

# *Kappa* as a Dystopia:

## A Study of Akutagawas Anti-utopian Thought

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*Kappa* (1927), also known as *Gulliver in A Kimono*,<sup>1</sup> by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927) is one of the longest works of the author who had contributed altogether one hundred and forty-nine stories and tales in his short span of life, and perhaps one of his most extraordinary in terms of the puzzles and interests it renders to critics and readers both at home and abroad. *Kappa* is also one of the author's masterpieces that are frequently and widely translated into foreign languages, and in some languages, more than one translation is available.<sup>2</sup> The way this novelette appeals to translators does not seem to work on literary critics that well. At least, we do not hitherto find a serious article devoted solely to *Kappa* in English, while there are three full-length English translations of the novelette.<sup>3</sup> The present article may meet this need.

The first publication of *Kappa* in the March 1927 issue of the magazine *Kaizō* gave its author's contemporaries as much bewilderment as the news of his suicide did a few months later. Many critics were stunned by the apparent incongruity between the relatively lighthearted fairy tales elements and the implicit bitterness in the novelette. Some critics simply disregarded the bitter elements and related *Kappa* to Akutagawa's famous children's stories. Other critics, on the other hand, ignored the fairy tale elements altogether and read it

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1 In Shiojiri Seiichi's 1947 English translation of *Kappa*, „Gulliver in A Kimono“ is put as the subtitle of the novelette (Ōsaka: Akita-ya 1947).

2 Amano Keitarō has compiled a comprehensive bibliography of Akutagawa's fictional works in Western translations. See his „Akutagawa Ryūnosuke sakuhin gaikokugo yakushoshi“ [Bibliography of works by Akutagawa in foreign languages], in YOSHIDA Seiichi, TAKEDA Katsuhiko and TSURUTA Kinya (eds.): *Akutagawa bungaku: kaigai no hyōka* [Literary works of Akutagawa: overseas criticism and evaluation] (Tōkyō: Waseda Univ. Press 1972), pp.3-42; subsequently cited as ABKNH.

3 The three translations in chronological order are: SHIOJIRI Seiichi, tr., *Kappa: Gulliver in a Kimono* (Ōsaka: Akita-ya 1947). This work was twice revised and published by the Hokusei-do Press in Kyōto in 1949 and 1952; KOJIMA Takashi and John McVITTE trs., *Exotic Japanese stories*, introd. John McVitte (New York: Liverighl 1961), pp.209–65; Geoffrey BOWNAS tr., *Kappa*, introd. G.H. Healey (London: Peter Owen 1970). Bownas' translation was then published by Charles E. Tuttle Company, Inc. of Rutland, Vermont and Tōkyō in 1971 and is now in its ninth reprint. See TAKEDA Katsuhiko: „Ō-Bei no Akutagawa kenkyū to honyaku“ [Studies and translations of Akutagawa [and his works] in Europe and America], in: ABKNH, pp.293–314 for a discussion of the three translations; see note 30 below.

as a sweeping criticism of Japanese society or even as a work written from the socialist perspective. Yoshida Taiji alleged, however, that *Kappa* was not intended to be a social satire but „a distillation of the author's feeling of revulsion from the whole of human life“. <sup>4</sup> This insightful remark was endorsed by Akutagawa himself who further explained in a letter to Yoshida that „*Kappa* was born out of my degout with respect to everything, especially myself. All the other criticism of *Kappa* has elaborated on the lighthearted wit' and so on, as if deliberately to make me the more miserable.“ <sup>5</sup> *Kappa* is, therefore, „a mixed bag of public themes and private fantasies which affords many levels of meaning“. <sup>6</sup>

When the novelette was first translated into English by Shiojiri Seiichi and published in June 1947, a review entitled „Gulliver in a Kimono“ appeared in the August 25<sup>th</sup> issue of *Time* in the same year. The reviewer, perhaps being overwhelmed by the presence of Western literary techniques and the acute satire in the novelette, claimed that „to American readers, Ryûnosuke Akutagawa's satire seemed almost too good to have been written by a Japanese“. <sup>7</sup> His background of European utopian literature made him aware that many features in *Kappa* could have been inspired by works of Jonathan Swift, Clarence Day, and Samuel Butler. This review at once affiliated *Kappa* with the Western utopian tradition of fiction.

