Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Harmonious Multiplicity in "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" (Kamigami no bishō, 1922)

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"The Faint Smiles of the Gods" is a minor work of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892-1927) about a Portuguese missionary who comes to Japan to spread Christianity in perhaps the sixteenth century but has difficulty converting Japanese to this foreign faith. A mysterious Japanese spirit appears out of nowhere and explains why. This paper explores the meaning of this short story for Akutagawa and argues that his petit-bourgeois social background helps explain the sense of contentment in the story, even while it deals with the issue of cultural collision between the West and Japan.

In his 1958 essay on the question of Akutagawa's death Yoshimoto Takaaki begins with citing some of the various reactions to Akutagawa's suicide in 1927.[1] One commentator called Akutagawa's death an "art of actualized self-destruction." Another said that his death was just one more phase in the fall of the bourgeoisie. Miyamoto Kenji, the Japanese Communist Party leader, responded to these comments in Haiboku no bungaku ('The Literature of Defeat') by citing Akutagawa's statement to the effect that, rather than blame us, future generations will understand our passion. He argued that class background alone does not explain Akutagawa's suicide. Tayama Katai's was strongly affected by the suicide, too. It caused his political orientation to shift to the left. The right-leaning, nationalistic Yokomitsu Riichi was also affected. The one

statement that caused Yoshimoto to seriously re-think this problem was Akutagawa Ryûnosuke to Shiga Naoya by Inoue Yoshio (1907-2003) in which he wrote, "Every writer after [Akutagawa] has to deal with his death; only by dealing with it, can one not have to commit suicide. His death has nothing to do with intellectualism; no matter how smart one is, intelligence does not help."[2]

Yoshimoto's analysis of what caused Akutagawa to choose death combines the familiar concept of Akutagawa's "class complex" with this point that his death had nothing to do with intelligence. Although Akutagawa attended the best schools and received a university education, he belonged to the petit bourgeois economic class. One of the key points in Yoshimoto's argument that lends it greater credibility is that Akutagawa had a love/hate relationship with his origins, which included the family that he grew up with.[3] Contrary to the usual image of Akutagawa as the sophisticated and cool master of novel construction, where he is portrayed as a kind of technician, Yoshimoto argues that originally, in Akutagawa's first three works, Rônen ("The Old Man," 1914), Seinen to shi ("Youths and Death," 1914), and Hyottoko (Playing the Fool, 1914) he was not an intellectualist writer. In these works he portrayed typical Shitamachi commoners and characters who had a love-hate relationship with their family, just as he himself had with his family. He argues that the tragedy of Akutagawa's career is that it was only when he abandoned his natural character that he became successful and gained the image of the intellectualist master of "formalistic construction." A sense of guilt about having left behind his true self and a resultant self-loathing come through in The Nose, Father, Kodoku jigoku (Lonely Hell), and Rashomon, works in which characters make attempts to re-create their outer selves. As in The Nose, the characters often only reach a place of inner peace once they return to their original self. In a word, Yoshimoto views Akutagawa's death as the result of his failed attempt to escape his class. His career rested on his outer reputation as a master of formalistic construction and as long as he worked to live up to that reputation, he could not return to

his origins. In his work he was under pressure to deny himself. His suicide came when he could no longer sustain this balancing act—in Yoshimoto's words "standing tiptoe"—and could no longer sustain this struggle to produce works that played up form and structure.

Yoshimoto points out that the stories that contained a sense of contentment were fairy tale-like stories. Here I will analyze one story of this type that tends to be ignored by Japanese literary critics, "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" (Kamigami no bishō, 1922, in this paper hereafter referred to as "Kamigami").[4] Writing in 1970, Endō Shūsaku wrote that to his knowledge Sako Jun'ichirō was the only one who had emphasized the importance of this work. He categorizes it as an "intellectual dialogue in the form of a novel." It is a dialogue between an old man, who is actually an ancient god of Japan, and Organtino, a Portuguese missionary. Endō says that the old man is Japan itself, and I would add that Organtino stands in as a representative of the West.[5] The story begins with Organtino walking alone through a garden at Nanbanji (Portuguese temple), the Christian church in Kyoto. The garden is full of Western plants, and the smell of roses in particular wafts through the air. In the quietness of the garden there is the feel of an "inexplicable charm" that is somehow not quite Japan. Organtino is lost in thought, recollecting the things of home that he misses: European peaches, the central Catholic church in Rome, San Pietro, the Harbor of Lisbon, the sound of a European zither, and a song about the spirit and God. He is described as "red-haired," an old term for a European foreigner. In his homesickness he calls out to God, but this makes him feel even more melancholy. Organtino speaks to himself:

