual life becomes fully absorbed into the vitality which continues even after the cessation of the individual, as Shiga believes that he too shall somehow continue on, renewed, even in the absence which in one sense is his

death. Nature is therefore not an antagonistic, vindictive force of absolute destruction but rather the locus of a process through the necessary stages of which an individual will become an eternal part of something boundless.

Although an individual consciousness may come to an end, as a short story will run out of pages, life, literature, will continue.

Not so for Akutagawa, in whose work death is a terrifyingly final occurrence against which one must struggle with every conceivable effort. Art provides but one method of continuing this struggle; it allows one an opportunity to realize an element of control over nature, to express one's animosity towards a force of even greater enmity and destructive power, and yet art too saps one's strength and hastens, if not actively participates in, one's own decay. Nature does not itself form the stuff of art, does not provide the model an artist tries carefully and accurately to represent; rather art provides the ideal form for nature to follow were it not so hostile. Art provides the artist with a medium through which to console himself and convey his message of warning to an unsuspecting, unresponsive society, as in his story "Numachi". In his piece, "Shuzanzu" (1920; tr. A Painting of an Autumn Mountain, 1961), it is the former, correcting provision offered by art, that of creating a paradise more complete, more inviting than any natural place could possibly be, which is accepted. The story itself begins with one of Akutagawa's most favoured devices, that of the frame or introduction of an inner narrator, in this instance coming

in the form of a host, Unnanden, asking his guest, Osekikoku, if he has ever seen the Shuzanzu by Kotaichi, about which Unnanden shall tell his story, and which he himself for some reason cannot say for certain that he has seen. It seems that although this painting's creator was quite well known, it itself was rather obscure (Yoshida Seiichi, in the second volume of his study entitled Akutagawa Ryunosuke, (Tokyo: Ofusha, 1971), mentions the critical debate at the time of the publication of "Shuzanzu" concerning whether this was an actual painting or merely one invented by Akutagawa); one of the characters of the framed tale, Enkakuou, is told by his senior that this is " 'perhaps the finest example within Kotaichi's entire oeuvre' " (V:9). Enkakuou travels to a distant province to view the work at the home of a private collector; when he arrives at the man's estate however of so run down an appearance are its grounds that he doubts the object of his journey is actually there. The home,

even though its grounds were quite large, had a pervasive desolation and ruin. Ivy ensnared the fence, and in the garden the grasses grew wild. Amidst all of this the crows and ducks stared at the visitor as if he were an unusual sight, indeed (V:6).

A servant leads Enkakuou into the house to meet the proprietor; therein he is struck by "the cold smell of dust. In fact one could even say that a sense of desolation hung in the air above the floor tiles" (V:7). The man who lives amongst this isolated ruin, "although he has a sickly face, does not seem to be of a bad character. No, rather, he's one in whose pale face and wrinkled hands an apparently noble dignity may be discerned" (ibid). Enkakuou, so eager

is he to view the masterpiece he has travelled long to see, presses his host for a showing with such urgency that he seems "superstitiously certain the work will disappear like dew before he can gaze at it" (ibid). When he does finally see it, "at but a single glance an unexpected shout of surprise escapes him" (ibid) and he becomes lost in appreciation of the painting, "as if completely entranced" (V:7). It is an apparently stunning work, presenting a landscape the beauty of which "is virtually beyond the power of words" (V:7) to describe; "within its waves of colour, [shades of green with touches of vermillion and chalk white,] an old elegance seems spontaneously to overflow" (ibid). The work is so engrossing that Enkakuou can barely pull his eyes from it when his host asks him how he likes it; the old man then surprises him by asking if it really is such a masterpiece, a question put because, as he explains it,

when I look at that painting I feel as if I'm dreaming with my eyes open. Indeed 'The Autumn Mountain' is beautiful, but is it not a beauty which only I can see? To others is it not just an average work? I'm troubled by such thoughts, but I don't know their cause: is it truly just my own confusion, or is it that this work is too beautiful to exist in the world? It gives me such a strange sensation that even your admiration just now gives me pause. (V:8).

Enkakuou barely listens to the man after his first few words, being absorbed back into the painting, aware only that he is mumbling something suspicious; in the following few days he conceives a desire to own the work, willing to pay or give up whatever it takes to acquire it, but to no avail. Unable to purchase the work he returns to his home province where, after fifty years of memories, he urges the story's inner narrator to view the painting now come to town

via a circuitous route amongst the property of a second collector. The narrator does see the work, and though he finds it to be a first rate piece, he feels it somehow to be "definitely a different" (V:13) one than that seen by Enkakuou, who himself comes once more to view the object of his obsessions, only to confess after shaking his head and giving a wink, that "'everything is like a dream. From what I've seen that fellow {fifty years ago} must have been a wizard'" (V:15).

The painting has somehow changed; it is no longer the enchanting thing it was when isolated from civilization in a remote province, surrounded by desolation. The interesting facet of this story lies in its depiction of a nature perfected when presented within a work of art which has the power to obsess the one or two somehow able to perceive its beauty. Indeed it seems as if the old man were justified in wondering whether or not others could see the painting's qualities, its beauty, which is itself something which may not so much have changed over fifty years as decayed, been corrupted by the force of nature imprisoned within it. The painting's owner was someone with a sickly countenance, his nobility still visible behind his wrinkles and pallor, yet he inhabits a house the very air of which conveys a sense of ruin, surrounded as it is by a garden in which the grasses and vines grow to profusion. As the human situation declines that of the natural world gains strength, perhaps the strength drawn forth from man as he ponders the beauty of a manipulated nature, a nature captured mimetically in a perfected, constructed surface, that of a painting. Perhaps

this painting holds its beauty only when surrounded by nature's riotous growths; when transported to an affluent city, a place in which civilization's influence is greatest and nature's is at its nadir, it loses its dramatic contrast and impact, those qualities which strike the viewer as lacking in the nature of actuality. The painting's owner suffered a decline in the prosperity of his property over the years the work hung in his home; his vitality was perhaps appropriated by the work through his constant wondering whether the beauty visible to him was only an illusion, a phantom he himself had created, and so too Enkakuou spends much of the remainder of his life in desiring this two-dimensional, man-made paradise. One can only speculate on the fate of the painter himself, whose other works are apparently well-known to the story's characters: was he able to complete more after this one masterpiece, or did he, too, like the anonymous creator of the painting "Numachi" die after its execution? And in fact did he paint the same work owned and viewed by those afterwards so troubled by it? Perhaps his painting once completed began a steady decline in impact, starting out as a truly divine work, decaying to mere masterpiece status at the story's end whereat, though still able to elicit praise, it no longer has the power to fascinate, being the victim of the corrupting forces of the nature it holds within it. The work's inner narrator speculates on the painting, deciding that Enkakuou had not seen a "phantasy" (V:15), and yet that the only certain existence of the painting, the site of its only true presence, is in the minds of those who believe

they've seen it: as the owner who felt that perhaps only he could perceive the work's beauty, those who have seen it are touched by something, an impossibly ideal image, which lives on in their mental constructions like an auto-hypnotic emblem. Nature perfected becomes a phantasy possible only in the mind of those sufficiently aesthetically aware to sustain its vision, which act of sustenance then absorbs their energies and controls their lives. The painting itself too fades, but for those with the ability to conjure up its image, to respond to its auto-hypnotic suggestion, "even if there's no painting, there's nothing to doubt" (V:16). The work will exist as a product of human endeavour, a product of man's desire to resist decay and strive for an image of paradise which is nature made tame and benevolent through the fantastic vision of an artist, an individual dedicated to the struggle against malevolent disharmony.

This story, "Shuzanzu", offers the possibility of man's memory and mind overcoming, through a representation of perfection, nature's corruption; the image of the work of art may in time actually degenerate but in the mental record of those sympathetic to it, it shall retain its transcendent purity. This is an optimistic expression of human potential quite unusual in Akutagawa's work, though the desire to present a corrected nature it reflects is typical. Needless to say such a positive view was short lived; not long after the publication of "Shuzanzu" Akutagawa wrote "Niwa" (The Garden), a work which concludes with a more representatively pessimistic view of human fallibility in the face of natural hostility and corruption, for herein not only is nature

dangerous and degenerate, but even the human capacity for memory and mimetic, corrective expression is exposed as imperfect and very much subject to the destructive whims of disease, time, and decay. The characters in "Niwa" all act out various phases in the inevitably impossible battle against a nature bent, as in "Rashomon", on reclaiming a usurped space, an area carefully tended and sculpted into an artificially habitable tract which Akutagawa presents as slowly unravelling, returning to its wildly desolate roots, as it were, as being taken back by determined and subversive forces. In "Niwa" man's efforts to capture an image of a corrected nature are revealed as futile in light of man's own decay into death, of man's own mental imperfections which condemn him to confusion, forgetfulness, and failure.

The story of "Niwa" is thus: an old upper-class family, the Nakamura, has on its estate a large garden which is steadily going to ruin, its landscaping overgrown, gazebo collapsing, and waterfall dried up. The family itself is in decline, many of its members dead, those remaining living on in illness. One day after a ten-year absence the second son returns to the household, now headed by his younger brother, to nurse the syphilis he has acquired through a life of dissipation. He hears his mother singing an old ballad and from some hidden depth gains inspiration to rebuild the garden to the splendour in which his memory still maintains it. His work, while initially progressing well under his zealous enthusiasm, assisted by his young nephew, Ren'ichi, ultimately goes awry: his mind, affected by his disease, loses its capacity to guide his efforts coherently, and he

is forced to bed before completing his task. He dies, the family loses its estate, and the garden is torn down, becoming the site of a train station. Ren'ichi grows to become an oil painter, and occasionally thinks back on his uncle, who seems to come visit him, urging him to keep on with his work. So ends the story.

No picturesque idyll, then, no vision of harmonious repose exists within Akutagawa's garden. In "Niwa" the "urgings of a savage power" (V:237) taunt the reader searching for the delicacy and controlled spontaneity of a garden, and reward his quest not with an Eden of human and natural interaction, but with a hell of scurrying rats and choked waterfalls.

Like the Nakamura family which claims it this garden is in decline: having held out for ten years after the Restoration -- the reinstatement of the Emperor as the head of the Japanese government which took place in 1868 and heralded the beginning of a period of phenomenal Westernization and modernization, an event which may here serve to symbolize the hope of a tantalizing ascendancy of man, of things socially ordered -- the garden can no longer "hide the sense of ruin and desolation" (ibid) lurking behind its surface, its carefully man-made facade, for that is what a garden possesses, a facade of nature made hospitable, beautiful, welcoming to the human presence. This is the face which is now steadily disintegrating, and the time of its most rapid destruction, the most obvious display of its desolation, comes at the height of spring, the time of nature's rebirth and the regeneration of forces

beyond man's control, such forces being centred in the young shoots at the treetops both within and without the garden. Within and without, to emphasize the solidarity of the tamed, habitable garden with the wild space it once was, the wilderness still extant just beyond its walls and just below its surface. Akutagawa draws a parallel between the surface of this garden and that of the Nakamura family inhabiting it, as he parallels the decrepitude of the Rasho gate with the underling's dirty face: both conceal rot and destitution. In the garden wild growths of plants consume, first, a stone lantern, later, the artificial pond and the shrubberies of the landscaping; in the family, old Nakamura himself has retired. His wife, we learn, is literally rotting before her family's eyes: she must wrap her head each night in thick cloth to prevent her being bitten by the rats the malignant decay of her skin attracts. Nakamura's wife, in fact, represents a motif common in Akutagawa's work, that of the wife or mother who has within her a corrupting disease; as such in this work she shows a kinship with the garden which has within it the corrupting forces of nature, forces even able to dry up the garden's waterfall. These same forces, concentrated in a summer of extreme drought, are the very ones which burst the blood vessels in Nakamura's head and so kill him. They are the ones which infect both Nakamura's eldest son and that son's wife with consumption, a name perfectly suited to describing the inner rot of tuberculosis, the decay so alike that progressing year by year in the garden. Indeed the Nakamura family is a family more in name than actuality, two of its sons having

left its fold, one actually having been given in adoption to others; this son, though, is not immune to the destructive powers bent on exerting their control over the Nakamura family and garden: the second son (identified as 'Jinan' in the text, a name which means simply 'second son') spends ten years ruining his health in a life of moral decay before returning to live within the mortuary room of the estate's main house, known as the 'mother house' in a Japanese idiom, wherein he rests his body plagued by the malignancy of syphilis. Here again we see aligned the images of death and disease with the image of the mother: the mother house houses within it a family in ruin; the memorials to two dead men, Nakamura and his son; the memorial to a consumptive woman, the son's wife, also a mother; the mother with open sores on her skin; and a man soon to die of syphilis, a degenerative disease contracted through sexual relations with prostitutes, 'professional' women who concentrate within them the sexual essence of 'woman'. Jinan one day hears his mother singing a kaeuta, a popular, heroic song (which she learned from her husband, who himself learned it from a prostitute) which tells of a famous samurai preparing for battle; the samurai is killed but his name lives on for the valour with which he fought and died. He has obtained through his efforts some measure of immortality: this is the goal Jinan shall take as his own through the reconstruction of the garden's facade, through his work to present an image of nature as perfected, as welcoming of the human presence. However like the samurai felled by a musket ball Jinan shall be defeated by a force stronger than the flimsy armour of

his body and work. The song shall come to mock him, for his work shall end in failure and his name shall be forgotten. During his slow, stubborn work rebuilding, which proceeds against the twin oppositions of an advanced natural disorder in the landscape's previously well-crafted surface and his family's indifference to his labours, Jinan experiences periods of fatigue so deep he must lie down where he is. Whenever this happens, we are told, "around him in the heat shimmer that consumes the entire garden, the flowers and young shoots of the grasses smoulder and smoke" (V:241): in this passage we see clearly what it is which possesses this garden, where it is that Jinan tries to change the face of nature. Jinan is in hell, the hell of human endeavour which pits itself against that which it cannot vanquish: the strength of the natural world. Jinan's work progresses; in time Ren'ichi, whose name can mean 'the accusing one', begins to help him and comes to see the effect battling nature has on his uncle, for Jinan grows confused, his work grows sloppy. Ren'ichi watches his uncle, judges him: Akutagawa uses the verb niramitsukeru, which freely translated means to accuse. Ren'ichi accuses Jinan, charges him with confusion, condemning the decay of his uncle's mind. But a few lines earlier in the work we had seen Ren'ichi sitting beside the newly-opened stream busily killing any ants which came his way; the character with which the word for ant is written, ari, (蟻) combines the symbol for insect with that for ceremony or ritual, and presents ants as something of a paradox: a member of the natural world which utilizes the human enterprise of ritual.

Ants therefore combine elements of nature and the human realm, and Ren'ichi's destruction of them here comes to show Akutagawa's ideal of the individual, one who will "turn his back on both society and nature" (ibid) to create for himself his own existence, like Jinan does here, and like Ren'ichi shall later, in following his uncle's artistic enterprise. It is this determination to create something for himself which Ren'ichi accuses Jinan of losing; he blames him for losing his drive, his individualistic ambition to overcome, alone, both natural resistance and social indifference to his chosen work. This drive had united Jinan with the painter of "Numachi" who also worked alone against the sickly yellow swamp he depicted and the society which excluded him from its fold; its loss places Jinan where he must ultimately end, within the lists of mortals. Jinan's illness progresses to the point of incapacitating him. On his deathbed he expresses satisfaction with the work he has done in the garden, even though "to compare it with the old garden {would be a disappointment, for in actuality} that elegant surface created by a renowned landscape artist was virtually nowhere to be seen" (V:242-3). In Jinan's mind however, fogged by sickness, the concept of the garden thrives with all its former magnificence: hence the poignancy of Ren'ichi's anger towards his uncle. Ren'ichi is caught in the frustration of seeing both the goal and the achievement; as the one best able to appreciate Jinan's work he is the one most sympathetic to the artist, most desirous of complete accomplishment of his task, and so too most likely to

continue his efforts in his own life (in fact it is Ren'ichi who discovers Jinan's corpse). Ren'ichi's paintings carry on Jinan's project of capturing an image of nature, of creating an easily manipulated form which man may dominate (Akutagawa presents one final link with woman and nature in the coda to this piece, which describes Ren'ichi painting a female model; while he and his uncle have the same goal their materials are the two allies opposed to Akutagawa), and so allow Jinan's memory to come to him with a clarity which implies more than a sympathetic partnership: Jinan's presence in Ren'ichi's mind indicates that Jinan's confusion and disease are both also present there, guaranteeing an ultimate failure for this young artist who, far from famous, struggles on alone in his garret with the same determination which motivated his uncle and drove the painter of "Numachi" to madness.

In "Niwa" we encounter Akutagawa's view of nature as something hostile which lurks behind the man-made, civilized space in which society lives. We see also that for Akutagawa that society too is hostile to the artist, to the individual who is able to transcend the illusion of appearance and effect a transformation of materials into a benevolent representation of a benign nature. This artist, working to impose his will, his vision, onto the stuff of the world, is very much akin to the Western individual, having indeed many similarities to the stereotypically struggling genius, this cliché who works alone to create beauty, found in Western popular mythology. In certain respects Akutagawa seems virtually indistinguishable from

alienated Western writers, notably Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893), some of whose work, such as "Fou?" (1882; tr. Am I Insane? 1903) speaks directly to Akutagawa's innermost being (despite the affinity between these two writers, Akutagawa once wrote that although he admired de Maupassant, he disliked him, and even felt discomfort when he read some of his pieces (XIII:31)). Within the Japanese canon there is none to match Akutagawa's suspicion of nature. Typically in classical Japanese poetry, for example, nature appears as an entity intimately connected with human emotions. Through the influence of Buddhism the transience of the seasons comes to express the transience of human life; seasonal cyclicity expresses the cycles of human reincarnation. In love poetry natural imagery helps to express the longings of the lovers for one another, or their disappointments, too; it is often the songs of birds which intervene in the lovers' revels to alert them to the approaching dawn. In the "Man'yōshū" (c.750; tr. Collection of Ten Thousand Leaves,), "the oldest and greatest of the Japanese anthologies of poetry" (Keene, p.33), we see nature as something alluring, peaceful:

Nothing but pain and shame
in this world of men, but I
cannot fly away, Wanting the
wings of a bird

(Yamanoue.Okura, in Keene, p.48).