The arguments in this review were supported by Beongcheon Yu, Yamanouchi Hisaaki and Ishii Koroichi. Yu argued that France's *Penguin Island*, Butler's *Erewhon* and Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* might have been sources of Akutagawa's *Kappa*. <sup>8</sup> Yamanouchi argued along the same line and added Morris' *News from Nowhere* to Yu's list <sup>9</sup> whereas Ishii attributed special merits to Butler's *Erewhon*. <sup>10</sup> In the preface to Shiojiri's English translation of the novelette, however, Tsuneto Kyô, a close friend of Akutagawa, warned that although Kappaland was an imaginary country, it was not a community of utopian

4 For a summary of the immediate reception of *Kappa* and Yoshida's quotation, see G.H. Healey's „introduction“ to *Kappa*, tr. by Bownas, p.40; also NAKAMURA Shin'ichirô, (ed.), *Akutagawa Ryûnosuke armai* [Introduction to Akutagawa Ryûnosuke] (Tôkyô: Iwanami 1955), pp.97–101.

5 Quoted in Donald KEENE, *Dawn to the West, Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1984), pp.508–1.

6 TSURUTA Kinya, rev. of *Kappa*, by Akutagawa Ryûnosuke, tr. Geoffrey Bownas, *Monumenta Nipponica*, XXVII: 113 (1972).

7 „Gulliver in a Kimono“, rev. of *Kappa*, by Akutagawa Ryûnosuke, tr. Shiojiri Seiichi, *Time*, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, p.32.

8 Beongcheon YU: *Akutagawa: An Introduction* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press 1972), p.88.

9 YAMANOUCI Hisaaki: *The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1978), p.99.

10 ISHII Koroichi: „Akutagawa no ‚Kappa‘ ni miru Samyuelu Butola“ [Samuel Butler seen in Akutagawa's *Kappa*], in his *Shôsetsu no hikaku bungaku-teki shiten* [The Perspectives of Comparative Literature in Fiction] (Kyôto: Yamaguchi 1982), pp.173–82.

romance."<sup>11</sup> Indeed, despite the fact that an intimate relation can be identified between *Kappa* and some Western utopian fiction, not a single critic, to the best of my knowledge, has ever argued that Kappaland is a utopia as the term is used to mean an ideal commonwealth as exemplified by Thomas More's *Utopia*. The main reason is that Kappaland is not portrayed as an ideal place, but a nightmarish society. As a critic remarks, „Kappaland is obvious no Utopia, it has theft, unemployment, exploitation, war, censorship and suicide. Most of the inhabitants are not happy kappas.“<sup>12</sup> Critics, however, stop right here in the investigation of the relationship between *Kappa* and utopian literature. They fail to place *Kappa* in the context of other utopian sub-genres. My task here is to examine the novelette as a literary expression of Akutagawa's vision of a malevolent society, or a dystopia.<sup>13</sup> This approach allows us to blend together the critical standpoints of Yoshida, Yu, Yamanouchi, Ishii and Tsuneto, and the remarks on *Kappa* made by Akutagawa himself. Perhaps, it would ultimately lead us to a solid basis upon which we could build our valid interpretations and fair evaluation of the novelette.