> This country's scenery is beautiful and the climate is warm. I prefer those black-skinned people over these yellow-faced people. However, it's easy to get close to these people. Now there are about 10,000 believers. Even here in Kyoto, the center of this country, there is a nice Catholic church. Although I am not happy, I will probably not be sad. Whenever I get dreamy, I get very depressed. I want to go back

to Lisbon. I want to get out of this country though. Anywhere is fine—China, India, Thailand. However there are other reasons for my depression, besides homesickness.

From the beginning this story abounds with images of race and national culture: Rome's central Catholic church, the harbor of Lisbon, European music, red-haired, black-skinned, yellow-faced. Organtino is clearly an outsider and just being in Japan makes him uncomfortable, not only homesick. We get the feeling that he, the church, the roses of his land with their foreign scent, somehow do not fit here. Any other Asian country would be fine for Organtino. Japan is uniquely inhospitable for him. These passages are rhythmic and poetic. From this soothing atmosphere that only hints of tension we feel a sudden increase in tempo and sense of fear.

Organtino sighs and his eyes land on some cherry blossom (*sakura*) petals fallen on moss. Sakura! He looks between the trees in the dark spaces, sees ferns and a cherry tree with long branches hanging down, sees the petals falling through smoke as in a dream. There is a fallen branch, and as he is about to make the sign of the cross to rid the place of evil spirits, he looks up at the cherry tree itself with an eerie sense of fear. What he sees is more than eerieness. It is Japan itself, making him feel anxious. In another moment, he realizes it was just the usual cherry tree, and making a pained and forced smile, walks on down the path back to where he was before.

He goes to pray at the altar, under a domed ceiling above, and a hanging lamp. On the fresco on the wall, there is the dead body of Moses with the Devil of Hell on one side and on the other the angel Michael, both fighting for his soul. Of course Michael, the angel, was beautiful, but even the Devil was beautiful on this night in the light of the moon. The reason it was beautiful may have been because of the light or the smell of the European plants. Organtino praying at the altar:

Oh, heavenly spirit! Our father who art in heaven! .....I am in this

depression because in the mountains, in the forests, and even where people live, there is a miraculous power that overwhelms me. If it wasn't for this power I would not be in the depths of depression. Japanese are completely trusting these heathen gods and may never pray to you, God, as true believers. Please give me the courage and the strength to continue the struggle for you.

When Organtino gets spooked saying "Sakura!" it is as if he is saying "Japan!" When he goes to the altar, he encounters an image of the struggle between two spirits for the control of a man's soul. We are reminded of Organtino's purpose in Japan. Although we know the outcome of this struggle for Moses's soul, in this light Lucifer is beautiful and we feel as Organtino does, that God's victory is less certain here. The distinction between good and evil becomes less sharp. Some power dwelling in the mountains and the forests (the gods of Japan) are deceiving these people. Similarly Organtino and God are fighting the Japanese gods for the souls of Japanese. Again the tempo picks up; Organtino's pulse begins to race.

He thinks he hears the sound of a chicken, but ignoring it he continues to pray. He prayed to God, saying that this power lurking in Japanese rivers and mountains was not inferior to the power of God, who parted the rivers for Moses. Organtino looks around him when he hears a big commotion, and up on the altar is a rooster crowing loudly, telling him the time. He yells and tries to make the rooster go away, but then he notices that from out of nowhere this central chamber has become filled with a sea of rooster's crests. A powerful light filled the room as from a bonfire, and breathing heavily, he then sees the room fill with the shadows of people. As soon as he looks at them, he sees that they are a non-descript group of men and women. This group of men and women dance and frolic, the roosters crow together loudly and the picture of Saint Michael is sucked out of the room like fog disappearing. He is taken aback by this Bacchanalia of Japan.