Within nature there are creatures sympathetic to man's plight, beings which share his sorrow at living in a world of sorrow:

I find no solace in my heart;
 Like the bird flying behind the clouds
 I weep aloud (Yamanoue.Okura, in Keene,
 p.49).

In works from the "Kokinshu" (905; tr. Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems,)), "the first of the anthologies of Japanese poetry compiled by imperial order" (Keene, p.76), nature too provides the images necessary for poetry. As in the "Man'yoshu" the works in the "Kokinshu" are strongly coloured with Buddhist sentiment, and with a "gentle melancholy" (Keene, p.76).

Since I left her,
 Frigid as the setting moon,
 There is nothing I loathe
 As much as the light
 Of dawn on the clouds

(Mibu no Tadamine, in Keene, p.78).

If I consider
 My body like the fields
 Withered by winter,
 Can I hope, though I am burnt,
 That spring will come again?

(Ise, in Keene, p.79).

So lonely am I
 My body is a floating weed
 Severed at the roots.
 Were there water to entice me,
 I would follow it, I think

(Ono no Komachi, *ibid*).

This last piece in particular demonstrates a sensibility quite different from that of Akutagawa. The image of the rootless weed well conveys the narrator's feeling of abandonment, of severance from the anchoring, nurturing solidity of the world or human society. Contrarily, Akutagawa's artists, if they did not actually thrive in this alienated condition, at least lived in it, and in it produced there works. Indeed Akutagawa's artists actively

seek this isolation from the uncomprehending people around them, looking to society for only appreciation of their products, as the painter in "Numachi" sought inclusion in the exhibition for the display of his oil painting. For this painter the sticky yellow mud of the swamp was something which engulfed one's foot, never to release it. For the poet Ono no Komachi, however this same absorption into a muddy or earthy ground becomes a rooting, a proof of her belonging to life itself.

Whereas in traditional Japanese imagery one's association with nature becomes a reassuring union with an eternal energy, for Akutagawa such an energy becomes a force directed against one's individual life. As we have seen, Shiga Naoya is very much of the Japanese tradition. His characters do indeed arrive at the integration implied in the above-noted poems. For the Shiga-hero, as in Ise's poem, spring will come to the burnt field, even though the new shoots will be different from those of the previous year. For the traditional Japanese world view, life is a category of inexhaustible renewal, not of individual particles. Akutagawa, however, is barred from this renewal; for him, one must struggle to maintain one's own identity in the face of an absorbing cyclicity, one must resist reabsorption into Mother Earth, the female body which shall form the subject of our next chapter.

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Woman

Akutagawa, without room for compromise, was a male writer: his opus is purely concerned with a male perspective, the era in which he lived privileged men, and Japanese society was, and is, a masculine one, a society in which to be male was a prerequisite to any sort of public participation. Women in Asia have always been marginalized, overlooked; as Simone de Beauvoir phrases it, "the history of women in the East... has been in effect that of a long and unchanging slavery" (de Beauvoir, p.75). This is not to explain as irrelevant or inevitable the degree to which misogyny and an actual fear of women pervade Akutagawa's work; indeed although it has been argued elsewhere that "male writers... want not only to control the texts they create but also exercise a patriarchal authority over the female characters they imbed in those texts" (Person, pp.3-4), Akutagawa's portrayal of women goes far beyond an attempt to gain some self-assuring dominance over an inscrutable Other who may at best embarrass, at worst threaten his very existence. Rather, Akutagawa's female characters exhibit a number of qualities which indicate their creator's very real fears of a nature/female alliance or conspiracy to ensnare him in a web of insanity and decay. Women are consistently represented as somehow in league with nature, earth-mothers turned savage dominatrices, partners in the destruction of rational, male existence Akutagawa saw inherent in nature, and this representation, far from

providing Akutagawa with control over those two opponents, if anything reinforced the paranoia with which he lived, reinforced his fears of following his mother into the insanity from which her only release was death. Not surprisingly the figure of the Mother, too, receives an important treatment in Akutagawa's works, appearing in guises often explicitly associated with malevolence and disease; as the essence of woman ("... what is woman? 'Tota mulier in utero,'...'woman is a womb.'" de Beauvoir, p.xiii) the mother is the one whence comes the most hostile antagonism to Akutagawa's masculine perceptions, where is found the source of all his fears. (It is interesting that Akutagawa rarely writes of men as insane, and rarely too writes of fathers. Perhaps this is because as a male himself Akutagawa felt little, or at least less, otherness in men, yet the absence of the father in his work is an intriguing gap. As David Tavey writes in his study of Patrick White, Patrick White, Fiction, and the Unconscious, a work particularly amusing when applied to aspects of Akutagawa because of its Jungian, depth-psychological analysis of White's fantasized, unconscious, incestuous relationship with his mother,

the feeling of being isolated is a central fact of adolescence. the ego is cast out of the pleasurable matrix and is forced to develop in the realm of the consciousness. In the mythological cycle of the developing ego the father is meant to become the dominant archetype at this point, guiding the son into the world and facilitating his adaptation to life. In [by extension Akutagawa's] fiction, however, the father is absent, either quite literally or else spiritually and psychologically...What this means is that the ego development is retarded at adolescence, there is no internal direction into adulthood and maturity, but a perpetual hankering after the psychic past... or perhaps a modelless search for a viable self-creation,

a fictionalized individuality which defines itself inadequately to arrive at a durable personality (Tavey, p.9).

This type of modelless self-creation is not an impossible aspect of Akutagawa's life; indeed in light of his suicide the failure of Akutagawa to arrive at a durable personality becomes something one may plausibly explain through recourse to such a psychological interpretation). Akutagawa's treatment of women in general and mothers in particular in his work is an extension of his treatment of nature, and one may interpret this as an attempt to avenge himself on, or at least to present to himself a view of, his own mother and what he could conceivably perceive as her betrayal of him, her withholding of the maternal affection so necessary to one's healthy integration into a social order.

Motherly love... is unconditional affirmation of the child's life and his needs. But one important addition to this description must be made here. Affirmation of the child's life has two aspects; one is the care and responsibility absolutely necessary for the preservation of the child's life and his growth. the other aspect goes further than mere preservation. It is the attitude which instills in the child a love for living, which gives him the feeling: it is good to be alive, it is good to be on this Earth!... The effect on the child can hardly be exaggerated. Mother's love for life is as infectious as her anxiety is. Both attitudes have a deep effect on the child's whole personality; one can distinguish indeed, among children -- and adults -- those who got only 'milk' and those who got 'milk and honey' (Fromm, pp.42-3).

The association of woman with death is not surprising given Akutagawa's own past and the social milieu in which he lived, one which historically favoured the male through the dominant ideological perspectives it held: Buddhism and Confucianism both emphasized the importance of being male for the achievement of enlightenment or sagehood, the ideal

accomplishments for which one strove in one's daily affairs. These two systems both reflected and influenced the agrarian based cultures whence they originated, which valued the male for his greater capacity for physical labour; woman was left in a position of servitude (indeed Confucius wrote in the *Analects*, "Women and servants are most difficult to deal with. If you are familiar with them they cease to be humble. If you keep a distance from them they resent it" (Chan, p.47)). With the influx of European thought begun in the Meiji period and continuing with ever greater momentum into Akutagawa's own time devaluation of the female received greater credence. In the West, "women, historically consigned to the spheres of non-productive or reproductive labour, ... [have been] situated outside the society of male producer, in a state of nature" (Owens, p.63). Further,

disease and the Woman have something in common -- they are both socially devalued or undesirable, marginalized elements which constantly threaten to infiltrate and contaminate that which is more central, health or masculinity. There is even a sense in which the female body could be said to harbour disease within physical configurations that are enigmatic to the male (Doane, p.152).

Until quite recently it was more the rule than the exception for even well educated men to view woman as "the being who is feeble, dangerous, mysteriously troublesome, [even incapable of restraint or rational thought. In the opinion of many], God had only created woman to tempt man and test him. Man should not approach her without those precautions for defense which he would take, and the fears he would cherish, near an ambush" (de Maupassant, p.51b). The source of this enmity is of course the role Christian mythology assigns woman as the ruination of Eden, a role which both

reflects and influences the traditional association of woman with nature. For Christianity then man can only accept the woman who denies her carnality and expresses her contrition through submissiveness to man. Writes Simone de Beauvoir,

As servant, woman is entitled to the most splendid deification. In her, Christianity hates the flesh; if she renounces the flesh she is God's creature... She takes her place... among the souls assured the joys of Heaven [but not of this life, wherein she must continually bow and serve]... If she agrees to deny her animality woman... will also be the most radiant incarnation of triumph [over the flesh, as the most repentant of the most vile sinners becomes the most glorified in salvation].

It was as Mother that woman was fearsome [for as Mother she is most representative of morality]; it is in maternity that she must be transfigured and enslaved... She will be glorified only in accepting the subordinate role assigned to her [as the virgin mother, the impossibly immaculate]... This is the supreme masculine victory, consummated in the cult of the Virgin -- it is the rehabilitation of woman through the accomplishment of her defeat... As much the source of death as life, in giving birth to men [woman had a mystical power over pre-Christian men, but] under Christianity life and death depend only upon God, and man, once out of the maternal body, has escaped that body forever. (de Beauvoir, p.159-60)

This escape however did not give to man the distance whence to appreciate objectively the humanity of woman; rather it alienated him from woman and allowed him to feel contempt for the vessel he once occupied, now able to discard it, assured of a greater receptacle for what now became the eternal essence of individual personality. Akutagawa did not miss the significance of Mary as representative of the Mother; in a piece entitled "Kokuseiba" (1920; Mother of the Black-Robed Saint) he depicts Mary as a brutal, deceptive, and exacting symbol of feminine threat who tricks a grandmother into forfeiting not only her life but that of her grandson as well.

Even in those Western thinkers not persuaded by

christian rhetoric that woman must remain inferior to man as the source of sin in the world, nonetheless there persists the urge to blame, or conversely revere with the respect that comes from fear, the mother as the cause of mortality, for the mother is consistently seen as that which starts life's unalterable course to death. The mother suffers the consequences of human sexuality in carrying the results of that sexuality; "sexuality implies death and vice versa" (Kristeva, p.103). If one is not busy condemning woman as the destroyer of an Edenic paradise or as mother, the root of death, it seems as if one's only other option has been historically to be lost in dewy-eyed, sentimental reverence of the Earth Mother nurturer who regulates man's place in the universe by allowing into the human (male) realm remembrances of things unifying and secure:

since woman has been subjected as mother, she will be cherished and respected first as mother. Of the two ancient aspects of maternity, (those of nurturer/creator and death/destroyer) man today wishes to know only the smiling, attractive face. Limited in time and space, having but one body and one finite life, man is but a lone individual in the midst of a Nature and a History that are both foreign to him. Woman is similarly limited, and like man she is endowed with mind and spirit, but she belongs to Nature, the infinite current of life flows through her; she appears, therefore, as the mediatrix between the individual and the cosmos. When the mother has become a figure of reassurance and holiness man naturally turns to her in love. Lost in nature he seeks to escape; but separated from her he wishes to go back. Established firmly in the family, in society,... the mother is the very incarnation of the good: nature, to which she belongs in part, becomes good, no longer an enemy of the spirit; and if she remains mysterious, hers is a smiling mystery (de Beauvoir, p.160).

This somewhat benign view of woman is nonetheless alienating, serving to remove her from the male sphere

divorced from a nature with which woman maintains an intimate contact.

Such then have been the historical, polar views of woman operating within Akutagawa's intellectual environment: one offering her as the source of sin and threat; the other revering her as a link with an otherwise indifferent nature, neither of which view allows for a free interaction between two groups of equally human individuals. Akutagawa unites aspects of these two opinions to present woman as a link to nature's corruption, leaving no room for a compassionate view of woman who very much belongs to nature and supports all the malevolence implied in that possession. For him the mother is indeed the source of disease and death; she is an archetypal representation of all the dangerous unknown implied in nature's hostility to the individual who must age and die in solitude, alienated by all the mysteries of his own birth. Perhaps Akutagawa's best expression of this view comes in the piece already introduced, "Niwa", wherein the super-abundance of dying, diseased mothers, all inhabiting the main or "mother" house of the Nakamura family estate, itself slowly being reclaimed by the chaotic growths of nature, ie., which is itself dying, presents the reader with a clearly matrophobic reality: Akutagawa even goes so far as to create the opportunity for the work's protagonist to receive his inspiration to rebuild the ornamental garden of the house, to battle the destruction of his home and self which nature is planning, and in so doing hasten his own physical and mental decline, through his mother's singing of an old ballad taught to her by her husband who, we are told,

learned it from a prostitute, a symbol of woman's servitude and sexuality. The mother becomes the force which lures her own son into decline while herself suffering from a festering decay of her skin, while herself actually embodying rot. The pessimism and mistrust Akutagawa feels for society pale beside the emotions he holds for the image of the mother, for "compared with the love [and this word may be read as sarcastically as one would wish] that binds mother to son, all other 'human relations' stand revealed as flagrant imitations" (Kristeva, p.108). When the child cannot love the mother, her unity with nature will naturally reinforce any mistrust the child may feel for the world in general; if the child were to find himself in a position abandoned by his mother into a hostile environment his longings would be for a return to a time he may have only imagined. Even if that time should somehow come to be, if by chance the child were to rediscover his mother, how could his trust in her ever be that total, vital thing it should originally have been? I do not believe that Akutagawa necessarily longed for a return of his mother's affections, for those affections too to his memory were tainted by his fears of her insanity and its germs locked somewhere within him; but this certainly does not preclude her having an enormous influence and presence in his psyche. Quite the contrary: it is simply a question of quality. In Akutagawa the description of mother's relation to nature has a negative connotation: rather than the mother being an incarnation of the good and through her nature becoming an accepting place of harmonious unity, she amounts to an

absolute threat. Nature in turn becomes an absolutely malevolent entity. Akutagawa, while not (consciously) desiring his mother, conducts a lifelong dialogue with her, wages a continuous defensive battle against her influence. Being dead of course his mother is both immune to his attacks and in actuality harmless to him; but as in the best of paranoiacs the images of demons Akutagawa's mind conjures up for itself are the more effective the more remote in rational time their sources are. Just as Norman Bates in Hitchcock's Psycho carried within him his own mother, even supplying her with the use of his voice to urge his obeisance to her (created, artificial) demands, so too, Akutagawa creates for himself a haunting presence he shall both fear and support, an Other against whom he shall define himself, who shall persistently influence him to the point at which, while protesting his non-identity with that Other, he shall in fact take on her characteristics and attributes, assigned, created by him in the first place, and so bring about the end against which he had struggled -- his own death culminating a decline into paranoia and mental decay. As a youth Akutagawa visited his mother during the years of her infirmity; she passed away before he as an adult could make peace with himself over her fate.

When the possibilities of communication are swept away, the last remaining rampart against death is the subtle spectrum of auditory, tactile, and visual memories that precede language and re-emerge in its absence [as the breeding ground of thought, of art, as the fertile soil in which literature's necessity to an individual takes root, as in fact a surrogate mother]. Nothing could be more 'normal' than that a maternal image should establish itself on the site of that tempered anguish known as love. No one is spared. Except perhaps... the writer who, by force of language, can still manage

nothing more than to demolish the fiction of mother-as-love's-mainstay and to identify with love as it really is: a fire of tongues, an escape from representation [into the arena of self-creation, of immaculate, untainted birth]. For the few who practice it, then, is modern art not a realization of maternal love -- a veil over death, assuming death's very place and knowing that it does? A sublime celebration of incest...(Kristeva, p.111),

a love affair between mother and child which has as its climax not a sexual experience, nor even a reconciliation, but an acceptance of death as the unpostponable return to the womb, the inevitable embrace of the mother through madness, through suicide. Akutagawa's project in fiction may be seen as a number of things; one of his goals was perhaps the definition of himself, the creation of an existence which could endure the onslaughts of his memories and apprehensions for his future mental state. As such this definition necessitated his constant vigilance against his mother which ensured her constant presence in his (at least unconscious) thoughts.

A child's perceptions of parents are always influenced by psychic factors [being reinforced by the witnessed facts of their lives] and when the son is unusually close to the mother [in terms of the influential space she occupies in his inner world, in terms of the amount of psychic weight with which she is endowed by him] the negative aspect of the Mother archetype often appears with frightening force. In psychological terms this is because the emerging ego is caught up in the maternal realm, and is unable to develop a separate existence, so that 'mother' seems overwhelming, a force which negates and destroys life. (Tavey, p.4).

This is the negative view of de Beauvoir's mother as the mediatrix between the individual and the cosmos, the benevolence which can integrate the child into a reassuring unity, provided he has first received her love, for "without

nourishment from the maternal image the world is benumbed and everything seems as a nightmare" (Tavey, p.9). Akutagawa as one embarked on a project of self-creation, of individuation, through this project disqualified himself from any chance of a peaceful merger with the memory of his (nurturing) mother, for

paradoxically the child can experience a more positive aspect of the [Mother] archetype [only] when he surrenders his individuality and sinks back into the maternal source. Then the Mother appears as a vast ocean of ecstasy and support, an inviting womb in which the son is contained and nurtured. She is still the disintegrating figure as before [for in both aspects of the archetype the existence of the child as the individuated child is lost], but now the process of being overpowered assumes a seductive, pleasurable character (Tavey, p.40).

The individual's point of view must choose between an acceptance of the loss of self into the mother as a welcoming oblivion or a stubborn insistence on individuality which condemns one to fighting tooth and nail against the sources of one's life. This latter is the one Akutagawa chose for himself in choosing to resist (that is, in choosing to worry about) the potential for madness he allowed himself to perceive as having been deposited in him by his mother, which he presented to himself in his fiction through the images of the mother and woman as diseased, unbalanced, and aligned with nature's hostility. Perhaps only this view of Akutagawa's work gives full appreciation to the tragic role he created for himself, a role which presents the figure of a man trying, not as a snake to swallow himself, but rather to write the hand which writes itself, to create his own birth free of a mother's mediation (and this would also help explain Akutagawa's later interest

in Christ), an obvious impossibility, obvious even to him, yet nonetheless attempted with stoic determination to proceed to the utmost realization of his own responsibility: his suicide, itself carefully planned, introduced, framed by a suicide note, that is, by an act of writing, the same act which had created the life lived up to that point.