Although utopists agree that the human being is tractable (otherwise utopias will not be possible), they consider that the human being is „weak and must be constantly supervised“.<sup>14</sup> In order that a utopia can be built and maintained as such, the inhabitants „must be overwhelmed with punishment in order to act decently, or alternatively, must be watched, so carefully and constantly observed, that no individual can find the social space to violate regulations.“<sup>15</sup> The ideal is therefore that „man has no nature, whose character is inscribed wholly by his environment“.<sup>16</sup>

Such utopian belief in human nature is one reason to explain the birth of anti-utopianism. When a utopist claims that heavy punishments and strict controls introduced in his utopia are merely for good ends, the social condition resulted may make an intended utopia appear nightmarish to its intended inhabitants. Moreover, given that human nature is depraved, is it really possible to totally curb all evil sides of human nature so that a genuine utopia can be established and then protected from corruption? In Akutagawa's conviction, a genuine uto-

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11 TSUNETO Kyô, „Preface“ to *Kappa*, tr., Shiojiri (Kyôto: The Hokuseido Press 1949), p.3.

12 TSURUTA, p.113.

13 I would like to clarify the utopian terms that I am using in this article. „Utopia“ is used as a collective or neutral term to include utopist makes or intends to make his readers believe to be better than the existing society, whereas „dystopia“ refers to a utopia which the utopist makes or intends to make his readers believe worse than the existing society. „Utopist“ means the author of a utopia. „Anti-utopian“ is the term to describe any negative reactions to utopian thinking.

14 Lyman Tower SARGENT „Themes in utopian fiction in English before Wells“, *Science Fiction Studies*, 3:276(1976).

15 Gorman BEAUCHAMP, „Utopia and its discontents“, *Midwest Quarterly*, 16:167 (1975).

16 Lyman TOWER SARGENT „A note on the other side of human nature in the utopian novel“, *Political Theory*, 3:94 (1975).

pia is impossible, for human nature is fundamentally incompatible with any utopian order and will therefore thwart any efforts for utopian ends.

He once asserted that „unless human nature changes, a perfect eutopia is not possible“.<sup>17</sup> Such conviction is well demonstrated in *Kappa* in which Akutagawa attributed nearly all miseries in life to the faults of human nature.

*Kappa* is narrated by a mental patient who claims that he has visited the land of kappas.<sup>18</sup> The patient recounts how he got lost in a mountain and encountered a kappa which led him to Kappaland, where he underwent a number of extraordinary experiences; and then how he got back to human world after tiring of life in Kappaland, but was then disillusioned by the human society to which he returned. The patient finally decided to settle in Kappaland, and was prevented from doing so, because he was caught on his way to there and kept in a mental hospital thereafter. The plot of the story, therefore, highly resembles a typical utopia.

Uemichi Isao, among others, has argued that there had been no „utopias“ in Japanese literature before Western culture was introduced to Japan and only various forms of paradise could be found. He explained that „there was no clear distinction between paradise and utopia“ in ancient Japan and therefore resorted to labelling the examples of Japanese paradise „utopian paradise“.<sup>19</sup> Even though we are willing to skip the legitimate question, what differentiates a paradise from a utopian paradise, Uemichi's apology may appear somehow frivolous and superfluous for a scholar well versed in utopian studies in the West, for what Uemichi called „paradise“ or „utopian paradise“ could easily fit into the category of what Lewis Mumford called „utopia of escape“.<sup>20</sup> Uemichi's discussion of Japanese paradises, however, throws some light on the sources of *Kappa*. Uemichi mentioned and compared two „utopian paradises“, namely, a Japanese folktale, „The Story of Urashima Tarô, The Fisher Lad“ and a Chinese tale, „The Story of Peach Blossom Spring.“ Briefly, both stories narrate how a fisherman discovers an access to a utopian world and later returns to the human world after a sojourn there. Among the similarities of the two stories upon which Uemichi has not put much emphasis, the episodes of the discovery of the utopian worlds in these works are of particular significance for our analysis of

17 See ARIMA Tatsuo: *The Failure of Freedom: a Portrait of Modern Japanese Intellectuals* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press 1969), pp. 157–8.

18 Kappa, which literally means river-child, is a legendary animal in Japan. The narrator describes this animal in pp. 57–9. It is, in short, an amphibian creature of almost three feet in height and around twenty to thirty pounds in weight. Its skin is chameleon-like and will change color to match that of the environment. There are many other contradictory opinions of kappa in other Japanese sources, see, for example, „The kappa in Japanese folklore,“ in: SHIOJIRI, tr., *Kappa*, rev. ed. (Tôkyô: Hokuseido Press 1951), pp. 12–21.