The people were wearing ancient Japanese clothing and sitting around in a circle serving each other sake, with light from torches all around. A large Romanesque woman stood on an upside-down barrel, dancing wildly. A strong man stood nearby with a *sakaki* (a sacred tree) tree that he had pulled out of the ground by the roots and the jewels and mirrors were hung on the tree. The roosters were moving about in a lively, happy way. There was a cave with a stone door. The woman dances with vines in her hair, slapping against her chin, and as she dances her large, uncovered breasts rise up. For Organtino she is pure, sexual desire. He was unable to turn away, or move his body, it being controlled by some mysterious force.

Suddenly everyone, including the roosters who were strutting around to demonstrate their superior strength, stop and become quiet and solemn. The beautiful voice of a woman suddenly can be heard. "If I don't come out, the world will be dark. Why do you laugh and have fun?"

This passage is rife with symbolism antithetical to Christian ideals. Whereas in the previous passage the angel Michael (good) and Lucifer (evil) were placed in binary opposition to each other, representing the Western spiritual world, now we see Japan's spiritual world—pure Bacchanalia. The Western spiritual world is a dead and immobile painting, while Japan's is liveliness, bodily pleasure, sex, liquor, and virility—the strutting roosters and the strong man who has ripped a tree out of the ground by its roots and stands near the dancing woman in an almost placid way. He holds this massive phallic object while gazing at the dancer. Organtino wishes to turn away, but the force of life itself, and Japan's sexuality, makes him as immobile as the Western painting. Symbols of state Shinto and the better known gods of antiquity from Japan's most ancient mythical texts are come alive before us—the jewels and the mirror hung on the tree and perhaps sparkling as they rotate on the *sakaki* and Amaterasu herself being seduced from inside the cave. Later we will be asked who will win, Amaterasu of Japan or the God of the

West. Yet among themselves the Japanese gods are not fighting each other and there is no dialectic of good versus evil with its synthesis, Moses, a human capable of one or the other. The Japanese spiritual world appears as pluralistic harmony, multiplicity rather than binarism.

The woman who was dancing before said, looking back at the others (for their consent), "We are happy because there is a god that is even superior to you."

Organtino thought, "Perhaps this god is 'Deus.'" And he looked on with interest. The boulder door rolled to the side and (Amaterasu)'s light poured forth brilliantly. His tongue could not move to yell; his feet would not let him run away. He could only stop and feel dizzy because of the glaring light. He heard a loud, roaring cheer from the large crowd of people rejoicing. They called out "Oohirumemuchi," another name for Amaterasu. They yelled out praises to her: "There is no new god. There is none that compares to you. Look at how the darkness is gone. Your rivers, your oceans, your mountains! If anyone goes against you, they will perish."

Organtino yelled and fell down.

This passage partially inverts the conceptual unity of the God of the Bible as the "one true God." When and why does Organtino lose consciousness? It is just after he and we hear, "If anyone goes against you, they will perish." The same was said of the biblical God. Organtino is literally felled through an encounter with this heretical idea and of course through the powerful light, another familiar image of the biblical God, with Amaterasu, a woman no less, in his place.

Later he regains consciousness and the sound of the gods from before still reverberates in his ears, but when he looks around they are all gone, and the wall painting is there again. Flabbergast, he groans as his senses return. He could not make sense of what had just happened. The only thing he was sure of is that the vision he had just seen was not shown to him by God.

Organtino walked along saying to himself, "It is more difficult than I

thought to fight against these gods. I wonder whether I'll win or lose."

But then in his ear was whispered the words, "You will lose." He looked around but could not tell where the voice had come from.

It was peaceful and quiet and he could smell the scent of roses. The only sound was from pigeons. It was so peaceful, as if the angels on high would be drawn down to earth to search out the daughters of human beings, like the twilight of ancient times.

"Yes, indeed the base, low gods of Japan cannot win against the almighty God. Last night was just a vision, and since these several people have become believers, I am sure that in the future finally there will be churches all across this land." Without him knowing it, an old man wearing jewels around his neck comes up, walking along beside him.

We now return to the world of familiar Western symbolism and to Organtino's original peace—the smell of roses (a frequent symbol of the West in the story), the fresco painting, and doves (a biblical symbol of peace). It is the following evening after Organtino has had a day of successful proselytizing. Several Japanese samurai have been converted, or so he thinks. Shattering this peace, the devilish figure of an old man invades Organtino's world, but he sneaks up on him, disappearing and appearing like a sprightly elf. The image of angels coming down for the daughters of human beings seems like an obscure reference, but the phrase "Twilight of ancient times" appears in different forms three or four times in the story, usually pointing to a pre-Christian multiplicity of gods.