As with many of his themes, Akutagawa's presentation of woman's naturally inspired hostility intensifies over time. Initially he offers her image to the reader (and to himself) as an alien being, virtually of a different species to man, a being understandable only from the viewpoint of nature. In a particularly short piece entitled "Nyotai" (1917; tr. A Woman's Body, 1952), Akutagawa describes a woman's body from the point of view of a louse. The protagonist of the piece, the woman's husband, "a Chinese man named Yo" (II:51), one mysterious evening finds himself transformed into a louse and is able to discover in his wife's sleeping form whole landscapes of beauty which had hitherto been invisible to him. Akutagawa's use of a Chinese protagonist here is particularly significant, for although this man must first be changed into a louse in order to appreciate his wife's beauty, nonetheless he does in fact arrive at a positive conclusion concerning that beauty in perceiving it as such: Akutagawa, in choosing a foreigner, someone from a 'different place', and one that could have been seen as inferior in light of Japan's self-assumed role of Asian colonial power at the time of Akutagawa's writing, protects himself from an association with Yo's experiences, while allowing himself to benefit from the presentation of woman

as comprehensible only to an equally natural entity, an insect.

One evening while trying to sleep in "an excessive, sultry heat, lying on his bed sunk deep into an absurd fantasy" (ibid), Yo espies a louse crawling along the edge of the mattress towards Yo's sleeping wife. He wonders to himself what a louse's life must be like, and concludes that "if he had been born a louse, how tedious he would have found things" (ibid).

While aimlessly pondering such matters Yo's consciousness gradually dimmed. Of course, it was no dream, but then, neither was it reality. Rather, Yo began to sink, but without sinking, down to the bottom of an incredibly ecstatic feeling. When he finally returned to full consciousness with a startled opening of his eyes, he found that at some point he had entered into the louse's body, and was wriggling his way along the edge of the sweat-soaked bed. (ibid)

Yo is surprised by not only the transformation, for there before his eyes lies an enormous form, a "tall mountain. Warmly embracing a full roundness, it seems to hang like a stalactite from its top, which Yo's eye could not reach, down to the bed just before" (II: 52). This mountain, Yo discovers, is one of his wife's breasts, glowing as if "containing a fire within it" (ibid). So overwhelming are Yo's surprise and awe at the sight before him that

forgetting love and hate, forgetting even desire, he stares up at that... enormous breast. Forgetting even the sweat-soaked bed he stands unable to move. Yo, having become a louse, for the first time is able truly to perceive the physical beauty of his wife (ibid).

Although superficially the story appears to describe the process by which one strange night a man becomes closer to his wife through a realization of her beauty, appearances are here more deceptive than usual. The work contains

subversive elements which serve to reinforce the alienation of the man from both the woman's body and the natural world.

First of all, on this sultry night, the heat of which is keeping Yo awake, his wife is able to sleep soundly, seemingly unaffected by the source of her husband's discomfort. Although Yo is far from a well rounded character (the reader has no idea of his age, occupation, personal tastes, or even physical features, for example), he does at least have a name, a feature which his wife lacks. "naming... is the labelling of the character that completes its formation" (Bal, p.336), yet it is his name that is the very first of Yo's possessions the reader encounters. Akutagawa presents Yo, through his name, as sufficiently defined to support the weight of the few paragraphs of text which nonetheless owe as much to the wife's body (and to the louse!) as to Yo, the only 'human' character the reader can call by name. All other characters in this work are defined in relation to Yo, all receive their respective degrees of importance through the order in which his eyes encounter their forms. Hence from Yo's perspective (which becomes that of the reader) the louse, being first encountered and watched with greater interest than the wife, is more important than Yo's spouse. A further valorization of the louse at the expense of the wife comes in the description of the louse's back as "reflecting the pale light of the candle like a pinch of silver dust" (II:51), while the wife is the sleeping, naked inhabitant of a bed smelling of sweat. the louse is able to rouse Yo from his absurd fantasies, and in some ways draws sympathetic thoughts from Yo, who pities the

creature's inability to cover "in one hour that which Yo could cover in two or three steps" (ibid), a sympathy which indicates the split between Yo's wakeful, masculine ability to move, and nature's relative immobility: this relative paralysis as a further division between man and nature is also present in Yo's wife who, asleep, of course remains still.

Finding himself transformed into the louse, and standing before his wife's body, Yo resorts to imagery of the natural world to describe that body which, in fact, he is initially unable even to recognize as such. He sees before him a mountain, a stalactite, "with a glossy whiteness and a gently sloping hollow just beyond, seeming to shine in the moonlight just after a fresh fall of snow" (II:52). This 'mountain' contains the contradictory qualities of a snowy whiteness and a concealed, fire-like glow, a warmth of life hidden beneath an image of deathly cold. When Yo recognizes the mountain for what it is, it eliminates in him the contradictory emotions of love and hate, even extinguishing his sexual desire, becoming not a tangible, living human breast but "an enormous breast like a mountain of ivory" (ibid), a mountain of once-living material transformed into an insurmountable obstacle. This obstacle, this mountainous breast, is so alienating that before it Yo can no longer even move, "as if struck stiff" (ibid), like Medussa's victims turned to stone by the woman/monster combining within her body attributes of femaleness and nature, breasts and serpents. The Medussa involves an association of woman with nature and represents

this association as threatening to males, for they shall become immobile, passive when she stares at them: they shall lose their masculine ability to move, as Yo loses his when transfixed before his wife. He has entered the slow-moving body of a louse, part of the natural world, to witness the beauty of his wife's body which for him is equally a part of nature; hence, he must be struck stiff as stone.

Yo's wife combines within her breast the qualities of life-sustaining nourishment, the fire-like glow which warms the depths of her being, and a hard, snowy exterior which repulses even Yo's desire to approach it, making unobtainable the life it contains within. This is the beauty which Yo is now able to perceive within his wife's flesh, this contradictory life-supporting and yet alienating, ivory-like physicality which does not arouse desire, urgings for a human, sexual union with it: this beauty remains the quality of an object which only another (non-human) object can appreciate, this being Yo in the body of the louse which itself does not appreciate the dichotomy of the breast but sees in it only a source of blood, of food. To the louse, free of a human ability to intellectualize a split between the snowy, ivory exterior, and the fire-like interior, this breast is accessible as something into which it can enter, as an equally natural substance with which it can merge both to sustain its own life and allow to fulfill its function, the transmission of nutrients from one body to another. Akutagawa here creates a situation wherein that transmission and that merger are denied to one being, a human male, for his alienation from

his wife as woman and nature's ally, and yet permitted to another being, the parasitic louse, for its positioning within a natural order shared with the woman as an existence opposed to that of the human, ie., male Yo. The surface appreciation of Yo for his wife's beauty serves to reveal the enormity of the gulf separating him from a true communion with her body, with herself: they are in fact members of two completely different worlds, Yo belonging to the conscious, rational world of human intellectual speculation and motion, the wife belonging to the physical, objective, natural world unconscious of (male) mental activity, immobile, accessible to only other natural creatures such as the louse.

In a piece only slightly longer than "Nyotai", "Onna" (1920; Woman), Akutagawa again represents a merger of nature with the female, in this instance describing, under the heading "Woman", the predatory qualities of a female spider, her giving birth to a brood of young spiders, and her death. The story reveals the creature, not without a certain almost sympathetic tenderness, to be a vicious organism existing simply to kill and reproduce, then die, her function fulfilled. The spider becomes representative for Akutagawa of all woman, the mother, means to him, "almost evil itself" (IV: 85). A synopsis of the story is almost as long as the work itself: a spider is bathing in the sunlight of a midsummer's day, "pondering" (IV: 84) something beneath a red rose, when a bee approaches. The spider stealthily, silently stalks the bee; after the passing of a "brief moment of cruel silence" (ibid), the

spider pounces. The bee, "smeared with pollen" (ibid), beats its wings desperately, making the dusty pollen "dance in the light" (ibid). The struggle soon ends to reveal the spider "calmly, without even bestirring herself, beginning to suck out the bee's blood. The sunlight, ignorant of shame,... cuts open the solitude of midday and illuminates the spider, triumphant in her butchery and plunder... With its ash-coloured, satin belly, black pearl eyes, and ugly...leprous legs -- the spider, like 'Evil' itself, crouches maliciously over the dead bee" (ibid). These events, we read, recur several times, until "one day, as if recollecting something" (IV:85) the spider begins to spin a nest into which she deposits numberless small eggs. She herself sits atop this woven packet, this spider the "colour of corrosive ash" (ibid), and "as if having forgotten both sunlight and honeybees... remains sunk in her thoughts" (ibid). Several weeks pass and the young spiders "sleeping inside their eggs... wake up. It is the now aged mother spider... who first notices this... She cuts through the pocket separating mother from children", (ibid) allowing a steady stream to spill forth. The young spiders swarm over the rose bush and disperse themselves, leaving behind "to her solitude" (IV:86) the spider who "at some point, while feeling the boundless joy of a mother who has achieved her purpose, has died. That woman who had lived amidst midsummer's nature, killing bees, who was like Evil itself" (ibid). The final passage contains a fond nostalgia, indeed almost a tender note of parting for this spider, now called mother and woman, abandoned by her young for whom she had

given her life. This piece presents a number of images of things female which, while not negating the pathos of the final lines, certainly sets it off as a complex emotional response to the memory of a dead mother.

The reader initially encounters a sexless spider endowed with the ability to think about things, a human attribute here encapsulated in something far from human, something which immediately becomes no longer a contemplative existence in repose but a calculating and ruthless hunter whose prey is a honeybee, a non-reproducing worker bee covered with pollen, the sexual dust of the flower which shelters the spider. Akutagawa mentions the connection between bee and pollen three times, once before the attack, again during the struggle, when the pollen, "made to dance in the light" (IV: 84), shows off the violence of the fight, and finally when, the battle over, the spider prepares to draw off the vital fluids of the corpse: this close association is consistent with Akutagawa's linking of death with sexuality, for this entire piece is little more than an elaborate construction to present and then destroy the image of the cruel mother. The bee, a sexless creature despite its biological femaleness, must be highlighted as that which allows floral reproduction to take place by being literally immersed in sex, in the stuff of sexuality which is pollen, at the moment of its demise. After this sort of event is repeated a number of times the spider, which had hitherto also remained sexless, discovers (actually recalls) itself to be pregnant, to be a reproductive, sexed entity, despite the complete absence of

another spider, let alone a male, from the brief narrative (this piece is conspicuous for its lack of male, paternal elements, begging a discussion of the role of Akutagawa's own father in his life, which unfortunately falls outside the scope of the present study. Further, this pregnancy, bordering on an immaculate conception, offers a range of possibilities in a study of Akutagawa's interest in Christianity). Discovering her own sex the spider "forgets even the sound of a bee's wings" (IV:85): the butchering of female bees, highlighted as reproductive mechanisms despite their own lack of reproductive ability, which had provided her with nourishment is now put aside over the weeks in which she does nothing but await the hatching of her brood. This having occurred she dies: her own reproduction here provides the necessary prelude to death the story had been awaiting for its conclusion. That this work is set within the stems and beneath the reproductive organs of a rose bush reinforces the informing theme of a link between (female) sexuality and death, here made both savagely violent and touchingly forlorn: the mother, while killing in a vampirish fashion, a fashion which gains her the characterization of being almost Evil itself, dies in solitude having obeyed the laws of nature with which she had been intimately familiar, completely ignored by the little mouths she had let loose into the world, her young "numberless" (ibid) the better to universalize her role, to make her symbolic of all motherhood. This nostalgia for a mother unknown to her young exists for the work's narrator alone, however; for the spider, her death is neither painful nor frightening, simply

natural, a part of the greater design of life. Woman, the mother, is profoundly connected with nature in Akutagawa's work and so able to accept even for herself life's conclusion. Hence Yo's wife is able to sleep soundly in conditions which prevent her husband from doing the same: she 'fits in' to her environment, as it were, while Yo does not. The description of the spider's legs as leprous anticipates the later, closer associations of the mother with malignant disease which permeate "Niwa", wherein the diseases are also of a putrescent quality, typified by the now archaic though incomparably evocative word 'consumption': Akutagawa reserves for his female characters illnesses which imply a reabsorption of the body into a greater entity, and one may argue that the death of the mother spider is a direct result of her young having absorbed her vital, reproductive energies, performing the function of a tuberculosis bacillus or other sucking parasite (much as the mother herself existed by sucking dry the bodies of bees, vectors of reproduction for the rose bush which sheltered and supported the spider). The underlying message is that mentioned by Kristeva, that death and sexuality imply, in fact necessitate, one another. The mother becomes not merely a conduit into life but a revealer of the link between birth and death.

One will seek in vain throughout the ten or so volumes of short fiction that make up Akutagawa's opus for a depiction of woman which is not hostile, not marked by an aggressive suspicion of all that she contains. There is very little subtlety masking the negative opinion Akutagawa

holds of his female characters, and if in his own life he treated his wife rather well, and easily formed extramarital relations with other women (Yoshida Seiichi devotes a portion of his two-volumed study Akutagawa Ryunosuke to identifying some of the enigmatic female figures who inhabit Akutagawa's later autobiographical works), this detracts not at all from the misogynistic qualities of his prose. One work which could mislead the reader into believing that Akutagawa at least temporarily relented in his battle against woman as destroyer to offer an image of woman as misunderstood victim may be "Kesa to Morito" (1918; tr. Kesa and Morito, 1956), a piece structured as two monologues by the characters Kesa, a noble woman married to a man admired by her seducer, Morito, the other soliloquist, who must, through his own suggestion though against his will, murder that husband, monologues which present very different views of the act of Kesa's seduction by Morito and its consequences. One may subject this work to a variety of critical methods and so arrive at a variety of conclusions, none particularly privileged; one such method would be an application of the (slightly modified) terms 'sadist' and 'masochist' to Morito and Kesa, respectively, a method which would then define this piece as a depiction of the revenge an objectified subject would exact upon an objectifying subject. One must rework the terms sadist and masochist here, stripping them of their (overtly) violent aspects and reducing them to categories describing a person who refuses to recognize another as worthy of subjectivity, in the case of the sadist; and one who permits another to remove his or

her subjectivity for himself, in the case of the masochist. Including in the interpretation the role of the moon in the piece, the work becomes yet again a linking by Akutagawa of the female with nature to trap and defeat the male: the moon, traditionally in Asian philosophy a female force, functions here as a consistent device to unite woman with nature's malice.

Morito's soliloquy comes first; herein the reader encounters the principle characters and learns of the events which have led to Morito's necessity to kill Kesa's husband, Wataru Saemon no jo. We read that Morito had known this fellow by sight, and had "actually felt jealously for a while when [he] learned that he was Kesa's husband" (II:116), for Morito "at least believed [him]self to be in love with Kesa" (II:117). However he admits that his feelings for her were not pure, and confesses to not knowing whether he had sought out her person or her body, during his self-imposed "celibacy" (ibid). In his words, "the love [he] harboured for Kesa was nothing more than a sentimentality, a beautified desire" (ibid); although for three years he "lived without being able to forget her, [he wonders] if he had known her body those three years ago he would still remember her" (ibid). What drives Morito back to Kesa most strongly is the "nostalgic regret" (miren, ibid) he feels at not having seduced her before her marriage, and so schemes to accomplish this belated conquest of her body, in which enterprise his success both surprises and disappoints him:

when Kesa and I sat together... I came to realize that my nostalgia for her had faded. Even more than because

I was no longer celibate, ...the real reason for that was that this woman's beauty had waned. In fact this Kesa was no longer the Kesa of three years ago. Her skin had lost its glow; around her eyes dark shadows had appeared, and around her cheeks and chin her rich flesh had faded... These changes were certainly a frightful blow to my desire (II:118).

Why then did Morito pursue his seduction ("rather, it would be more accurate to call it 'rape'" (II:119)) of Kesa? he "first of all had been driven by an odd urge to attack her, to degrade her" (II:118), and so drove her to speak at length about her marriage, deciding finally that this woman is too "proud of her husband" (ibid). However more than by his desire to degrade Kesa, Morito was "driven by pure lust. It was not a nostalgic regret at not having known her body, it was a baser lust for lust's sake which did not require that the body be that of Kesa" (ibid). After having sex with her he "even felt hatred for that woman" (ibid). She was "even more shameless than" (ibid) Morito appeared to himself. "Her dishevelled hair, her sweat-soaked make-up -- there was nothing that did not bespeak of the ugliness of her body and soul" (ibid). For reasons unknown to himself Morito whispers to Kesa, the woman he had so desperately wanted, whose body he has come to despise, that they should kill her husband. Forcing himself to admit why he had proposed the murder "of an unhated man for an unloved woman" (II:119), he realizes that he "could not restrain a desire to shame her...For this, there was nothing so suitable as to force her to consent to the murder of the husband for whom she had boasted of such love" (II:120). In making this suggestion he has occasion once again to be surprised by Kesa's reaction: she agrees "obediently" (sunaoni, ibid),

with a strange "glimmer resting in her eyes which [Morito has] never seen anywhere since" (ibid). Morito feels further disgust for Kesa:

'What a bitch!' I thought (kanfu, ibid)-- the ugliness of her sweat, of her indecency, tormented me... If I had been able I would have broken my vow then and there, I would have flung that slut to the very bottom of all shame. If I had done that perhaps my conscience could have taken refuge behind my indignation, even though I myself had made sport of that woman. I had no time then for such reflections: as if she could predict my thoughts that woman who had so quickly changed her expression, when she fixed my eyes with her gaze -- I must confess. My having fallen into these circumstances... is all due to my fear of Kesa's revenge if I don't carry out my promise (II:121).

Morito concludes his speech by once again bemoaning his fate, which is further to add "filth to the filth of [his] heart" (ibid), and by reiterating the ambiguous emotions he feels for Kesa, both hatred and love. Morito continues to pace in his garden as the moon appears, and the work moves on to Kesa's monologue.