19 UEMICHI Isao: „Paradise in Japanese literature“, *Proceedings of the Fourth International Symposium on Asian Studies*, 1982, (Hong Kong: Asian Research Service 1982), p. 358. See also NUITA Seiji, „Traditional utopias in Japan and the West: a study in contrasts“, in David PLATHS, ed., *Aware of Utopia* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press 1971), pp. 12–32.

20 Lewis MUMFORD: *The Story of Utopias* (New York: The Viking Press 1966), pp. 15–23.

*Kappa*. Both the discovery episodes involve a fisherman character, a water motif, and a journey motif, and the discovery is incidental rather than intentional. In *Kappa*, all these elements are found. The episode in the Chinese story is especially analogous to the same episode in *Kappa*. In the Chinese story, a fisherman one day rows his boat aimlessly along a river. Without knowing how far he has gone, he suddenly comes across a peach orchard. At the other end of the orchard, he sees a mountain cave and the spring of the river. He enters the cave and after passing through a long tunnel comes to the earthly paradise.<sup>21</sup> The protagonist „I“ in *Kappa* sets out on a journey to Mount Hotaka and follows the only route to the mountain along the River Azusa. Since there is a thick mist, the man soon loses his way and decides to pick his way back to the bank of the river. On reaching the river, he notices a kappa, Bag, the fisherman, which leads him to a bush of bamboo-grass where he falls into a deep hole and finds himself in the kappas' world on coming back to consciousness. Thus, these two episodes have in common the following elements: the character of fisherman as either the discoverer of or the guide to the utopian world, the river as an indirect guide to the utopian world whose entrance is hidden by certain plants, a tunnel leading to the utopia as well as the accidental nature of the discovery. Since „The Story of the Peach Blossom Spring“ is well known in Japan and is, furthermore, the origin of the term for „utopia“ in Japanese, namely, *tôgenkyô* („The realm of the Peach Blossom Spring“), it should be added to the list of the sources of inspiration of Akutagawa.<sup>22</sup> This hypothesis is strongly supported by the fact that Akutagawa was not only an avid reader of Chinese literature, but also had made use of Chinese materials in writing his stories.<sup>23</sup>

Among the various Western influences, the influence of Swift is especially prominent and important. Yu has sorted out a list of four items which he called „Swifteen twist“ in *Kappa*, but Yu's observation leaves much to be desired. The first item that in love-making in Kappaland, as in „Yahooland, the female pursues the male, not vice versa“ is perhaps not very accurate.<sup>24</sup> First, the place where the Yahoos live is ruled by the wise horses, Houyhnhnms; even Swift himself calls it „the Country of the Houyhnhnms“. It is, therefore, quite misleading to call that place Yahooland. Secondly, although Gulliver does experi-

21 For a discussion of this Chinese story as utopia, see my „Utopianism: a unique theme in Western literature – a short survey on Chinese utopianism“, *Tamkang Review*, vol. XIII, no. 1:93–5 (Fall 1982).

22 According to UEMICHI, *tôgenkyô* 桃源郷 is the traditional term for paradise. In modern usage, it has been replaced by the transliteration of paradise, *paradaisu*, p.358.

23 See TSURUTA Kinya: „Akutagawa Ryônosuke: His Concepts of Life and Art“, Diss. Univ. of Washington, 1967, p.27.

24 YU, p.88. The other three are the kappas' use of donkeys brain powder in printing, a reminiscence of some of the experiments as the Academy of Lagado; the eliminating of unemployment by eating the jobless as food, an echo to „A modest proposal;“ and the narrators loathing human odor, a parallel to Gulliver's reaction after he has returned to the human world.

ence a sexual attack from a female Yahoo, and Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master has observed that a female Yahoo often hides herself at some place and tries to attract a male Yahoo passing by, there is not enough evidence to assert that „the female pursues the male, not vice versa“.<sup>25</sup> Even in Kappaland, it is not always the females who takes the initiative (details to follow).