From here begins the main "intellectual dialogue" referred to by Endō above between the old man, a Japanese god living since ancient times, and Organtino. (The old man does not give his name but identifies himself as "one of the spirits of Japan.") Organtino naturally suspects that he is a demon, but the old man assures him that he is not. This misunderstanding demonstrates Organtino's limited consciousness. In his world there is only good and evil, the singular God or demons. His field of

vision is closed and the old man's purpose in speaking to him is to open that field to include the gods of Japan. The old man is like an older brother taking him aside and telling him of the world beyond his borders in order to keep him safe. Near the conclusion of his talk the old man will say, "I am just saying 'be careful,' because we are ancient gods. Like the Greek gods we have seen the dawn of the world." Many passages and images compare the Japanese gods to the ancient Greek gods.

"You came here to spread Christianity, didn't you? That may not be a bad thing, but if God comes to this country, he will surely lose."

"God is the all-powerful Lord, so to God..." Organtino changes his tone of voice to the polite tone he uses towards potential converts. "It is not likely that [you and the other Japanese gods] will win against God."

"In fact, it *is* likely. Listen, your 'Deus' is not the only one to come to Japan. Earlier Confucius, Mencius, and Zhuang-zi came, and besides them, other Chinese philosophers. But this country had just been founded. They brought silk and jewels. They brought writing. But did China conquer us? Look at their characters. Instead of their characters conquering us, we conquered their characters. A poet I knew named Kaki no Moto Hiromaru wrote a poem called Tanabata that [is a Japanese alteration of an originally Chinese poem]. In that poem the huge roaring rivers, like the Yellow River or Yang-zi, divided the two gods, but in Hiromaru's story, it is a gentle Japanese brook that separates them.

Famous people with good calligraphy like Kûkai showed us samples of Chinese writing. We imitated that writing but it came out as Japanese writing.

That is not all. Our breath, like the salty wind, softened even Taoism and Confucianism. With Mencius's books, we, the Japanese gods, became angry [when they came here] turning upside down and sinking the ships that brought the books [kamikaze]. Ask any native here and they'll tell you. Actually, the god, Shinato, did not do that,

but even the fact that Japanese people believe this shows our power, we who live in this country.

The notion that there are "kamikaze" in the air protectively surrounding Japan's shores clearly defines an interior for Japan. Only some outside things are permitted entrance, but even if they make it past the kamikaze, once they arrive in Japan's interior they are subjected to an air, or an atmosphere, that transforms those things into something native. Organtino earlier says that there is something different about the air in Japan. There is a possible double meaning in the word "softened" *(yawaragemashita)*. Things are both softened and Japanized once they arrive in Japan. One wonders if this is one effect of the internalization of the Western Orientalist discourse that views Asia as female. Chinese characters, Taoism, Confucianism, and possibly Christianity are figured as hard, and by extension, masculine. The Tanabata folklore of China imagined a huge river separating the lover gods. They look at each other across this vast, roaring, masculine flow, but in Japan it becomes a trickling, feminine brook.

In this passage Akutagawa gives the first hint about what he meant by "the power of the Japanese gods." To say that the gods are powerful is to say that Japanese believe in them. Later he, through the voice of the old man, will say that the Greek gods died, yet the Japanese gods are still living. The phrase "the Greek gods died" brings to mind the triumph of Christianity over paganism. If the Japanese gods have been living since the "dawn of the world," then Japanese people, a monolithic, harmonious mass have always believed in them. From the opposition of "the" Japanese gods vis-à-vis "the" European God in "Kamigami" and its sense of unified spiritual culture that has existed since antiquity arises an erasure of difference within Japan. From this passage forward one begins to read Akutagawa on a new, different level. Rather than telling us a fairy tell, he is saying something about the persistence of myth in Japan and the consequences of the persistence of myth for Japan's negotiations with "other," outside forces.

Organtino turns to look at the old man with a blank look on his face. He could only understand half of what the old man said.