Kesa begins by wondering if Morito will keep his word to murder Wataru; she decides that despite his scorn and hatred for her, she can rely on his fear to make him come, for if he should not, she could "never again raise her shamed face, like a female puppet, to greet the sun" (II:122). She thinks of herself as "not at all different from a corpse abandoned by the roadside" (ibid), she who "can now no longer rely on" (II:123) herself. Once proud of herself,

"three years ago [she] was able to have confidence in [her] own beauty more than all else. Rather than to say three years ago it may be closer to the truth to say it was up till that day when, in [her] grandmother's house [she] met that man whom [she] had seen only once before, [she] saw reflected in his eyes all [her] ugliness. He spoke softly, seducingly,... but how could the heart of a woman once made to see her own

ugliness take comfort at such words. [she] was merely mortified, frightened, saddened... Compared to the awful feeling [she] had when taken as a child by her wetnurse to see a lunar eclipse, how much worse was this present feeling. All the various dreams [she] had, vanished. After that there was nothing but ... [a profound] loneliness which surrounded [her] -- while cloaked in this loneliness, [she] gave up to him [her] body as if dead... After being released from his arms, again a free body, [she] thought [her]self wretched (ibid).

In this miserable condition, weeping from shame, she reflects that she "was not only saddened at having her faithfulness ruined. Atop that, to be despised like a leprous dog, to be hated, tormented, was more painful than anything else" (ibid). Hearing Morito's whispered suggestion to kill Wataru she experienced a

strangely vivid [ikikishita] feeling -- vivid? If moonlight can be called bright, then this was a vivid feeling. Nonetheless this was quite different from moonlight. Somehow [she] was consoled by his dreadful words... [she] continued with her lonely, moonlight-like vividness, to weep softly...[She] agreed to the promise...[She] thought for the first time of her husband...[Her] plan, which suddenly floated up in [her]mind, was probably a result of that instant when [she] recalled [her husband's smiling] face (II:124)

Her plan is to substitute herself for her husband, since she considered herself already dead, and so trick Morito into killing her, in this way "atoning" (ibid) for what she has done. She "will not die for [her] husband's sake. [She] will die for [her] own sake, for the sake of the wounds to [her] heart and the shame which soiled [her] body" (II:125). As Kesa puts out her lamp to await Morito's arrival, "there comes the sound of a shutter's opening, as a pale moonbeam begins to shine" (II:126).

The ominous appearance of the moonlight at the close of the work underlines the role it plays as an indicator of both Kesa's and Morito's changing views of themselves and

carnality. The moon links Kesa with nature, and reasserts Akutagawa's association with death in ways consistent with those present in such other pieces as "Niwa" and "Onna". The first lines of Morito's section tell the reader that although Morito had previously awaited the moon with impatience he now finds its arrival frightening: immediately after he speaks of the murder he must commit, and his sympathetic feelings for his victim. This is the only instance in his monologue of an expression of sympathy for anyone other than himself; even Kesa, the woman he has raped, receives nothing but scorn, existing not so much as a person for Morito but as a body, as flesh capable of satisfying his desire for flesh. She too changes from an entity whose presence Morito had anticipated with impatience to an object of fear and threat, one who would take his life should he fail her, identified through this transformation similar to that of the moon, with that object traditionally regarded in Asian philosophy as the embodiment of female energy. Kesa too has strong feelings for the moon: as a child she had seen a lunar eclipse with her wetnurse, her "uba", literally a "milk mother", and had experienced an awful feeling as the moon disappeared. This feeling however was surpassed in unpleasantness by the revelation of her own ugliness she receives from seeing herself reflected in Morito's eyes, for the faith she had in her own beauty was swept away by his look which revealed her to be flesh which could be desired. "The Other looks at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I am" (Sartre, p.473), and what he knows is that Kesa, as a body,

for Akutagawa through Morito, is both ugly and dangerous. Kesa assumes the masochistic pole to Morito's sadistic exposition of her as an object of desire, she loses herself, her subjectivity through his look, becoming flesh, and so experiences the sinking feeling of a loss of herself as woman, the same feeling as she had known at the eclipse of the moon, the loss of all feminine force in nature, this force further connected through the presence of the wetnurse, the surrogate mother, with all things female and with motherhood. The moon's reappearance at the end of the work and the hold it has on Morito signal the reinvigoration of the female in the form of death: as we have seen before, Akutagawa connects femininity with mortality, here expressing that through Morito's fear of Kesa's revenge and the moon's light. The fear with which he awaits the lunar dawn is the fear with which he anticipates Kesa's vengeance; it is this fear which drives him to kill Wataru and so become the victim of woman and nature, united in this piece to destroy the male arrogance which had sought to establish its primacy in the world.

Morito describes his feeling for Kesa as a beautified desire, a desire which becomes lust for lust's sake, lust for any body. His desire had been diminished by his realization that Kesa over time had changed; her flesh grew less rich, her flesh in fact deteriorated, indicating the passage of time and proving her mortality (so too one may consider a lunar eclipse as a marker of time's flow, more dramatic than the monthly cycle of waxing and waning for its unexpectedness): Morito, having carried Kesa's image with

him, had no expectation that this object could have a life of its own, its own place in the world which would allow it to age, eventually even to die. For him Kesa was not alive -- she was the representative form of the Body, an incarnated desire which permitted Morito to know himself for three years as alive, as desiring. Morito had known other bodies, had given up his celibacy, but these bodies were not the one he had awaited, they were not for him symbolic, existing as already possessed. It was Kesa who became for him Desire, the Body, the thing whose conquest was necessary for his satisfaction and reassurance that he was above the mortality of flesh.

Morito's desire for Kesa indicates two things, it assumes two aspects which are linked though in some ways contradictory. These things are the wish to experience his own body as body, and to manipulate another's body as flesh. I tend to agree with Sartre that

in desire I make myself flesh in the presence of the Other in order to appropriate the Other's flesh... Thus desire is the desire to appropriate a body as this appropriation reveals to me my body as flesh... Desire is an attempt to strip the body... and to make it exist as pure flesh; it is an attempt to incarnate the Other's body (Sartre, p.506), and so through this incarnation gain not only a grounding in the world but a dominance over the body, over one's own body. Desire is linked to Sadism through this attempt to gain an advantage over the concept of flesh, to reveal flesh as something one may manipulate at will: Sadism becomes a denial of the importance of flesh in one's own person;

thus Sadism is a refusal to be incarnated... and at the same time an effort to get hold of the Other's [incarnation]. Sadism like desire attempts to strip the Other... It seeks to reveal the flesh behind the action. But whereas [the subject] in desire loses

itself in its own flesh... the sadist refuses his own flesh at the same time that he [attempts] to reveal... the Other's flesh. The object [that is, the goal] of Sadism is immediate appropriation (Sartre, p.518),

the type of appropriation Morito seeks in Kesa. Morito expresses a desire to attack Kesa, to shame her, being driven by this desire once he has seen in her flesh signs of decay and change, that is, once he recognizes the proofs of her existence: the desire he had previously felt was not for a living person, for he himself states clearly that, having persuaded himself that he loved her, what it was that he wanted from her for three years was to know her body, to experience her flesh, not the personality which makes the Other subject, a person fully alive and able to share one's life. Kesa perceives this, recognizes Morito's objectifying Sadism, when she gives herself to him as a corpse, as flesh devoid of all personality. Morito's desire, then, becomes no longer a type of nostalgia at not having known Kesa in the past, but rather is now "something baser" (II:119), lust for lust's sake. Morito feels that "even a man who buys a prostitute would not be as shameful as" (ibid) he himself was then, for a man with a prostitute makes no pretence to either himself or the woman: he wants sex, a body, pure and simple. So did Morito, in fact, but he could not admit this till he had achieved his goal of forcing Kesa to accept herself as ugly, pure flesh. Kesa speaks of giving herself "as if dead" (II:123) to Morito: a corpse is more flesh than a living person for it is pure object, unable to resist the objectification inflicted on it by living eyes, as Kesa was unable to resist Morito's objectification of her, his rape, his 'use' of her body to satisfy the project of his

sadistically appropriating desire. In her initial acceptance of, that is, her initial inability to deny the role assigned to her by Morito as body, as representative of flesh, Kesa assumes the role of masochist to Morito's sadist: her perception of herself as dead, her realization that her dreams have all vanished, her dreams being the possibilities, the projects her life as a subjectivity held for her, show her to accept (at least temporarily) the loss of her self; hence her shame. "Shame... is the shame of self; it is the recognition of the fact that I am indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging" (Sartre, p.350). As an object Kesa experiences guilt, for in masochism (here of course defined as the condition in which one exists as an object not only for others but for oneself as well, as does Kesa, perceiving herself to be already dead),

I am guilty due to the very fact that I am an object, I am guilty toward myself since I consent to my absolute alienation. I am guilty toward the Other, for I furnish him with the occasion of being guilty -- that is, of radically missing my freedom as such. Masochism is an attempt not to fascinate the Other by means of my objectivity but to [allow] myself to be fascinated by my objectivity-for-others; that is, to [allow] myself to be constituted as an object by the Other in such a way that I... apprehend my subjectivity as a nothing in the presence of (Sartre, p.492)

the Other, the one who assumes or is granted the privilege of existing as the cause, the motivating force of the situation: the subject. Kesa permits Morito to establish himself as this defining force by accepting the look he turns on her (before returning it with her own look, the "strange glimmer" which so terrifies Morito, which entraps him in objectivity), by accepting her flesh as ugly when

reflected in his eyes. The change which occurs in her, the gleam in her eyes, comes after sex and links Kesa with the female spider we've seen earlier: sex empowers Kesa and fills her with a closeness to death, a closeness which as in the spider's case is to death in general, her own death as well as that threatening Morito. Kesa, as a woman, will accept her own death: she does not fear it and is proud to redeem herself by dying for her ashamed heart, her denied, now regained subjectivity (the Japanese notion of redeeming oneself through death is present here as well, complicating this issue somewhat, but in light of Akutagawa's opus wherein corroborating pieces such as "Onna" exist, the connection with a type of natural fatalism takes precedence). That both Kesa and Morito recognize the complementary roles they play for each other is shown by their tentative admissions that perhaps they love one another, despite the animosity between them; such a love could only exist in Akutagawa's fiction wherein the mixture of danger and objectification present in the relationship becomes proof of the depth of emotion between them. These two were indeed made for each other; Akutagawa has here fashioned their characters specifically to demonstrate his views of woman's flesh, to link it with nature and death, and the designs these threatening entities have on man. Morito becomes the revealer of woman as body, as the source of desire and mortality, for it is through Kesa that Morito shall become a murderer, an agent of death symbolized at the work's close by the moonlight, Yin, the purely female. To reprise and paraphrase Doane, woman and nature do indeed

contain elements hostile to man, to his desire and to his person; these elements "constantly threaten to infiltrate and contaminate... masculinity" (Doane, p.152), through the carnal lust which man, as also a member of nature, cannot help but feel. Morito's celibacy, his attempt to resist the desire of one body for another, came to an end: his desire for Kesa, which began during his period of abstinence, did not end with it, for Kesa, in Morito's mind was the Body, she was the idea of flesh which drove him to experience carnality. Kesa as flesh, the source of desire, comes to be time, life, mortality; "desire... is the ensnarement of a body in the world... That is why sensual pleasure is so often linked with death" (Sartre, p.509), why sex and death imply one another, why the sadist must refuse his own incarnation even while experiencing the strongest need to possess another's body, and why Morito cannot accept Kesa as she appears before him, feeling disappointment when he compares her to his memory of her: she proves the vulnerability of all flesh as the mothers in "Niwa" contain disease, she condemns Morito to the death which she, as woman, as one aligned with nature, is not only able to accept, but actually seeks out. Kesa shall stand as Akutagawa's woman, as the one who, through sexual desire, awakens the male to himself as flesh, mortal, while accepting the death which nature has deemed necessary for her, as the female spider accepts her own death after reproduction.

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The Double

One may often encounter the figure of the Double in works of fantasy or the macabre, Poe being perhaps the practitioner springing most readily to mind. And yet were one to consider this trope in a more general way rather than to expect an exact physical duplication of the character concerned, one would encounter instances of doubling in a great many works. C.F. Keppler, in The Literature of the Second Self, uses the term "second self" to define a curious psychical linking of characters which are complements to one another, connected by links of oppositeness "in nature [which tend] to result in a certain... opposition in attitude" (Keppler, p.12). Such characters may be twins, that is duplicates of one individual, but they may also be joined through more obscure means, as the black cat with the protagonist in Poe's tale of the same name. Within the lexicon of Akutagawa's devices there are some particularly cherished entries under the heading of the Double; in his work this figure adopts two forms, one utilising as may be expected a duplication of the main character's physical appearance in a way to suggest some comment on that character; the other involving a split of that character into two distinct halves within the same body, separated by the possession and subsequent loss of some particular attribute or quality which, like alcohol to the protagonist in "Shuchu" (1916; tr. The Wine Worm, 1930), gives some entrance into society to the character concerned. The Double

and the split self, though one may construe them to be different devices having different effects, are reducible to a common metaphorical goal in Akutagawa's opus, a goal which parallels that of the double in Western texts as being a display of one's "other self, his conscience" (Miyoshi, p.295), in certain instances, but which is also richer in interpretive potential, allowing the character to perceive a model for a more integrating social behaviour and through the rejection of this model to mourn its loss while asserting his own independence and individuality, however isolating these may be. The Double in Akutagawa is always a condemnation of both the protagonist's and Akutagawa's own alienation from society, always the acknowledgement that there is something in him which is wrong and must be expelled: "the double is born of what Sartre would term the bad faith with which one disowns half of one's life, which then carries on living in the guise of a self condemned as other" (Coates, p.36), a self which in turn mocks one's inability to master the daily reality in which it moves with such contemptuous ease. The Double in Akutagawa is that half of the split self in possession of the mask or drug which corrects the character's own inherent flaws, that half which knows himself: "[he] is the intruder from the background...[who] is much more likely to have knowledge of his foreground counterpart than the latter of him, but the exact extent and source of his knowledge..." (Keppler p.3) remain an infuriating, maddening puzzle.

Akutagawa's enterprise as a writer, as one who wrote (surreptitiously) about himself, had a great effect on both

his product and his own self view. This effect was to divide him into two parts: the one who writes, and the one who is written. In writing of himself he became detached from the life he was actually living, preferring the experiential mediation of the printed page whereon he was in control of the face he read. Much of this may be seen in his last few pieces, published posthumously, wherein he does finally indulge in "above board" autobiography: in these works, in particular in "Haguruma" (1927; tr. The Cogwheel, 1965) writing plays a vital role in his quest for stability, for reassurance, though even this stability temporarily won, proved ultimately to be illusory, fictional. The flight Akutagawa exhibits in "Haguruma" away from the nervous strain of his daily life, toward a fictional world, served finally only to divide him irreconcilably, into two halves, one of which coldly watched as the other descended into paranoia and psychosis. This same effect of writing on a character, of dividing him into two distinct personae, will be seen in "Futatsu no tegami" (1925; "Two Letters") discussed later in this chapter.

Paul Coates, a literary critic at McGill University, has written a study entitled The Double and the Other, (Hong Kong: MacMillan Press, 1988) a work which deals primarily with the ideological influence of colonialism in 19th century fin de siecle european literary product. This publication is useful when some of its postulates are grafted onto Akutagawa's writing precisely because of Akutagawa's positioning within what is very much a Japanese fin de siecle; Coates lists a number of criteria which will

facilitate, if not completely necessitate, an author's attraction to the device of the Double. "Stories that deal explicitly with the Double seem in the main to be written by authors who are suspended between languages and cultures" (Coates p.2) he argues, and this is definitely the case for Akutagawa. Not only is he caught, as it were, between languages and cultures, but even within the Japanese social structure of his period there was tremendous upheaval: Japan was Westernizing itself at a phenomenal rate, had beaten a major European power in military conflict only ten years before Akutagawa began to publish, and was entering into a period of imperialism while in turn was experiencing itself a cultural colonization. Beongcheon Yu has characterised this period as placing on the Japanese people "a double burden of modernization and Westernization" (Yu, p1), terms which he claims to be "synonymous in this instance" (Yu, p.1. Even historical descriptions of this era, it would seem, are not immune to the allure of the double, of two entities or concepts sharing an identity).

The materialization of the double can be interpreted as a pathological attempt to replace the image of the other with that of the self: this process of projection is bound in the mechanisms of colonialism...The double enhances the ideology of individualism: it puts the self in the place of the other... Nevertheless, if the double mocks the self whose appearance it imitates, this indicates that the other retains a will of its own below the projections with which it has been overlaid [a will which can accuse the first self of inadequacy, in effect haunting the self with its own existence] (Coates, p.2).

The figure of the Double allows one to see in the other a solipsistic insistence on one's own preeminence; in effect it allows one to create a world in one's own image and populate it with people (theoretically) one need not fear:

copies of oneself. Coates provides a reason for this self replicating population of the world through the ideology of post-Romantic colonialism, and his comments are insightful in explaining the role of one's social milieu in influencing one's character:

ideology socialises the individual by bringing him... to internalise the dividedness of a class society in the form of 'objective value-free judgement', thereby enabling the system to rule the subject by dividing it... Ideology thus seems to be a characteristic of the modern era, as it splits the written language from the spoken one ... or suffuses the mind with images from another world [the Western world Japan was emulating, or Asian one it was colonizing]. In splitting the self it brings forth the Double. Imagination enforces the self-division... The process of self-translation into another place [such as is required in the adoption of a foreign mode of dress or literary culture]... [has the] immediate effect on the individual... to split him for his mental translation will never be a complete one: the individual enticed away from his native sphere may find the sought-after real unattainable... (Coates, p.5-6).

This then accounts for the perception of the Double as a reflection of one's own individuality, for one must remain aware of one's situation even as one, through bad faith, attempts to deny it, just as one must remain aware of the blankness of the page one has just filled. The Double is "the self that has been left behind, or overlooked, or unrealized, or otherwise excluded from the first self's self conception: he is the self that must be come to terms with. And, therefore, despite all his... closeness to the first self, he is always... the opposite of the first self" (Keppler, p.11). In Akutagawa this opposite is the integrated self, the self firmly rooted in the family, able to exist in a social setting and held in the bosom of nature. The need to depict the Double in fiction may indeed indicate a need to control circumstances, to create a sense

of capability lacking in one's life:

in writing of the Double, the author can be said to be writing of his own representative [and those writers who not only do not write about, but somehow suppress the Double]... seek to suppress their own knowledge of the degree to which every character is a distorted reflection.. of the author himself (Coates, p.1-3).

Akutagawa's resistance to the autobiographical form of writing which gained such popularity amongst his contemporaries, and yet his fondness for the Double beyond its association with the eerie or macabre of which he was admittedly enamoured, bespeak of this suppression which must in fact be a conscious one: what could better explain his reworkings of older stories, his borrowings of historical sources, than a desire to avoid even the hint of autobiography, a desire which nonetheless cannot supplant a fundamental fascination, an obsession, with himself and his ultimate fate? "The Double is the emissary of Death" (p.7), writes Coates, and Akutagawa, too, notes that "to judge from this, one may consider that the appearance of one's Doppelganger foretells death" (Akutagawa, II: 17). Akutagawa was plagued by fears of death, by fears of insanity (which in itself may be thought of as an inhabitation of one's mind by a stranger, a Double) and fled to writing as to a solace, as he shows himself in "Haguruma". "Stamping one's own features upon the face of a character may be a fearful authorial manoeuvre intended to limit the dangers" (Coates, p.1) of an existence defined by a fear of madness and lack of natural place, an existence which, through fear of exteriority, relies on the imagination to construct a livable realm for one's individuality. "The structure of the imagination is

frustration" (Coates, p.6), for the imagination presents phantasms, tantalizing possibilities which, though controllable through their creation, are unrealizable by their very nature: one cannot imagine completely what one may actually achieve, nor achieve what one may imagine. These are truisms, but still vital to the creation of literary product: one's work is but marks on a page, the concrete proof of the frustration of the imagination in that it is decidedly not concrete and purely dependent upon the imagination for its existence, "but if frustration evokes aggression as a response, the only aggression here is directed towards self-splitting" (Coates, p.6), as is manifestly so in Akutagawa, with the necessary development of a division of the self into a destruction of the self: if the self creates its existence in the imaginative production of phantasies on a page, by dividing itself into the characters it designates both consciously and unconsciously as its own doubles, then it cannot be, it cannot maintain its own fiction.

Akutagawa killed himself on July 24, 1927, after completing a transition to overtly autobiographical fiction in such works as "Haguruma" and "Aru aho no issho" (1927; tr. A Fool's Life, 1961), that is, after completing the creation on paper of his fictional life, after writing himself into a corner whence he could not escape back into a more tangible place (of course, his reliance on drugs to provide even sleep, that is, his dependence on even fictional sleep, cannot be overlooked in any speculation as to why he chose suicide as a solution). At his most

desperate, his most nihilistically depressed period just before his death, while describing the terrors of his paranoid state, Akutagawa writes (again in "Haguruma") of throwing himself recklessly, passionately into his writing: his blackest days drove him most to create himself through his characters, now finally and explicitly autobiographical, even though his autobiography may be typified by "Aru Aho no Issho" (1927; tr. A Fool's Life, 1961), a collection of brief sketches told in the third person, from a frighteningly far remove. Akutagawa, even in Haguruma, maintains a presence of mind, a distance from his own desperation indicative of an insurmountable resistance to autobiography, maintains a resistance to a true revelatory style of exposition (which indeed even autobiography is not: who is ever able to believe, to trust sufficiently to accept, what one tells about oneself? Who is ever able to write of oneself with sufficient penetration to arrive at an unmeditated view of oneself capable of passing through the filter of language?). The split self, the character divided into a before and after version, and the Double, become symbols for the author who could, and the man who could not, live. The singular existence which, by virtue of its cultural ambiguity, was caught amongst the isolationist, modernising, colonising, and colonized Japan, and the West, and the familial obscurities of insanity and adoption, had to create a sanctuary for itself within itself, and within this sanctuary had necessarily to face its own failures and inabilities in the form of a mocking Double endowed by itself with knowledge of "the secrets the first self can

never quite fathom" (Keppler, p.11).

Within Akutagawa's opus the split-self/Double figure shows considerable stylistic evolution and refinement, progressing from a merely ironical trope or moralistic, slightly didactic element, to a haunting and condemning spectre of inadequacy and ridicule as Akutagawa's conviction of the triviality and stupidity of his life increased. The split self occurs with a certain regularity in Akutagawa's earlier works, the scheme of which may be summarized as portraying a character generally accepted, if not respected, by society, who sets out to remove or change some part of his body or way of life which is responsible for, unbeknownst to him, his social acceptability. This pattern occurs in such pieces as "Shuchu" (1916; tr. The wine Worm, 1930) and "Hyottoko" (1914; tr. A Clown's mask 1969). The character's attempt is initially successful, but he discovers that the change has terribly incapacitated him to enjoy or participate in the type of social intercourse to which he had, for good or ill, grown accustomed. The story will end with the character regretting the change, even though it had permitted him a degree of self assertion and hope. Often the character will be completely destroyed by the removal of this attribute, as if that quality had in fact somehow planned this destruction. What is significant in these works is that the character's public identity, is given an attribute which comes to be revealed as a second self, both exterior and opposed to his true feelings or self-perception, the removal of which results in a loss of his total identity. In the story "Hyottoko" (1914; tr. A

Clown's Mask, 1969) the main character, Heikichi, is one who knows himself to have "not only a physical need, but also a psychological necessity to drink. Only when drinking would his spirit expand, and he could feel free of reservations before the world" (I:24). This story describes an incident on a river during an annual cherry blossom viewing day: aboard a floating barge of revellers, a drunken man, Heikichi, wearing a mask and dancing, falls into the crowd watching him. The people on shore and on the bridges above the river who had seen all this laugh at Heikichi, but their laughter soon stops when they realize that something serious has happened, for Heikichi does not get up. He soon dies, and this narrator tells in retrospect the details of Heikichi's life, concluding with a more detailed view of Heikichi's final drunken dance.

On two occasions Heikichi had suffered periods of unconsciousness as a result of alcohol, and though he had "admirably" (ibid) tried for a time to follow his physician's requests to give up drinking, weak willpower, that is, the domination of his attribute, soon won out over his half-hearted determination. Heikichi is once more in the grip of his psychological need to drink, the psychological attribute which causes a definite split in Heikichi's personality. This split self takes on the dimensions of another self, one able to dominate the first and place him in a vulnerable position, even on a whim, to destroy him. Akutagawa tells us that although Heikichi, after a night of his typically heavy drinking, "would lie and say that 'looking back this morning, it all seems like a dream', he

was perfectly aware of whether he had danced or slept. He could in no way conceive of the self left in his memory as being the same person he was today when he compared the two" (ibid). So completely does Heikichi become another person when drunk, that at the height of his split-self-controlled revels he actually puts on a mask, the "hyottoko" of the title, a twisted, comic mask, and performs an accompanying dance. Ominously, as to "which Heikichi was the real one, even this was unknown to him" (ibid). The drunken Heikichi can manipulate the 'real' one for he is ever present in his thoughts, a presence which the sober Heikichi cannot himself claim in the mind of the second one. Akutagawa makes specific reference to Janus, the twin-faced god, to explain Heikichi's far from divine situation, his existence as a puppet controlled by something within himself he cannot exorcise. Even when he is sober, Heikichi is not able to be himself, for "it may be that there are few people who lie to the extent that the usual Heikichi does" (I:24). He cannot stop himself from telling lies about his life, from creating a somewhat romantic past for himself. "Were one to remove these lies from the known part of his life, without a doubt nothing would remain" (I:25-6). Heikichi does not know why he must lie, but the reasons lie next to those for his drinking. As he is, he does not belong in the world, he cannot face up to it: "a person in the wrong place has a fictional identity and lives a lie" (Coates, p.48). His existence is characterized by either drunken gestures behind a carved mask, or the changeable lies of his sober self: there is no Heikichi in actuality, and only the barest

figment of a character, even, exists for the reader, for Akutagawa offers only the barest physical description necessary to give this figure a fictional life. Yoshida Seiichi makes the interesting comments that "one may say that Akutagawa too like the protagonist of 'Hyottoko' lived his whole life while telling lies from behind a mask. The many works he left behind him... may well be that Hyottoko mask" (Yoshida, p.55).

When Heikichi falls in his drunken stupor aboard the drifting barge of cherry blossom viewers, while uncontrollably dancing his masked self-creation, he feels the finality of the mask's condemnation of himself and makes the self-affirming exertion which his life up to this point has lacked. He tries to fight the mask's domination: "'Take off the mask'", (I:26), he manages to gasp, soon to expire, for he wants to be free for once of this dominating other, the alien portion of himself able to act without shyness in society. However, this attempt to assert his own will, to claim individuality for himself, is doomed to the failure Akutagawa sees as inevitable for all who would insist on their own independence. Heikichi exhorts those around him to remove his mask, to reveal his true face, and although his face "had already become not that of the usual Heikichi" (ibid), that is, had already changed into a face of one free from the mask and Heikichi's own lies, his attempt to change himself into a free, self-created, whole person, has failed in death. It would seem that there is no existence of self-assertion possible in Akutagawa's work, for Heikichi has lost what little identity he had while alive, such identity

as had been given him by his life of subservience to a need to drink and his own self-fictionalization through lies. Trying to free himself from the mask removed himself from what he was. "All that remained unchanged... was the Hyottoko mask" (I: 27) the face of Heikichi's split self.

Alcohol plays a significant role too in the division of the protagonist in "Shuchu", (1916; tr. The Wine Worm, 1930), a tale of one who, unbeknownst to himself, has within his stomach a parasite which craves rice wine. This work concerns Ryu, a perpetual drinker, who one day receives a stranger as a guest; the stranger reveals to Ryu this presence of a parasite in his stomach which causes him to drink, and offers to remove it. Ryu accepts the offer, the attempt is successful, and Ryu continues his life free from the desire to drink. His life however, is no longer a happy one. Akutagawa concludes this tale by speculating that Ryu and the parasite are actually two parts of one person; the removal of the worm therefore changes, in fact ruins, Ryu's life.

Ryu, Akutagawa writes, "had as his sole pastime the drinking of sake, and from morning on there was hardly opportunity for him to be away from his cups. Even at that... he had a capacity far removed from that of ordinary men" (I:72). One day while drinking with a friend Ryu receives a visitor, an unusually dressed stranger identified as a "banzo" in the text, literally a barbarian, or savage monk. Interestingly, the character "ban" with which the word "barbarian" is written share part of its construction with the "chu" of the parasite, Shuchu: the portion is that which

means "insect". As we have seen in other works, and as I have argued in the introduction, Akutagawa here too makes use of the visual richness of Kanji to elucidate or comment on aspects of his characters. In this instance the usage is particularly subtle, but nonetheless definite: the visiting stranger could have been anyone, he could have been Taoist, he could have been a scholar. Why did Akutagawa write of a "barbarian"? I believe he chose this situation precisely to accentuate the connection between the visitor and the parasite, to link them through the clues contained within the Kanji which identify them. Akutagawa has embedded part of the parasite within this foreign messenger, the barbarian monk, to emphasize his role as harbinger of the split self, the presence within Ryu which shall in effect be responsible for the existence Ryu has up to this point enjoyed. The monk reveals to Ryu the presence of the parasite within him, and informs him that " 'precisely because I am able to cure you, I have come to you' " (I:74), alerting the reader to the approach of the split self: this man by means unknown to Ryu is aware of a secret existence within Ryu, aware of a second Ryu about to be born of the first into the world; as Keppler writes, "the coming of a second self as second self (for he may be physically present for a long while before asserting his true nature) into the life of the first is a result of some unknown force... transcending all known ones" (Keppler, p.12). The stranger convinces Ryu that he can cure him without the use of medicines, needles, or magic spells; his cure consists of tying Ryu securely to the ground on a day marked by "heat that there hasn't been in

recent years" (I:70). It is in this position that the reader first encounters Ryu, surrounded by his drinking companion, the stranger, and an unglazed jug filled with wine, the aroma of which tickles Ryu's nose and makes his dry mouth ache with thirst. Ryu begins a new life on this day, a life which puts him back into his own body, apparently at his own request. The sweat which stings Ryu's eyes provides a sensation he has never before experienced, so taken over by the parasite has he been.

Ryu had accepted the stranger's offer to remove the parasite with a certain reluctance, a certain unsteadiness of nature; "with an unexpectedly doubtful voice" (I:74) Ryu asks about the procedure, but nonetheless after it is explained to him he decides to accept, for "though he was not aware of it, his curiosity was rather moved at the prospect of a cure". Here again we see a manipulation of the first self by the second or dominant, alien personality: as Heikichi was compelled by his ever present drunken self to drink, to gain his identity by accepting the face given to him, so is Ryu at the mercy of his parasite, first to drink, to exist in order to ensure the parasite's existence, and then at the urgings of the barbarian monk who shares an identifying feature with that very parasite, to attempt to remove it from himself, to attempt a life free of its control. Ryu accepts this manipulation for he is not aware of it; he submits himself to the cure perhaps with thoughts of discovering how much of his life is really his, with the hope of asserting his own will: the one argument which most convinces him to try the cure is that, no matter how much he

drinks, he never feels the effects of alcohol. His efforts at self assertion, at freeing himself from a parasite to live for himself, however, are less his own than were those of Heikichi, for the suggestion came from the monk who is, as we've seen, closely associated with the parasite. Ryu is manipulated into a self-assertion which will cost him his life, the cost paid by all of Akutagawa's characters who claim their own lives, by this internal parasite which is an actual part of himself. After his cure not only does Ryu's health deteriorate, leaving him with a "dull-complexioned, oily skin", (v1 p.78) but also his property loses value and is sold. Ryu is destroyed by removing the parasite from himself; his freedom from it leads to his ruin as Heikichi's freedom from his drunkenly masked self is possible only in death. Akutagawa has constructed this tale as the simple retelling of a story (not one though which actually exists) transmitted from China, that is a borrowing from a foreign culture, and concludes it with the positing of the questions

why, after spitting out the parasite, did Ryu's health decline? Why did his property fail?... To these questions [Ryu's neighbours] were able to give various answers [three of which Akutagawa records, having] done nothing more than select the most representative from amongst them" (I: 79)

One such postulated answer explicitly deals with an identification of the parasite with Ryu, that is, it states that "Ryu is precisely the parasite, and the parasite precisely Ryu... From the day on which Ryu became unable to drink, Ryu as Ryu was no longer Ryu" (ibid). This is in accord with the precedent set by Heikichi who could not answer to himself who he was, the drunken self behind the mask or the sober self who created himself anew with each

new lie, who in the end was neither one nor the other but a broken stranger able to assert his own self-will only in death. The real Ryu is not the host to a parasitical existence but rather the example of a failed, fooled self-will, a victim of a pessimistic joke perpetrated by his self-alienating, internal second, or split, self.

In "Shuchu" Akutagawa discovers a progression in the figure of the split-self, the possibility of that self projecting itself into another form, that of the parasite, or its emissary the barbarian monk who knows the first self's inner reality more fully than he himself does, and so is able to manipulate that first self into a position whence his destruction becomes an apparently self-willed desire for independence. Such a progression leads Akutagawa to the Double. A year or so after the publication of "Shuchu" Akutagawa penned "Futatsu no tegami" (1925; Two Letters), two letters describing in the first person an individual's encounters with his own double and the effect they have had on his life. In this piece the division Akutagawa inflicted upon himself, into the author and the authored, is itself reflected, even doubled, in the writing of the protagonist, who composes the letters to create an alibi for himself in the disappearance of his wife. In this character, Sasaki Shinichiro, we see Akutagawa placing qualities he himself had: an intimacy with foreign language and customs, a skilful fluidity in his own language, and a desire to create on paper a mask which improves on his own face. Akutagawa, touching a subject, the confrontation of oneself with separate, accusing parts of oneself, so close to his own

enterprise, discovering himself in his literary creations, seeks to hide explicit acknowledgement of his project, for if Coates is correct, in assuming the Double to spring from bad faith, then this bad faith by definition requires a denial of its presence in one's motives. Therefore Akutagawa will rather weakly deny his authorship of this piece: "These two letters" Akutagawa writes, "by a certain chance came into my hands" (II:15).

The first letter begins with numerous strategies for proving its veracity, and its 'author' pleads that its addressee, the local chief of police, "believe that within my mental state there is nothing abnormal" (ibid). Akutagawa in the story to follow creates, and denies the responsibility for creating, an arena wherein a character will create, and deny the creation, of a theatre for self-constructing exposition:

before writing this I hesitated greatly; were one to ask why, I would say that was because in addition to writing this I find it necessary to disclose a family secret to you. Of course without a doubt this will be a considerable damage to my reputation, and yet circumstances are such that, were I not to write, with each moment my existence would grow more acutely painful. Here at last, I have decided to take decisive measures. (ibid).

The writer has taken pains to demonstrate that his situation is one he would rather keep private; faced with such an apparently unavoidable confession, as it were, the reader finds his sympathy persuasively solicited. He will accept the writer's chosen solution to the problem facing him, such solution being found in writing, in creating a verbal edifice which will stand for, which will in fact be, his life. "When he writes, it is in order to read himself"

(Sartre, p.427): just as Akutagawa (whose disclaimer weakly denies this by denying credit for the composition of the work) creates a symbol for his own life in the writing of these two letters. Let there be no mistake about the reasons for Akutagawa's usage of the Double, and his necessary discovery of that trope in light of his project in fiction, his self creation through words:

the Double, whether as epipsyche, self-portrait, or monster, is the vehicle of self-creation. Indeed, consciousness of self implies doubleness, the consciousness aware of itself... Life experience, the development of self consciousness, is... mere matter for the life of art. At the point where art is found to be an illusion, a lie at last, the life which is its source, and which in turn models its further life on art, is unavoidably a lie... Either way the autonomy of art relative to life is beyond compromise (Miyoshi, p.291).