The old man proceeds. "Next to come after that was Sidhddharta from India." (This was the name of Shakyamuni Buddha's name before he became a priest). The old man picks and smells the roses along the path they are walking in a light-hearted way, but as he picks them they are left behind untouched, and the rose in his hand is only a vague, misty approximation of the original.

"The idea of *honji suijaku* is that Amaterasu is the same as *Dainichi nyōrai* (both gods of the sun). Even if many people do not know Amaterasu but do know Dainichi, most native people do not imagine a black face when they imagine Dainichi's face. They imagine a Japanese face. The people who believed in Shinran and Nichiren saw Shōtoku Taishi's face when they imagined him."

"But today I had several converts."

"Yes, you will probably have many more converts, but there will also be converts to Buddhism. We gods do not destroy things; we remake them."

"But even the Greek gods, the demons of Greece, have such power. Anyway, God will win." Stubbornly he said it once more.

But the J. god continued to speak slowly as if he had not heard what O. said. "But Pan died. We are still living." (Pan was the ancient Greek god of flocks, forests, meadows, and shepherds. He had the horns and feet of a goat. He frolicked about the landscape playing tunes).

Organtino turned and gave him a rare look of surprise. "You know about Pan?"

"Sure, it was in a book with the characters written sideways brought to Japan by the Three Big Names of Kyūshū."[6] Even if we are not the only ones with the power of re-making, you must not be caught off guard. I am just saying be careful, because we are old gods. Like the Greek gods, we have seen the dawn of the world."

The old man next tells how he met Ulysses at night on a boulder and after sitting and talking with him, he became Japanese.[7] "All these things became Japanese. And the West *must* also become Japanese. I am in the trees. I am also in the shallow flows of water. I am in the wind that carries the scent of roses. I am in the twilight that lingers on the wall of temples."

The man disappears and Organtino hears Ave Maria sounding from the steeple bells. (My italics).

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Akutagawa is looking at a 300-year-old folding screen of a Portuguese ship coming into a harbor in Japan. The ship depicted has a flag raised. He starts to say "Padre Organtino of Nanbanji," but stops, saying "No, [this] is not limited to Organtino. [It is anyone who] wears the habits [of the missionary], a long-nosed foreigner..."

"Good-bye Organtino!"

We can't say who will win—Amaterasu or God. In the end our project will decide the winner.

...there will doubtless be a time when the sound of our black ships' cannons will surely destroy your old and familiar dream. (The listener here is explicitly stated as "Organtino and his group.") Until then, good-bye Padre Organtino! Good-bye.

Although it is noted in my Japanese version that Akutagawa himself is speaking in this last section, another possibility is the old man, or the Japanese gods collectively. One senses that ultimately, however, regardless who the speaker is, Akutagawa would be the one standing behind them and speaking through them. All along it has been Akutagawa speaking through the old man. In addition, while Organtino listened we listened with him, but who is the "we"? The "we" is the collective West. This is why Akutagawa writes, "No, [this] is not limited to Organtino. [It is anyone who] wears the habits [of the missionary], a long-nosed foreigner..." The story was written for a Japanese audience, but that audience had to assume the role of a Westerner, a Westerner who sees

Japan from the outside.

Another crucial question that is not easily answered is who is the "our" of "our black ships' cannons"? The black ships hark back to the black ships of Matthew Perry, but these cannot be his ships, nor can they be any of the West's ships. These ships are to destroy the "old and familiar dream" of the West. The reading that the West will destroy itself is not plausible when one thinks about the implications of the old man's narrative. Thus one must know whose dream it is. Ostensibly it is Organtino's—the dream of converting Japan and its inhabitants to Christianity. At one point Organtino dreamed of the day when churches would be seen all across the country. The "old and familiar dream" is the dream that the old man has told us is impossible, and that we must be careful to not try to impose on Japan. Therefore, the "our" of "our black ships' cannons" is Akutagawa and Japan. The message is that when the day comes that Japan has its own black ships and cannons, those cannons will destroy the dreams of Western imperialism. In the Taishô period that day, a day when Japan would become the equal of Western empires, was near at hand.

The Japanese gods, and in particular, the Sun Goddess, would not tolerate that there be any other gods more popular than her. She demands recognition. As the cheers of the other gods go, there are no new gods and none can surpass Amaterasu. Amaterasu is a jealous god just as the God of the West says in the Bible, "I am a jealous god." Akutagawa must have been conscious of the many discursive displacements or inversions of Western religious icons in this dialogue, a dialogue between East and West.

The words "win" and "lose" frequently appear. "We can't say who will win—Amaterasu or God. In the end our project will decide the winner." Throughout the old man's talk Japan is portrayed as a country that subdues (like the word "yarawageru"), refracts, or conquers (in the case of Chinese characters) anything that enters from the outside. In the present of this story Organtino and his religion are being absorbed and subdued, and the old man tells him that the same thing happened to Chinese

religion and philosophy. By Akutagawa's time China (1895), Russia (1904-05), and Korea (1910) had been subdued. One may say that Akutagawa himself had "conquered" Chinese, Russian, French, and English literature. The old man said, "All these things became Japanese. And the West *must* also become Japanese." The key word is "must," not "will." The final one to be subdued is not only the Christian God of the West, but the West itself. Akutagawa, whose essay title *"Bungeiteki na, amari ni bungeiteki na"* was taken from Nietsche, had liked his work and so probably agreed that although the Christian God was dead or dying, the Christian good/evil opposition with its omnipresence in Western society, was not. Akutagawa subtly hints that Japan's next important meeting with an outside nation would be when Japan's own black ships are aimed back on the West. Whether Amaterasu (Japan) or God (the West) wins would be determined by how Japan executed its imperialist project. (Of course, the imperialist project had already been nativized, 'yawaragemashita').

Given the many images of race and nation, then, such as a flag raised on the Portuguese ship, it is difficult not to conclude that Akutagawa is making a statement about Japan's inhospitability to outside elements or influences. There is throughout the story the sense that no exterior thought system or cultural artifact has ever been able to enter Japan unadulterated and *in toto.* As Endō hints at in his 1970 essay, it is not entirely clear whether Akutagawa is affirming or negating this tendency. In any case, one cannot deny that Akutagawa through the old man tells us that this tendency exists, has existed since antiquity, and will continue to exist. "Our project" alludes to Japan's project, which in Akutagawa's time was its imperialist project. Whether Akutagawa agreed with this project cannot be answered conclusively through any analysis of "Kamigami," but it is clear that Akutagawa in this story recognizes the existence of this project, and if readers take seriously the narrative in "Kamigami" of constant Japanization of foreign cultures since antiquity, then this story contributes to what Murai Osamu terms "the imperial nation view of history."[8] Japan is the old man. Like the model Confucian father, he

takes Organtino (the West) aside and benevolently instructs and cautions against danger. He says, "We gods do not destroy things; we remake them."[9] The old man is in the process of remaking Organtino, not destroying him, implying by analogy that Japan is in the process of remaking Asia, not destroying it. The story ends with Organtino returned to the Japanese folding screen; just as the old man cautioned against, Organtino has been literally transformed into the material of Japan, which is at once the material of the folding screen and the material of an essentialized Japan. Murai explains that in the Taishô period there was a yearning for archaism and that in this period Akutagawa and other prominent authors wrote many stories for the first time that used the myths of works such as the Kojiki and Nihon shoki as subject matter for fiction. Murai argues that this desire to view Japan as timeless and capable of maintaining its identity despite outside attempts to invade or conquer it was linked with the dominant imperialistic ideology that had to erase the violence that Japan was committing outside Japan. In the old man's narrative of Japanese history and in the final allusion to the black ships of Matthew Perry, the view is always inward-looking, from the outside, never outward looking to Asia or the West. The outside impurities, variability, and violence (Organtino is a symbol of an imperialist West) *comes to* Japan, but through the mysterious force of the Japanese gods, who have always existed because all people of Japan have always believed in them, are transformed, subdued, and purified into the native essence.