Akutagawa may be doubling himself in his characters; so be it, his characters will double themselves within their own literary endeavours. Sasaki Shinichiro, the author of the letters, after a lengthy and quite scholarly display of case histories, which can amount to nothing other than a persuasive preamble, an introductory, psychological study of the Double taken as a natural phenomenon, reveals that he has seen the Doubles of himself and his wife. The first appearance occurs at the theatre; "on that particular night my wife and I had gone to... a benefit variety show" (II:19). However the trip to the theatre itself was not something the husband and wife had planned -- there is some working of an unseen force, like fate, behind this outing, for, "to speak frankly, the tickets for that show had been quite generously given to us by some friends of ours, a couple who through some inconvenience were unable to attend"

(ibid). Sasaki goes on to write that "about the show itself there is no particular need to make detailed mention" (ibid). This peculiarly dismissive passage will bear closer scrutiny; firstly, the phrase "to speak frankly" (Uchiaketa ohanashi wo sureba, ibid) strikes one as superfluous, for after so many reiterations of the author's desire to be believed, for his sanity to be accepted as an unassailable fact, one would expect that he had been speaking frankly all along. Only a few sentences earlier, in describing his wife, the author had mentioned, prefaced by "what I should here especially like to point out to your attention, Sir" (II:18), the disclosure that his wife had for some time suffered from hysterics which, though generally on the mend, had lately shown a tendency to recur. This is a fact about which one would find much more need to speak frankly than the trivial circumstances of one's theatrical evening; and, having drawn attention to this event through such an open phrase, why should the author detract from that attention by dismissing a description of the show as unnecessary? One may accuse this author of clumsiness in his choice of terms, but one would be mistaken: Akutagawa's character is calling attention to a fiction, to his own creation of a fictional life which parallels Akutagawa's self creation through published fiction. Sasaki's life is that variety show attended, by merest chance, by that character about whom the story is being told. The name of this particular character so concerned with being believed, so intent on proving his sanity beyond the shadow of a fictional doubt, is Sasaki Shinichiro, which, when translated rather inelegantly, reads

Sasaki, True (or Believable) First Son; he certainly couldn't be the second son, for when dealing with the Double one must first have a character to be doubled. Within this family name the repetition of the syllable "sa" affords an ominous warning of things to come: his name contains an assertion of originality and a replication, a suggestion of falseness. Who then is writing this letter; which of the selves is describing a night at the theatre prefaced as a frank confession and dismissed as unworthy of detailed description? Is it truly the wife who has suffered from attacks of hysteria? Now, after labelling a description of the contents of the show unnecessary, Sasaki in fact provides one, wherein he insists that

Because I, who truly have no interest at all in music or dancing, was there for something like my wife's sake, the program had for the most part only increased my boredom. Accordingly, even if I were to intend a description of the performance, I completely lack the materials to do so. All I remember is that there was a story... to be read before the intermission. My judgement at the time was that my premonitions, my fearful expectations of something unusual, would not be swept away even by listening to this recital (II:21),

for it is not this explicit fiction which is his primary concern. Leaving his wife briefly for a visit to the lavatory, Sasaki on his return has his attention riveted to a man, his Double, leaning casually next to his wife, who is apparently unaware of this second presence. When Sasaki draws near the Double vanishes; his wife's only comment is, " you were gone long, weren't you" (ibid).

Sasaki tells his wife nothing; he manages to put the incident out of his mind because, he reports, he was relieved when over time nothing serious happened. With the coming of the new year he was prepared to dismiss the memory

as but a hallucination, when once more he sees his Double walking towards him on the street with a double of his wife. The third appearance, about five weeks after the second, takes place in Sasaki's home study: the Double and second wife are busy reading Sasaki's diary when he enters and finds them, busy prying into the one area of his life where he may actually have honestly recorded his thoughts. Following this discovery Sasaki passes out; his wife revives him and he confesses to her the events of the previous few months. The letter ends with a plea to the chief of police to put an end to the apparently widespread attacks on the reputations of Sasaki and his wife. The second letter informs the same person of the wife's disappearance and Sasaki's intention to pursue research into the supernatural, in an attempt to learn why he has been plagued by such catastrophic visitations. A number of factors in Sasaki's narrative in the first letter, however, make that answer clear, and indicate a distinct attempt on Sasaki's part to influence, in effect to create, his own story.

Throughout the letter Sasaki repeatedly draws attention to his own sanity; if after the first occurrence of the Double he was inclined to explain it as a hallucination, after the second sighting

before I could believe in the objective existence of my second self of course I doubted my mental state. Yet there was not the slightest confusion in my mind. I could sleep easily; I could even study... No matter what, I had to believe in this existence outside of existence. (II:24).

The reader may well question that Sasaki could sleep easily, after seeing a distinct, apparently real image identical to

himself even down to the shoes he was wearing, behaving in a way decidedly unusual. This sort of sleep is perhaps more of the type eagerly sought by one so overwrought by a mental strain virtually beyond his ability to bear that he must deny not only that taxing psychic burden but in effect the entire world and seek refuge in the gentlest of oblivions, sleep. The shock of the third sighting causes him to lose consciousness; it calls forth from his mouth "a shout which I myself did not comprehend" (II:25). One may well ask what it is that most disconcerts him about this third visitation: its very occurrence, or the invasion of his thoughts, the discovery of the secrets which he has perhaps confessed in his diary, read with such "cynicism" (II:25) by the pursuing doubles of himself and his wife. His reaction to his wife who revives him from his faint is most interesting: having explained the situation to her, including the precedents with which he had commenced his letter, giving in to her requests to confide in her what troubles him, a concern he attributes to her worry over hearing rumours that "the world entertains doubts as to my wife's virtue" (II:26), he proceeds to blame the creation of the doubles on her hysterical nature, again citing a precedent, and concluding that it would probably be possible to find two or three cases like that of his wife. Although he claims to trust his wife, and urges her to trust him, although, indeed he expends great energies following his report of the first visitation to proving the profound love there is between them, nevertheless he writes that "such a strange phenomenon would be easily originated in a woman of a hysterical nature

such as my wife" (II: 27). He consoles his wife with these words, he writes; this is how he trusts her character.

Sasaki's letter is well constructed: following his tirade about the depth of feeling existing between himself and his wife, he apologises for allowing his pen to get carried away from the main topic by a rush of emotion (v.2 p.21); describing the third sighting he allows himself to display a flash of humour in his style, quickly replaced by a sincere expression of horror and dismay: coming into his study, on the bookshelves

of course there was nothing changed. However, who on earth could they be, I wonder, the man seated by my desk, and the woman at his side, standing half-turned towards me? Sir, for an instant I saw my second self and second wife. Though I try to forget my fearful impressions of that moment, I cannot (II:25).

His descriptions are well calculated to convey a dramatic effect, to paint in rather bold colours the eeriness of his study when occupied by phantoms. Sasaki's second letter accuses the police chief of negligence, which has brought about the "final misfortune" (II:30) for himself and his wife, who, he writes, "the previous day suddenly disappeared; as yet I do not know what has happened to her. I fear the worst. Unable to bear the pressures of the world has she not committed suicide?" (ibid). Such a melodramatic shifting of blame to an innocent third party indicates a desperate attempt to bolster Sasaki's own self-perception, to deny his own culpability in this and the previous troubled period. "The world has killed an innocent person. In this hateful enterprise, you, too, Sir, have become an accomplice" (ibid), accuses Sasaki who has not lost sight of the necessity to write his own alibi, which is in fact what

his first letter becomes, a testimonial to a series of events for which Sasaki need claim no responsibility. The second letter embarks on an exploration of the unknown areas still left within the human psyche, the places wherein even in dreams there are whole crowds of people infected with contagious, mysterious disease" (ibid) which Sasaki now vows to investigate, for "there is hardly anyone other than myself who knows how quickly one can be infected, by even a single kiss" (ibid. Note too here the association again of woman with infection). So contorted is Sasaki's effort to vindicate himself and accuse every aspect of society of blame for his wife's disappearance that Akutagawa, in handing along these letters, grows fed up with this character's scrambling to protect himself, and "has decided here to omit the rather lengthy, virtually meaningless philosophical stuff written after this" (ibid). Sasaki, in writing to the chief of police, in appealing to the authoritative figurehead of those charged with maintaining law and order, with maintaining the civilized, rationally social portion of man's existence, is appealing to this authority to validate the effort he is making, through writing, to maintain his own sense of guiltlessness for the problems he and his wife may have been experiencing in their relationship. His protests of his own rationality are too insistent, his assertions of his wife's love for him are too idyllic, his letters are too structured, and his shock at having his diary read is too cataclysmic to suggest anything other than a lurking sense of guilt. Throughout the first letter Sasaki emphasizes features of others: rumours of his wife's

infidelities, her hysteria, the viciousness of society; the story he writes is one very sympathetic to his own predicament, and he even goes so far as to declare that, even if his wife were responsible for the creation of the doubles, "yet throughout it all she must have borne a concern for my affairs in mind" (II:28). The Double in this work is clearly a manifestation of something Sasaki would like to keep hidden, an embodiment of some accusatory force which, presumably, will not let off haunting Sasaki even now that his wife has disappeared. It is even possible that this force is accusing Sasaki of a buried desire to murder his wife, a desire he may finally have satisfied, motivated by a deep-rooted resentment towards something in her which oppresses him. The rumours of her infidelity, Sasaki writes, "even before that time had reached my ears" (II:26), and his text bears witness to the fact that he can be swept away by passion, as has happened when he described, in emphatic terms, the love he feels for his wife: this, even though his letter is carefully contrived to present a picture of himself as the victim of a supernatural event.

Can one conclude then that the rumours about his wife are justified and that in fact something in Sasaki, some possibly anti-social aloofness, drove her to seek fulfillment with another man? Indeed this is a possibility: there is a certain hostility towards the world evident in Sasaki's tone, and his employment as an instructor of logic and the English language indicates a contact, an intimacy with things foreign: perhaps this will equate to a preference for things foreign and dissatisfaction with

things domestic. If so, the trace of exotic sophistication lent him by his Western experiences, while initially appealing to his wife, could conceivably have grown sour to her after the close confinement of marriage, and left her with the feeling that she had made a mistake. It is interesting that Sasaki sees not only a double of himself but of his wife as well: this second couple is united in prying into his secrets (for they are seen most closely together when reading Sasaki's diary). They are a couple able to exist more fully as a couple than the real husband and wife, who cannot even enjoy of their own accord a night at the theatre -- it must be thrust upon them by well meaning friends (who are friends of the wife) perhaps able to perceive the boredom into which she has been plunged. The wife's ultimate fate must remain a mystery; Sasaki's is apparent: he shall launch himself into a homeless pursuit of the supernatural, a barely coherent search for his own Double, that is, a mad quest for the possessor of his secrets, the truths written down in his diary but never acknowledged, never fully admitted. Sasaki shall run himself into the ground chasing an accusing phantom which pursues him: himself, the true first son who is anything but believable.

In "Kage" (1920; tr. "The Shadow" 1988), Akutagawa again takes up the theme of the Double. This work is particularly complex and shows a direct development of the motives which may have driven Sasaki to murder his wife. This story concerns Chin Sai, an import-exporter living in Japan, one of foreign birth who speaks Japanese with an

"unusual authority" (IV: 207), a man who has hired a detective to spy on his wife who suffers from nervous troubles, imagining herself to be watched (a condition no doubt exasperated by the actual presence of the detective assigned to follow her). Chin has been receiving unsigned letters advising him to divorce his wife, Fusako, because of her reported infidelities to him; at the same time Chin has been having an affair with a cafe waitress, an occupation once engaged in by his wife, who in the past had received a number of expensive rings from various men, all involved in the business of trade. The accusatory letters all come from Chin's own secretary, a man named Imanishi (written, intriguingly, with characters meaning "Now West." This is a common enough name, but Akutagawa's use of it is telling in light of Coates' researches into the type of cultural split which can motivate one to write of the Double) who harbours some desire himself for Fusako, and whose face, when writing to Chin, takes on "the mask of hatred itself" (IV:221).

Chin, returning home after a meeting with a detective who reports nothing untoward in Fusako's day, follows a man along the path to his own back gate; inside his house, Chin stands outside his wife's locked door until the silence within forces him to break in: there he discovers "a Chin Sai completely identical" (ibid) to himself, lying atop the strangled corpse of his wife, his fingers still clutching her throat. The first Chin collapses in tears and the story ends to reveal the narrator "seated in a box at a certain theatre together with a woman" (IV:222). This unidentified narrator describes the film he's just seen, "Kage" ("The

Shadow"), to the woman, who informs him that that was not the film just shown; nonetheless she admits to having seen it too, sometime. The story finally ends with the woman's suggestion that they both " 'pay no attention to 'The Shadow' and things like that' " (IV:223).

Despite the very different structures of the two works "Futatsu no tegami" and "Kage" their similarities and affinities are plain. In both the central character is one who has good reason to question his own behaviour yet puts greater faith in the reported faithlessness of his wife than perhaps he should, and both of these characters have some air of the foreign about them either by birth or education they do not fit completely into the world around them. This incompatibility with the world is not necessarily negative; indeed the unusual authority with which Chin utilises Japanese, echoing the highly polished style of Sasaki's letter, indicates a powerful character capable of some degree of self-confidence, some measure of self-assertion similar to that called for by the earlier characters' confrontations with their vices or features as in "Hyottoko" or "Shuchu" which in effect split them from themselves. Sasaki too displays a remarkable fortitude, a definite individualism in vowing to fight the entire world's unfavourable judgement to clear his name and that of his wife: unfortunately for Sasaki a decidedly psychotic and rather paradoxical fear of self-discovery has motivated this individualistic battle which is actually a battle against himself. Chin Sai's double murders his wife, perhaps because of the letters, perhaps because of his own

dissatisfaction with her steadily worsening nervous condition, for which he himself may well be responsible; there is evidence that Sasaki too may have held similar desires for freedom and revenge, desires condemned as shamefully reprehensible by his double who, with a duplicate of his wife, mocks his marital relationship and blames him for its possible failure. And yet the first Chin displays anger and regret over what has happened; his is the more sympathetic character, though one may argue that in waiting so long to enter his wife's room he ensured the scene he was to discover. Nonetheless in both cases it is the second self who acts on what may be the true intentions of the first, who is privy to those intentions with a greater knowledge than the first, and so is able to show contempt and condemnation for the first self. This builds on the model Akutagawa introduced in his earlier works, that of the split self who is motivated by a growing uncertainty of the source and nature of his own identity to rebel against an attribute which he sees as providing the surface of his existence in favour of a more 'self-created' life which turns out to be a defeat of himself. Sasaki and Chin both discover within their doubles aspects of themselves which destroy them, which destroy the lives they had up till then led, even if that life had been born of a bad faith or self-deception. If Heikichi in "Hyottoko" is destroyed by the drunken mask he wears when not creating his past through lies and romantic exaggerations, and Ryu is destroyed by the parasite and its emissary, the barbarian monk, both of whom become identified with Ryu through his fate, if these

characters are destroyed by their desire to create themselves 'honestly', as it were, to assert their own singular existences through a denial of their predatory, parasitical split selves, so too is Sasaki destroyed, the veracity of his alibi destroyed by his own act of self-creation through the writing of his first letter. Chin's marital life is ended by his Double, his story is ended by the narrator who created it as a hallucinatory review of thoughts perhaps closer to his heart than he would care to admit, a dream sequence which may in fact be an indication of desires he himself harbours, but which in any case comments on Akutagawa's own self. He too is a witness to his characters' confrontations with the Doubles they have created for themselves, as Akutagawa has created them for himself.

All of these characters engage in acts of self-creation, of self-assertion motivated by elements of themselves which take on the proportions of separate, mocking, accusing entities. Akutagawa's characters, pursued by themselves, become pathetic figures desperately in search of ways to lead their lives in accordance with the standards they have unknowingly set. That is to say, the Doubles they see or halves split off from themselves challenge them to face honestly what it is they try to suppress, be these secret fears of fitting into an unaccepting society or trusting with their affections women who remain complex individuals with their own pasts and needs. That these characters attempt to create themselves through fictions (either verbal lies or concretely constructed letters or

films dreamed into external reality) reflects Akutagawa's own project of defining himself in a fiction world, of turning to writing, the manipulation of images and self-reflections, to create a durable facade behind which he could be free to exist. Such is the quality of Akutagawa's individualism, however, so mixed as it is with a pessimism and cynicism truly tenacious, that for him, no expression of self-assertion is possible outside of a context of insanity or doom: none of his characters survives his own or his double's attempts to found this liveable, singular existence, none remains with sanity or health intact, just as Akutagawa himself degenerated into increasing paranoia and despair, finally destroying himself, having written himself out of existence. His last works attain to autobiography, and yet these are almost more biographical, written from a definite distance, through the mediation of an unshakeable resolve to demonstrate the ultimate proof of one's self-assertion, the choice of the time and method of one's own death. Self-creation for Akutagawa, possible only in fiction in the end amounted to only a fiction: for himself, as well as for his characters, individual triumph was possible only in death.

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CHAPTER IV

"HAGURUMA": A CONCLUSION

As Akutagawa's self-doubts and depression grew, his writing, the vehicle by which he attempted to stabilize his existence, grew less effective as a means of fending off his paranoia, and became less rigidly constructed into linear works progressing smoothly from beginning to end. While "Rashomon" or "Onna", for example, presents a central character in a definite situation who moves through a process by which his or her life changes, arriving at a definite concluding point or decision, later works such as "Aru Aho no Isho" maintain a far sloppier formal quality, doing away with or making do with a far less exacting plot structure or even a precise telos. His writing too changed in subject material: like an addict needing ever increasing doses of his drug to achieve the same effect, Akutagawa needed an increasingly explicit autobiographical process to present himself to himself as alive; hence the venture into autobiography which finally, at the end of his life, he undertook. Works such as "Aru Aho no Isho" (1927; *A Fool's Life*, 1961), and "Haguruma" (1927; tr. "Cogwheels" 1965), even "Kappa" (1926; tr. "Kappa" 1964), contain clearly drawn portraits of a man writing a life for himself. This present study has perhaps excessively though necessarily conflated literary analysis with biographical inquiry; in these later

works however, such a merger becomes difficult to avoid, at best. Akutagawa's autobiographical texts maintain a distance between the authoring self and the authored which reinforces the impression given by the term 'autobiography' when translated out of the Latin in which it hides, that of a man creating himself on paper. His most desperate moods when placed on the page are mediated through an act of transcription which renders them observable to the very person living them. As Akutagawa writes in "Haguruma", "I've neither parents nor wife nor children, only the life which flows from my pen" (VIII: 81): and this life becomes not so much accessible as describable, as present to his imagination through his reading of it. This very pen which carves out from the blankness of a page Akutagawa's life itself seems to have an independent life, occasionally racing across the lines, occasionally resisting his every effort to move it; when it does move, it writes, as in "Aru Aho no Isho", of a 'he' who floats through a series of fragmentary scenes which jump between past and present. Akutagawa's fondness of the Double, of a figure the same yet completely different from himself, is related to this self-dividing process of writing: the writer and the reader who occupy the same body though in different regions exist as strangers to one another despite the shared frame which both unites and separates them, as the subject and object of a gaze are defined in opposite relation to each other though

both exist as part of the same entity, and though both perceive themselves as sovereign subject.