To return to Murai's thesis, he argues that a key feature of Japan's imperialistic, assimilationist ideology was what he calls discourses of the "vanishing," that the project of assimilating [and I would say 'subduing'] foreign races such as Koreans and domestically diverse ethnic groups such as the Ainu or Okinawans required the erasure of differences of class or ethnic conflict. Yanagita Kunio in Tōnō Monogatari (1910) and Yama no jinsei (1925) created the myth of the "mountain people" *(sanjin)*, who supposedly had been gradually pushed out of the flatlands and into the

mountains by the Yamato race long ago and through the ages had intermarried with native Japanese until their culture had been absorbed into Japan's and they vanished. Origuchi Shinobu in Kodai kenkyū (1930) creates the myth of the *"kataribe,"* a people (the Ainu) who have transmitted oral traditions from antiquity without the aid of writing. He embarked on a crusade to save these vanishing specimens of pre-assimilation non-Japanese. Murai emphasizes that behind all this was the idea that Japan all along through its long history had been assimilating foreign cultures, setting a precedent for Japan's colonization of Korea and more generally Asia. He says that, ignoring the history of *tanka* as an elite cultural practice, the writing of tanka was popularized at this time to the extent that people of all classes in Japan, from the emperor down to the common people wrote tanka. The imperial household sponsored annual tanka writing contests and the writing of tanka became "misrecognized" as an ancient tradition of the "nation's common people" (the *"kokumin"*). The direction of my reading of "Kamigami" above leads to the realization that one can easily imagine a similar operation in this work. Akutagawa figures Japan's spirit world as multiplicity in contrast to the singularity of the Christian God of the West, but in "Kamigami" this multiplicity is absolutely happy and harmonious. The gods sit in a circle serving each other sake, cooperating to bring Amaterasu back into the fold. Assimilation happens symbolically with consistently positive results. The old man enjoys the smell of the roses that he picks while walking through the garden full of European plants with Organtino. The roses are transformed visually to a misty rose-like image in his hands, just a dim reminder of the original, however, so he enjoys the smell of the rose only after making it his own. Akutagawa portrays these gods as the gods of the *"kokumin"* or the Nation as a whole, not the exclusive spirit world of the aristocratic class.

Conclusion

To return to the significance of "Kamigami" for understanding

Akutagawa, there *is* a sense of contentment in this work as Yoshimoto described, even when Akutagawa the author himself speaks in the last section. The discussion above should help locate where this contentment originates. Yoshimoto tells us that Akutagawa wanted to return to his Shitamachi, or petit-bourgeois origins in his work, to return to writing about these origins, as he did in his first three unsuccessful works. Borrowing Yoshimoto's insight, I would suggest that Akutagawa's urge to write "Kamigami" stemmed from an urge to resolve an inner conflict he had between a bourgeois "habitus" and a petit-bourgeois "habitus."

The term "habitus" as used in the sociological research of Pierre Bourdieu refers to the lifelong, durable dispositions that members of particular social groups acquire through experiences in everyday life. The habitus of an individual includes the sensibilities and taste common to other members of their particular social group, i.e., class, gender, and race. Dispositions, sensibilities, and tastes common to a group are reproduced from generation to generation.[10]

At certain times in his life, Akutagawa had absolute, almost religious faith in his artistic talent. Yet he recognized Shiga Naoya as a superior artist. In reading his more autobiographical works and his letters one quickly surmises that this is someone with an inferiority complex. As mentioned above, Yoshimoto convincingly argues that one cannot explain Akutagawa's suicide through a focus on his intelligence. He explains that Akutagawa was not jealous of Shiga Naoya because of Shiga's intelligence, but had an inferiority complex toward Shiga because Shiga was comfortable in high-class society and logical thinking was natural to him. One usually thinks of "logical thinking" as one element of intelligence, and not as the exclusive domain of any particular social class, so this sounds like a contradiction in Yoshimoto's argument. Setting that aside, however, Akutagawa in high-class society may have been missing what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "a feel for the game." Less than Cartesian logic, the key to success in an artistic field is sometimes a feel for what is appropriate in a particular situation. If Shiga was born into a higher economic class

than Akutagawa, then Shiga would have had social experiences that Akutagawa did not. Simply put, what Bourdieu terms a person's "habitus" is a set of dispositions that generate practices or regulate behavior which are instilled or 'embodied' in a person through experiences. ("Habitus" has the same word root as "habit"). It is how one talks, walks, eats, and even thinks. If Shiga's habitus was formed within high-class society, then his habitus was well-tuned for or matched that environment to a greater extent than Akutagawa's habitus. This would make interacting within that society or writing about it much easier. Akutagawa's habitus was certainly not lower class, nor was it upper class. His mother's father had been a high ranking samurai, but on the other side of his family, his father was thoroughly of Shitamachi merchant origins. Although he was raised in his mother's family by her sister, this family had already fallen financially so much that he/they lived in a shitamachi area. His class habitus was neither completely bourgeois nor petit bourgeois, but probably had elements of both.

Another way to describe this conflict is a conflict between "multiple subjectivities." Akutagawa was incapable of abandoning his bourgeois subjectivity (i.e., habitus) in favor of his petit bourgeois subjectivity. Contrary to Yoshimoto, I do not view him as fundamentally and originally petit bourgeois. One cannot ignore the effect of the social status background of his mother's family. In any event, since his inner class conflict was irresolvable, in "Kamigami" he turned to another inner conflict that *could* be resolved—the conflict between the West and Japan—or so I have argued. Through this short story Akutagawa puts into play a personal strategy of coping by replacing personal multiple subjectivity with national multiple subjectivity. In the internal conflicts that arise due to personal multiple subjectivity (i.e., more than one habitus) there are at least two problems that are overcome through a shift to national multiple subjectivity. One problem is that of eternally being cast as inferior and believing in that role—the inferiority complex. Unlike the Akutagawa who has an inferiority complex toward Shiga Naoya, Japan can triumph

over the West, or "reach the top" so to speak. Akutagawa becomes Japan. Doing so ends the feelings of inferiority.

The other problem is the lack of internal, psychological harmony. Unlike his personal, internal consciousness split between bourgeois and petit-bourgeois, on the level of the nation there is the possibility for a harmonious multiplicity. Japan can be Western, Chinese, and Indian all at once, without losing its identity as Japanese. All these cultures and religious thought systems have been absorbed by Japan. The old man instructs Organtino that when foreign things enter the air/breath/salty wind of Japan they become Japanese. This is a multiplicity encircled by harmonizing unity. In "Kamigami" Akutagawa returns to a Japan of harmonious multiplicity similar to the "Nihon kaiki" (return to Japan) that Tanizaki and other authors pursued.

He was keenly aware that he could not return to the home of his family: "Then I remembered my foster parents' home in the suburbs. Of course, they must be waiting for me to return. Probably my children too—but when I returned—I couldn't help fearing there would be some force there to restrain me, naturally."[11] When he returns to Japan there is no restraint, except possibly his sense of morality, which tells him that his returning is a lie:

> I began to think of the long piece I'd been planning. It was a long piece in which common people from the Suiko Era to the Meiji Era would be used as heroes... Some sparks leapt up, and I remembered the bronze statue in front of the Imperial Palace. The statue was in armor and helmet, ... But its enemy was --
>
> "A lie!"[12]

The "terrifying charm" of art proved to be far more seductive than morality and in the end pacified "the passion for action" of this hungry ghost.[13]

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[1] Yoshimoto Takaaki, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no shi," Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (Shinseiban, 1975).

2 Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 82.

3 Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 86.

4 An excellent translation of "The Faint Smiles of the Gods" appears in Seiji M. Lippit, ed., The Essential Akutagawa (New York: Marsilio, 1999) 115-28. But this paper uses my own rough translation.

5 Endō Shūsaku "Kamigami no bisho no imi," Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (Shinseiban, 1975) 108-9.

6 Three men who went to see the Roman Pope in 1582 and came back to Japan in 1590.

7 The story was changed substantially and was given a new title, "Yuri waka densetsu."

8 I borrow this phrase from Murai Osamu in his paper presented at Columbia University in April 1997, entitled "New National Learning, Folklore Studies, and Orality," p. 16.

9 The fact that Akutagawa himself is the only one who talks of destruction with his "I'm going to ruin your dreams" *(kimira no yume wo yaburu)* in the last passage where he speaks directly to the West could be considered a strategy of distancing himself from Japan's mythic discourse of nativizing the outside. Akutagawa or his narrator, whoever is speaking, is often detached from the narrative he posits, and it sometimes seems that he is looking down upon the world from the position of a god.

10 For more on "habitus," see Pierre Bourdieu, Language and symbolic power, John B. Thompson, ed. (Polity Press, 1992).

11 Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Cogwheels (Eridanos Press, 1987) 72.

12 Cogwheels 61. The Suika Era was 604 to 628, named after Empress Suiko (554-628).

13 Quote taken from Gregory Golley, "Tanizaki Junichirô: The Art of Subversion and the Subversion of Art" in Journal of Japanese Studies Vol. 21, No. 2 (Summer 1995) 365.