The intensification of the antagonism between Akutagawa and nature continued until his death, as did Akutagawa's distrust of woman's alliance with nature's hostility against him. The themes we've discussed in the preceding pages come together in a final display of fear and despairingly defensive self-creation in "Haguruma", which Akutagawa did not live to see in print. This piece, somewhat longer than most of Akutagawa's work, presents us with descriptions of the doubts which haunted Akutagawa's last period, though they had been present all his life. Its story, such as it is, is easy to summarize in general, more complex to explicate in detail: A character who resembles Akutagawa, though identified as only "A", leaves his mother-in-law's home in a summer resort town to travel to Tokyo, there to attend the wedding ceremony of a certain acquaintance. While in Tokyo he feels himself pursued by ill omens and an apparition in a rain-coat. His brother-in-law kills himself by jumping in front of a train while wearing such a coat, and the presence of death begins to oppress Akutagawa. His nervous condition worsens until, at his wits' end, he decides to return home. There he spends a few peaceful days before the spectres of his trip to Tokyo catch up with him; the work concludes with his rather pathetic pleas for someone to come strangle him in his sleep. Now that we have

the skeleton of the piece, let's look more closely at the muscles and the tendons, as it were, before evaluating the quality of the skin to discover how nature, woman, and the Double merge into a portrait of a man doomed by his own existence.

The work opens with Akutagawa "racing along in a car from a summer resort to a certain train station along the Tokaido rail line... to attend the wedding announcement ceremony of a certain acquaintance... The road along which the car ran was lined with pine trees" (VIII: 59) which received the light of a winter's setting sun. In the car with Akutagawa is one other passenger who tells him of a ghost who appears at a certain house in broad daylight, though mostly on rainy days, dressed in a rain-coat. Arriving at the station just barely too late for the train and so obliged to await the next one, Akutagawa notices a man in a rain coat who was "idly gazing outside" (ibid). Akutagawa moves to the station cafe where "on the dusty walls... placards advertised oyako donburi, cutlets, and omelettes" (VIII: 60), dishes which emphasize the consumption of flesh: oyako donburi for example is a bowl of rice topped with, basically, a chicken omelette; the word itself means 'parent and child' donburi, uniting both in death. These dishes give Akutagawa a feeling of the countryside along the rail-line, a countryside in which "electric trains run between fields of wheat and cabbage"

(ibid), in which nature supports the proof of man's transience, the trains which speed people along towards the end of their journey. This station reminds one of that one built atop the Nakamura estate in "Niwa": both are symbols of time's passage, literally of life's motion, placed over top a nature which will outlast every life and every construction. Finally boarding the train he awaited, Akutagawa takes his seat amongst a group of schoolgirls on an outing. The girls chat between themselves, making Akutagawa feel as if somehow they are older than they actually are; but when one does behave in an exaggeratedly 'mature' manner, he feels her to be the most girlish of the lot. Akutagawa, "feeling as if they're suffering from empyema, can't help but smile" (Viii: 60). The girls, Akutagawa feels, are diseased: the illness, chikunosho, empyema, which a reliable dictionary describes as "an accumulation of pus, usually in the pleural cavity", is every bit as indicative of an internal uncleanness as the tuberculosis or leprosy Akutagawa employs in earlier works. The fresh, young bodies of these girls are still female bodies, still for Akutagawa harbourers of consumptive, congestive illness.

His train having arrived at a transfer point, Akutagawa tramps along the cold platform and meets an acquaintance sporting an impressive ring purchased from someone whose business in Harbin -- a city in northern China which was the

site of imperialist, colonialising entrepreneurial activity -- has failed. The two chat when another man in a raincoat sits near them. Akutagawa is about to tell his friend the tale of the ghost when his friend points out a woman across the way: he knows her slightly, and relates a trivial anecdote about her. Akutagawa has his attention drawn to the "mouse-coloured shawl" (Viii: 62) she is wearing; she seems "shabby" (misuborashii, *ibid*), "something around her eyes making one feel she's a bit crazy" (*ibid*). From out of her packages a "sponge resembling a leopard" (*ibid*) protrudes.

Akutagawa arrives in Tokyo; the man in the raincoat from the train had at some point disappeared from sight. En route to his hotel room Akutagawa suddenly recalls the pine forest he had travelled through earlier, and becomes aware of a growing hallucination which had been recurrently bothering him for quite some time: a series of ceaselessly revolving cogwheels (the 'haguruma' of the title; this word is literally a 'toothed wheel' and implies a number of things: the teeth indicate a consuming quality, something predatory, which is united with a spinning wheel, associated with the Buddhist Wheel of the Law, the symbolic representation of the cycle of birth and death through which the unenlightened must eternally go. The wheel too, closely related to the Buddhistic meaning, signifies the cycle of nature which Akutagawa perceives as hostile to him; hence

the teeth) which after peaking in intensity fade, leaving behind them a dull headache. Depositing his possessions in his hotel, Akutagawa makes his way to the wedding banquet which has already begun before he arrives. His place is beside that of an old scholar of Chinese classics who wears "sideburns just like a lion's" (Viii: 63); after speaking for a while with this man about mythological creatures such as the kirin and the phoenix, Akutagawa feels a destructive desire and denies the authority of certain long-cherished, canonical texts. This of course infuriates the classicist, who breaks off their conversation with "almost a tiger's roar" (ibid). Akutagawa turns his attention to the slice of meat on his plate, carving it with his knife and fork, when he notices a worm "calmly wriggling" (VIII: 64) from it. Akutagawa sips his champagne, watches the worm, and eats nothing.

Returning to his hotel room the hat and the overcoat that he had hung on the wall make Akutagawa feel as if he's looking at himself -- he "hurriedly" (ibid) hangs them inside a closet, out of sight. He stares at himself in the mirror, "the worm floating up clearly in [his] thoughts" (ibid). Leaving , actually fleeing his hotel room, he goes to the lobby, there to sit for not even five minutes, for "even now there was a rain coat hanging limply from the back of a sofa beside" (ibid) him. He flees the lobby to walk along the hotel porch, there overhearing some one speak the

English words 'all right', which begin to haunt him and send him of course back to his room. Once there, "trying to avoid looking in the mirror" (VIII: 65), he sits himself at his desk which is covered with green Moroccan leather "close to lizard skin" (ibid), and tries to work on a short story; "however the pen filled with ink simply does not move" (ibid), resisting his effort till seemingly of itself it writes over and over the English phrase 'all right, all right'. The phone beside his bed rings, bringing his niece's call informing him of his brother-in-law's death: he had jumped in front of a train while wearing a raincoat, "not in keeping with the season" (VIII: 66). "Now knowing what was meant by 'all right' " (ibid), Akutagawa hears the sound of wings from somewhere down the hall, and wonders if someone isn't feeding a bird.

When Akutagawa wakes the next morning one of his slippers is missing; the hotel boy finds it in the bathroom, suggesting that perhaps a rat moved it. Akutagawa, drinking "coffee without milk" (ibid), works on a short story, "staring out at the snow in the garden... The snow beneath the daphne and its buds were soiled... from soot and grime. It was a scene which somehow gave (him) a pitiable feeling" (*itamashisa*, ibid). Idly thinking about his family and his brother-in-law he tries to write but "no matter what the pen would not move easily along even a single line: (VIII:67). Putting aside his work he reads Tolstoy's Polikouchka, and

feels as if his life is reflected in its hero as a "caricature" (ibid). He is particularly "upset at feeling the cold smile of fate" (ibid) within the work's tragedies, finally flinging the book with all his strength to one corner of the room. "So doing, a large rat runs out from near the window into the bathroom. At a bound [Akutagawa] follows, but looking everywhere, [sees] no sign of it" (VIII: 68).

He again leaves his room to walk along the porch, feeling "as usual as depressed as if [he] were in prison" (ibid). He looks in on the cooks who "eye [him] coldly" (ibid). Feeling himself in Hell, he cannot help having a prayer escape his lips. Walking to his sister's house he sees that the branches and leaves of the trees lining the street are blackened and dead; this gives him "more than displeasure, a feeling closer to fear" (ibid). Recalling the "souls turned into trees in Dante's Inferno, [he decides] to walk along a street lined with buildings facing the tramline" (ibid). At his sister's he speaks with her of her husband's death; she in turn asks him how he himself is and he rattles off the list of sleeping drugs he must take simply to rest. After only thirty minutes he leaves, intending to go to a certain restaurant. It is closed; he can see behind its locked glass door apples and bananas piled on its tables. Two other people pass him on his way away from the restaurant; "one seems to say just at that

moment, ' He's edgy, isn't he' " (VIII: 70). Akutagawa decides to check himself into a "mental hospital close to Aoyama Cemetery" (ibid) where his mentor, Natsume Soseki, lies buried. Passing up several yellow taxis (which he feels are unlucky) he climbs into a green cab, asking to be taken to the hospital; it is located on a small, twisting street which for some reason he cannot find this time, though he has never had that trouble before. The cab comes out onto a broad street near the cemetery and Akutagawa recalls that ten years before at Soseki's funeral, although then too he hadn't been happy, at least he had been "settled" (heiwa, Viii: 72). He returns to his hotel, there to find a man in a raincoat talking to a porter from the taxi company: turning on his heel Akutagawa walks back along the street growing more and more despondent. He enters a bookshop and idly picks up a book on Greek mythology, bound in yellow, "apparently written for children" (ibid). He reads one line which seems to "strike [him] down" (uchinomeshita, ibid): "even Zeus, the greatest god, cannot equal the God of Vengeance" (ibid). He flees the bookstore while feeling himself pursued by the God of Vengeance.

That evening in another bookstore he reads Strindberg's Mythologies and looks through an anthology of works produced by patients at an insane asylum; this publication contains a depiction of cogwheels identical to the hallucination which plagues him. Night falls leaving him

alone in the shop; like "a gambler" (ibid) he opens book after book, "all of which in either sentence or drawing conceal... needles" (ibid) to stab him. While flipping through the pages he recalls the pen name he once used (the explicitly other identity he adopted for himself): he had taken it from a story of one who, before learning the distinctive walk of his new province, forgot the equally distinctive walk of his old home, and so had no choice but to move about in a crawl. "To all who can see [him, Akutagawa] must surely appear to be that fellow today" (VIII: 73), thinks Akutagawa to himself. On a poster above his head he sees a depiction of St. George killing the dragon, a particularly disturbing image to Akutagawa for his own name, Ryunosuke, means 'dragon helper'. Akutagawa leaves the bookstore, fleeing along the street. Looking up at the infinite stars he tries "to imagine how small the Earth is - - and how much smaller still" (VIII: 74) is he himself.

Once again in his hotel lobby he meets a friend whom he invites to his room for a chat; all goes well till Akutagawa notices in a mirror a bit of yellow sticking-plaster behind the man's ear, and realizes that he's been sent to learn his secrets. After the man leaves Akutagawa reads Shiga Naoya's novel An 'ya Koro (1921-1936; tr. "A dark Night's Passing", 1976), feeling how stupid he is in comparison with this work's hero, who, as in Shiga's "Kinosaki nite", is able to integrate himself into a larger, natural harmony. His

cogwheel hallucination comes once more; taking a large dose of sleeping medicine, he falls into a fitful dream. He is walking away from his wife whom he leaves standing beside a swimming pool, telling her to look after the children. His destination is a large pine forest, and he apparently has no intention of returning, for when his wife asks him to take a towel, he replies that he has no need for it. He feels a strong regret at leaving, but continues to walk; somehow, though, his location has changed. He is now on the platform of a train station, and before him he finds an old school friend standing with an aged woman, whom he seems to remember from somewhere. He feels a "pleasurable excitement" (yukaina kofun, VIII: 78) when he speaks to her. The friend and the old woman wave to him as he climbs, alone, onto the train which had silently glided into the station. As he walks down the corridor a naked woman, "almost a mummy" (mirani chikai, VIII: 78), turns to face him from inside a sleeping compartment -- he feels "she is without a doubt the God of Vengeance, the daughter of an insane person" (ibid). Akutagawa awakens to the sounds of wings beating and rats scurrying; he goes to the lobby to await dawn, "like an old man suffering from a chronic illness who now awaits death" (ibid).

Later in the day he takes up his pen to write; the pen "at a rate unusual for even [him] runs across the page. However after two or three minutes, as if some unseen force

were blocking it, it stops... An expansive delusion takeshold of (him), and lost in a wild joy [he feels he has] neither parents nor family, only the life which flows from [his] pen" (VIII: 81). This wild feeling does not last long however for the telephone begins to ring; when he answers it, it spits out at him

ambiguous sounds... Surely it is saying the word 'mole'. 'Mole' is the English for moguramochi [which can be written with a kanji combining the symbol for 'rat' with that for 'woman'] ... After a few minutes [Akutagawa decides] that the word was 'la mort', the French word for death: of course it unsettles [him]... However within [his] discomfort (he feels) something funny. [He smiles]. How did it come about, this funny feeling. For a while [he stands] in front of the mirror, thinking about [his] second self, whom, although [he has] never seen it, the wife of an acquaintance has. She once even apologised to [him] for not saying hello at a function to which [he had never gone]... Perhaps death would come to [his] second self rather than to [him, Akutagawa thinks. Then he takes] up the pen once more to begin writing a new short story. (VIII: 82).

Yet again leaving his room to walk, Akutagawa meets one last friend, and old man who is particularly religious; he tries to convince Akutagawa to believe in the Christian God, but Akutagawa, sceptical, says that he can more easily believe in the Devil. Akutagawa wants to confide his fears in the man, wants to ask him such questions as "Why am I being punished? Why did my father's business fail? Why did my mother go insane?" (VIII: 83), feeling that this man is somehow privy to the secrets of his life, but fearing that he will report all this to Akutagawa's family, who will then send him like his "mother to an insane asylum" (VIII: 84),

he remains silent. Taking leave of the old man he walks the streets "like a thief" (VIII: 85). Driven back to his hotel by hearing two journalists whisper, seemingly about himself, in French, that the Devil is dead in Hell, Akutagawa decides to return home. Again he races along in a taxi down the pine-tree lined road to the resort, this time being driven by a man wearing a raincoat. He feels that the row of pine trees is standing in a funeral procession.

Despite a few days' quiet made possible by sleeping drugs, all does not stay well at home. Akutagawa comments to his mother-in-law that it is quiet here at her house, but she tells him that nonetheless it too is part of the world. He passes an eccentric foreigner named Strindberg who reminds him of the book on mythology he had read; the foreigner's black and white tie reminds him of the Black and White whisky he had drunk in Tokyo to remove the headache his hallucination had left. An aeroplane flies overhead, reminding him of the Airship brand of cigarettes he had smoked at the hotel, even though he disliked the package for its depiction of man-made wings. His younger brother-in-law tells him of an 'aeroplane sickness' which affects pilots, a condition in which they become accustomed to breathing the thin, high-altitude air, and can no longer breath at ground level. These various occurrences terrify Akutagawa: walking in the forest to get away he finds a dead mole, and encounters a crow which screams at him four times (in

Japanese four and death are homophonous). Back at home he lies down, only to see the shadow of large, black wings descend over him when he closes his eyes. He is startled by his wife calling to him to ask how he is: she has had a premonition that he has died. This, he says, is "the most frightening experience of [his] life. [He has] no more strength to keep on writing. Is there no one to come strangle [him] in [his] sleep?" (VIII: 94), he pleads, and the piece ends.

In structure this is very much a dystopic quest romance leading, as one would expect from that rather negative genre, to a destruction of the protagonist. The various types of questing fictions are distinguished by their tone and conclusions; their elements for the most part are similar. "The essential element... is adventure, which means that romance is naturally a sequential and processional form" (Frye, p.186). In a positive or utopic (rather, eutopic) quest, the hero is one marked for some special purpose or goal; he is set apart from more average people by a particular quality of purity or goodness. The hero "comes from an upper world, and his enemy is analogous to the demonic powers of a lower world... The enemy is associated with winter, darkness, confusion, sterility, moribund life" (Frye, p.187), while the hero represents, in a word, the good. He will be assisted in his quest by various helpers who are magical beings, often in disguise. While demons,

either deceptively appearing as those helping creatures or explicitly revealed as detrimental, will oppose him.

The quest may be for spiritual enlightenment, or Truth... but in any case it is likely to involve quest for the quester himself... The quester moves through unfamiliar landscape toward a guessed-at but still astounding token; the introspective venturer finds new awareness at every turn of thought and may at last reach the hidden treasure of self-knowledge, an integrated personality (Stout, p.16).

Even in a questing story the goal of which is something as mundane as love or the return of a stolen wife, as in James Branch Cabell's Jurgen (1919, which represents an excellent vehicle for the study of this genre, for it sets out to be a parody of the form), the structural pattern closely follows a paradigmatic shape: the quester departs from his normal life at Point A, having seen a sign, received a message, or responded to some inexplicable though life-long urge. The sign or message may have come from a divinity either disguised or explicitly revealed; in any event, the quester must travel far across perilous terrain, overcoming obstacles which are really tests. He encounters various creatures which either aid or oppose him, being in league with the polar forces supervising his progress. Finally he arrives at a place which contains the most difficult test of all, behind which lies the goal of his journey. He is successful, and hence returns to his normal life again at Point A (which may be the same place in time as well as geographic location) either recognized as a great hero by others or (in the case of the more mundane tales) simply in

possession of the prize which lay at the end of his search; in either case he returns wiser, humbler, at last a complete person. In a negative or dystopic quest such as, for example, Orwell's 1984 (1948), an anti-hero (though not necessarily the sort of negative personality type implied by that term; quite often he is simply an averagely unheroic, though still marked individual merely in the wrong place at the wrong time) will be set off from those around him by some sentimentality, for example, some nostalgia for a time he may never even have known, nor even coherently imagined, or be set apart by a desire for fortune, perhaps; his journey too will carry him across mysterious terrain or dark, secret dimensions of his ordinary life, and he shall encounter deceptive beings associated with a supreme and negative being, or a 'Big Brother' figure, who has watched this protagonist for quite a while with malicious intent, and who shall trick the main quester into trapping himself. The quester's goal shall not be reached; or rather, his true goal or fate, his failure and destruction, shall be inflicted upon him, and the point to which he returns at journey's end will be the point whence his journey truly began: the nothingness which is his death.

In "Haguruma" then, we have a character, Akutagawa, marked by the God of Vengeance and set off from the world by his social alienation and fear of nature, who travels from a resort town surrounded by greenery whereat live his mother-

in-law and wife, into the city to attend a symbolic union of man and woman. This union is the start of life, the ritualised, socially sanctioned merger of two people who may now legitimately bring forth new lives, that is, new lives which must one day end, little 'deaths-to-be': the ostensible goal of Akutagawa's journey here, the apparent reason for his going to Tokyo, is to attend this acknowledgement of sentience. Along his path Akutagawa meets various watchers, the first of which are the pine trees which line the road like sentinels in nature's employ, jailers ensuring his arrival at the one place to which he is 'authorized' to go. These pine trees are of course green year round, and so in this piece, even though it is set in winter and all around the trees there is the temporary death nature reserves for its wards, they appear freshly alive: they therefore come to imply the life nature itself has, the immortality it grants itself which permits it to rule over all else (it was to this eternal quality which Shiga was able to attach himself at the close of "Kinosaki nite"). The word for 'pine' in Japanese is a homophone for the verb 'to wait' much as, in English, 'pine' is similar to the verb 'to pine'. This association has long been exploited by Japanese poets to express the longing of lovers for each other, but here takes on a much darker aspect, that of nature 'pining' for Akutagawa's death (hence the pines standing in funereal ceremony at the work's close). Other

watchers include the various friends Akutagawa meets, whose sincerity or motives he doubts, such as the fellow with the sticking-plaster behind his ear sent, Akutagawa is certain, to espy his secrets. The blackened trees along Tokyo's streets, the rat in his hotel room, even the apples and bananas behind the closed restaurant's glass door, are all representatives of the greater force operating behind the scenes, the force of nature which supervises Akutagawa's every step. The recurring raincoat is the most obvious watcher or guide here, appearing at each stage of the journey; indeed it is the raincoated figure, explicitly connected, even over-connected through the brother-in-law's suicide, with death, who physically transports Akutagawa back to his mother-in-law's house whereat the true goal of his quest awaits him. This true goal is his defeat, his realization that he has no more strength to keep on with this life. The many animal figures and animal features hidden within people, such as the lion-like sideburns on the Chinese scholar, and the mouse-coloured shawl worn by the mad woman aboard the train, too, function as the creatures within a quest romance, all, like the old friend who believes in God, potential spies for Akutagawa's wife and family, all agents for the God of Vengeance so relentlessly pursuing his victim. The quest structure becomes complete when, after experiencing his (mis)adventures in Tokyo, Akutagawa returns to his starting

point in possession of the knowledge his supervising god had hoped to instil in him: that he must die.

Nature here takes on a role as hostile as in other of Akutagawa's works; it is insistent on the fate it demands of him, even assuming an all-powerful countenance, that of the God of Vengeance intent on punishing him. However whereas in earlier works such as "Niwa" there was the possibility of standing up to this condemning force through the resistance of artistic, corrective production, here all hope of escape has been lost: the occasions on which Akutagawa tries to write result in either frustration, for his pen refuses to obey him, or an equally frustrating feeling of possession by an unseen force. When the pen moves as if on its own, or as if moved by another, Akutagawa himself is not writing, is not engaging in the same sort of defiant process as was the protagonist's in "Niwa" or was that of the anonymous, insane painter of "Numachi". Their work was a testament to their rejection of nature's program: for Akutagawa in "Haguruma", such a rejection through work becomes barred to him by his pen's stubbornness, and nature, as characterized by the sooty snow outside his window, or the blackened trees along Tokyo's streets, becomes the unappeasable victor in the battle Akutagawa had until then believed himself capable of waging. He feels himself stupid in comparison to Shiga's hero in An'ya koro, a hero who arrives at the same integrating conclusion as was found in "Kinosaki nite", an

acceptance of a natural place within an eternal, absorbing, non-individuating existence embracing both life and death; this feeling of stupidity indicates the extent to which Akutagawa's faith in his own project had eroded, for he hasn't even the strength to reject a representation, a novel.

Closely related to this inability to resist nature is Akutagawa's now open treatment of the Double through his use of an autobiographical mode, for the unseen hand which moves or blocks his pens is that very second self he claims never to have seen, though its presence is frightening to him. The overcoat and hat he cannot face are him in duplicate; the face in the mirror he avoids seeing is not his face but that of his Double. When Akutagawa's nerves are at their most frazzled and he is busily trying to write a bit of control back into his life his self-creation through this act of writing takes on its most desperate form, and his awareness of himself as a divided existence becomes most acute. The "life which flows" from his pen, free of either parents or children, is a life created by one aware of dividing himself into the writer and the written; hence Akutagawa experiences the unseen force which moves or stills his (written) pen, for this existence captured on paper is subject to the passing whims of the 'real' Akutagawa, that very unseen force itself. The Akutagawa we read here is not the real Akutagawa but rather a created second self who

himself writes about seeing a duplicate. Like the doubled characters of his works Akutagawa himself had become a doubled character complaining when he, unseen by himself moved his own pen. Like Sasaki Shinichiro whose greatest shock came from finding his double reading his diary, Akutagawa was terrified lest he catch himself reading the self he had created on paper. When Akutagawa, at the close of "Haguruma", discovers the true end of his quest, the message that he must die, he writes that he can write no more: he can no longer write himself into life. The death he now expects is not one at his own hand, for he no longer knows that hand, he can no longer write it. Rather, his death will come when someone strangles him in his sleep (it actually came from an overdose of sleeping medicine): he shall die while perhaps dreaming his birth, as he lived by writing his life.

One should not overlook the role played by foreign culture in "Haguruma": from Tolstoy to Anatole France, Akutagawa presents European authors as greatly influential in his own self-perceptions. He describes himself as "stupid" in comparison to Shiga's hero, and feels a desire to deny the text of which he speaks with the old, lion-whiskered scholar. Further, he sees himself as caricatured by Tolstoy, and feels an affinity for Monsieur Bovary: this placing of himself outside of Japan and within a foreign literature, in fact within a fictional foreign world,

reinforces the alienation with which he lived, and makes him truly comparable to the fellow from the legend who forgot his own walk before learning that of strangers. No longer belonging to the old, Akutagawa could find no acceptance in the new; this new culture, while attracting him to its promise of individuality, and although affording him the literary forms through which he was able to find a temporarily effective mode of self-creation, ultimately failed Akutagawa for his demands on it were too great: it too is part of the world which it cannot transcend, it too contains alienating symbols, such as the dragon-slaying St. George, which serve to resist Akutagawa's desires for merger.

The death Akutagawa expects is anticipated too by his wife. When she comes to him at the end of the work with the premonition that he has gone, she puts into words what every woman in all of Akutagawa's opus has represented to him: the message of his doom, his mortality. The women in "Haguruma" function as something like rough allegorical representatives of the women one encounters in one's life. First, the mother, in this case the mother-in-law, presides over the place whence Akutagawa's quest begins. She is something of a zero point, existing before the life of the quester, and to which he will return at the end. He leaves her house in the forest, the place of the mother firmly located within nature, and goes to the city, the location of human society.

Akutagawa in this work as in his own life enters the human community, the city, without (one may almost say 'innocent of') a mother's guidance. Expelled (or temporarily released) from nature's embrace he must make his way alone into a social order filled with beings he feels are spying on him. As Akutagawa's journey progresses the women he encounters grow older. Aboard the train he sees the schoolgirls, mere children who strike him as harbouring within their young bodies a comparatively benign disease but nonetheless, a hint of infection which somehow reassures him, for he can see through the vigour of their young bodies, the deceptive freshness of their pre-nubile flesh, to the sexuality and danger hidden therein. He next meets his friend at the transfer point and they, now themselves like schoolboys trying to be sophisticated, gossip about a young woman. She is perhaps symbolic of the woman for whom one develops a childhood crush, from whom one receives an intimation of sexuality: there is a certain deprecation in their talk of her, for she is "what do you call it... 'modern' "

(VIII: 62): by this is implied the phrase 'modern girl' popular in Japan in the early part of this century to describe a young woman who dresses and behaves in a foreign, western fashion. The 'modern girls' (and their male counterparts, 'modern boys', known in Japanese pronunciation of the English words as simply 'mo-ga' and 'mo-bo') were generally condemned for being of looser morals than were

more traditional young women. Akutagawa is sensitive to this woman's appearance, noting details in it which threaten him (the mouse-like shawl, the leopard-like sponge): he is aware of her femaleness, and it too contains disease (the leopard behind the mouse). Her illness is more subtle than that of the school girls, however, appearing as "something between her eyes which makes one think she's crazy" (VIII: p.62): this is more dangerous than a child's disease for there is nothing amusing in it. She is as savage as the leopard hiding in her parcel, as the predatory creature Akutagawa sees concealed in all women. Her madness is directly opposed to rationality, it is a direct threat to Akutagawa's own sanity. Immediately after Akutagawa encounters this woman he suffers from the appearance of the cogwheel hallucination; although the woman is not the direct cause of that vision, she is a factor, through her madness, which brings it into this work: her insanity provokes a response in Akutagawa, a reaction which is his sighting of the haunting, cyclical motion of nature.

Next Akutagawa arrives at the wedding dinner; here of course the bride, though not even described by Akutagawa, is of tantamount importance. At this ceremony, the ritual joining of two people who may now legitimately bring forth new life, Akutagawa discovers the maggot in his dinner which emphasizes the 'deadness' of his food, the inevitable end of that new life here symbolically begun. Death asserts its

primacy at this ceremony which is a wedding for all present: Akutagawa does not mention his own wife before the dinner; only afterwards does he do so, and even this is done through gradual means. Marriage slowly comes closer to his own life, coming first (in the revelatory process of the work) to his sister whose husband commits suicide (perhaps for no other reason than that he is married), then by stages approaching Akutagawa. He idly recalls his wife while trying to write, while waiting for his pen to move and form words other than the 'all right' it insists on putting down. Finally he comes face to face with his wife, but even this is an event mediated through his imagination, for he dreams of her while lying in drug-induced sleep. In fact in this dream Akutagawa, not without a strong sense of regret, frees himself from her, abandoning her with their children. This regret is interesting: it may have several sources, ranging from a regret he feels for his wife, to a realization that in leaving her to enter the forest he is accepting his own death, to a regret that this is taking place merely within a dream and is not an actual freedom for him. In his dream Akutagawa also meets an old woman standing with a friend; the memory, un-placeable though definite, that he has of her, and the excitement he feels when speaking with her, indicate her to be a mother figure for him. She has aged, though, from the mother he could remember in his life, while the friend (perhaps a displaced damage of himself) is still

young: Akutagawa here may be commenting on himself, on his development possibly arrested at the stage whereat his own mother died. Her aging would then indicate that for Akutagawa his mother has never truly died, living on as a presence (unrecognized though agitatingly familiar) within his mind. This old woman with her young companion wave white handkerchiefs at Akutagawa as he rides away on the train: she remains in the past as the journey of his life (such facile symbolism!) takes him away from her, frozen in one eternal, inner place, locked within Akutagawa's mind. Next in his dream, and in his procession of aging women, comes the mummified, naked woman, the God of Vengeance who must be the daughter of one insane: she is a dead woman, incarnation of that force which has pursued and punished him all his life. This figure is the ultimate expression of Akutagawa's Woman, a living, mummified presence who travels with him aboard this train which takes him from and to he knows not where. All that is left to him now is to return to the zero point whence he set out, whereat his wife and mother-in-law await his arrival, and his death.

When, brought there by the raincoated ghost, he does return to the resort town, and does finally walk through the woods near the house leaving his wife behind, Akutagawa meets nature's final messengers, the dead mole and the death-crying crow. Of these, the mole is the symbol richer in interpretive layers; as I mentioned earlier, the word for

'mole' in Japanese, Moguramochi, may be written with characters combining the element for 'rat' with that for 'woman'. This is reminiscent of the mad woman aboard the train who wears a mouse-coloured shawl; actually, though it sounds best in English as 'mouse-coloured', the Japanese text has nezumi-iro, which may mean either mouse- or rat-coloured. The mole here is dead; hence the association is one of a strong link between death and the two elements, rat and woman. The character then spells out, as it were, a message accessible to Akutagawa in his nervously agitated state. Naturally Akutagawa did not invent this character, it had existed for thousands of years before he employed it here. Nonetheless he did carefully select the creature about which he writes of finding it dead in his path; he selected this mole, I feel, precisely because it unites within itself 'rat' and 'woman', unites them within a visual icon Akutagawa is able to present to himself as lying dead, as in fact being death. 'Rat', the taunting, natural trickster, and 'woman', the vengeful god, aging vessel for disease, become united in la mort in a way inconceivable in any language other than Japanese but which, in that language, is disturbing enough to reverbate in the mind of one dangerously unstable. Regardless of how much mediating craft Akutagawa displays in the construction of this nightmarish quest, there is little doubt that by this point in his life he was on the edge of rationality. For one in

such a state the play the words 'mole', 'la mort' (homophonous in Japanese as 'mohru'), and 'moguramochi' (when written with the above-described kanji) was not excessive, was not absurd: it had profound significance for Akutagawa, and this significance was inescapable. He was to die. Akutagawa was many things; first of which he was an artistic genius who utilized the 'text-ures' of words, who saw in words possibilities remote to, or even inaccessible to, average speakers of a language. He was also of fragile mental stability: as such the rules by which he chose to combine words and images were not those of average use. We have seen how he exploited the suggestive richness of kanji profitably to express facets of a character; in "Rashomon" the underling is aptly described by the term which names him (fortunately one which translates almost exactly into English). In "Futatsu no tegami" the name of the protagonist, Sasaki Shinichiro, is a well-made indicator of the predicament in which the reader finds him. So too in "Haguruma" the illustrative kanji for moguramochi finds a telling place in the text and adds layers of meaning which, though not otherwise unobtainable, are certainly present to the interpretive process.

Akutagawa's 'last' woman is his wife, mother to their children, bringer of death's premonition. We have seen in earlier works how sex or motherhood empowers a woman, brings her closer to death (often too to her own death, something

which she is able to accept); here the wife, safe within her mother's home, which is itself nestled in a greenly natural place, has the power to announce that Akutagawa is dead, has already reached the goal of his quest. This announcement strikes terror into him, he has no strength to resist it: having returned to the zero, starting point, he knows he has left to him no refuge from his avenging god, the ageless, undying mummy, as eternal as the pine trees, as the nature which now surrounds him and covers him with its beating, shadow wings. Akutagawa is engulfed in nature, is here at the point whence he can write no more. He must plead to the blank audience which is his page (which is himself) for someone to come strangle him in his sleep -- to come destroy the written entity which presents itself as writing. The person to strangle and the person to be strangled are the same: both are this self-authoring figure who can no longer write, can no longer divide himself into the subject and object of his fictional gaze. Just as the narrator of "Kage" ("The Shadow") awakens at the end of the story to reveal his confusion at having watched a non-existent film with an unknown woman who nonetheless knows the movie and the narrator, so too Akutagawa awakens here to reveal his inability to continue experiencing the sensations he creates from himself by writing them. The "unspeakable suffering it is to live amidst these feelings" (VIII: 95) is precisely that: unspeakable, something which Akutagawa cannot put into

words, hence with which he cannot continue to live. He had lived his life by putting it into words, by finding his life in those black marks on the page which end here, in one of the last things he was to compose, with the significantly foreign symbol, borrowed from a culture which seemed, deceptively, to offer a chance for renewal, for successful individuality; the symbol which summarizes not only Akutagawa's existence but all existences, all quests, and after which nothing of certainty may follow, save for a full stop: "?"

In the above we have seen how Akutagawa's alienation from his family and social context operated to remove him more and more from life, from himself. The works he constructed from the various components of his existence reflect the views of this man condemned by his self-responsibility to an excess of freedom. The freedom to create himself on paper became in actuality for Akutagawa only the freedom to end his life, the freedom to write himself out of life itself and into a fictional reality which he could not sustain. The vague unease Akutagawa felt for his future may have been, in effect, a form of writer's block taken to its most extreme expression, an end to all writing. Akutagawa, faced as he believed himself to be, with a natural world which hostilely insisted upon his death, alienated from woman, from the mother, the very source of fear in his life for the insanity he saw as

inherent in her, tried to create himself on paper free from these twinned opponents to his individual existence, but in so doing created only a self which came to mock him. This created, doubled Akutagawa haunted its author; as we have seen in "Futatsu no tegami" and in "Haguruma", the doubled self accuses the first of harbouring flaws, imperfections which invalidate that first self, and so too the characters which Akutagawa created, the self he wrote, pointed out to him his own inadequacies. Growing more and more aware of his failure to create a durable though fictional self, Akutagawa came to hate and fear this self too: he fled from his doubled self, as we have seen in "Haguruma" even avoiding his own hat and coat for the resemblance they bore to him. Akutagawa's only freedom from this written, haunting self, his own creation, was to stop writing, but to stop writing meant an end to the life he lived, the only life accessible to him as his chosen existence. Such was Akutagawa's paradox, the predicament into which he had led himself: to live meant to write, which meant to deny his existence, to mock himself; to cease mocking himself meant no longer to write, which meant no longer to live. Indeed no one knows, as Camus writes, the exact moment when one chooses to end one's life, when one reaches the decision to commit one's final act: but one may pinpoint the precise moment when that act is accomplished. Akutagawa lingered over his decision to die, he savoured it, even reserving the

time necessary to create that decision too on paper in the suicide notes he composed with as much deliberation and erudition as he composed the other pages of his life. Akutagawa, as any writer must be, was born of words; unlike most writers, he died of words as well.

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