The reversed role in love-making in Kappaland arouses the interest of Yamanouchi as well. He proposes that „Shaw's ideas are also echoed in the practice of courting which lets the females take the initiative“.<sup>26</sup> Since Yamanouchi mentions Shaw in the context of the idea of superman, presumably he is referring to Man and Superman. The problem consists in the fact that the play does not advocate the idea of letting the female take the initiative in courtship. Ann Whitefield, the females protagonist, does take the initiative in courting her guardian John Tanner and does it very persistently, but that does not prove anything. Thus, neither Yu nor Yamanouchi has given proof to his assumptions. Suffice it to say that although the two critics might be right, we would also suggest that this particular idea of courtship was perhaps inspired by an episode in the Chinese novel *Hsi-you Chi* (Journey to The West). In that episode, the protagonists come to Nu-erh Kuo (Country of Women), a country in which women are the only inhabitants. Women have to do all kinds of men's jobs, including courting any male travelers passing by. This suggestion is not at all a wild guess, for *Journey to the West* was Akutagawa's favourite novel when he was a school boy.<sup>27</sup> The Japanese satirical utopia, *Nyôgo no shima* (Island of Woman) in *The Elegant Tale of Shidôken* by Hiraga Gennai (1728–1779) is, of course, another possible source of this theme. Retaining any men landing on the island and forcing them to become „studs“ in the Country of Women resembles Akutagawa's description of the aggressive female kappas' „love assaults“ on the poor male kappas.

Other possible influences from Swift that are omitted by Yu are as follow: the protagonists feeling of abhorrence at human appearance after he returned to the human world, his unconscious dropping back to „Kappanese“, and his preference of kappa's company to that of human's. All these themes can be identified in *Gulliver's Travels* if we exchange „kappa“ with „horse“.

Raymond Williams contends that the salient differentiation between utopian or dystopian fiction and science fiction consists in the connection between the imaginary and the actual worlds. What marks the utopian and dystopian fiction is really the continuity, the implied connection between the imaginary world described in the fiction and the actual society to which the author belongs, whereas science fiction often projects new heavens and new hells based upon a certain fantasy out of the genres need to recast the physical reality.<sup>28</sup> *Kappa* as

25 See Jonathan SWIFT: *Gulliver's Travels*, (London & Glasgow: Collins 1953), pp.283, 285–86.

26 YAMANOUCHI, p.99.

27 TSURUTA, 1967, p.27.

28 Raymond WILLIAMS, „Utopia and science fiction“, *Science Fiction Studies*, 5:203–14 (1978).

belonging to the utopian genre is first established by the mirror-image relationship between Kappaland and Japan.<sup>29</sup> The narrator's first impression of Kappaland is this:

The most puzzling of all was the confusing Kappa way of getting everything upside down: where we humans take a thing seriously, the Kappa will tend to be amused; and similarly, what we humans find amusing the Kappa will take in deadly earnest, (p. 60<sup>30</sup>)

Actually, we find various references to Japan in the setting, in the kappas' customs, and in their certain ways of thinking. Important is that this reversed image still reflects the reality. Like the student kappa, Lap, Akutagawa seemed to attempt to look at the world in an upside down manner in writing *Kappa* so as to find a more encouraging view. Judging from the fact that he committed suicide just a few months after finishing this novelette, this experiment was obviously a failure. Lap's confession after his trial perhaps also sums up Akutagawa's own experience: „Everything seemed so terribly gloomy that I thought I'd have a go at looking at the world the other way up. But it turns out to be just the same, after all“ (p. 100).

The most important subject that Akutagawa picked to turn upside down is „woman“. In the process he developed the theme of *femme fatale* and a philosophy of misogyny, which together ultimately become a dominant dystopian motif in the novelette. In Japan, at least until Akutagawa's time, women were nearly entirely submissive to men; in Kappaland, however, female kappas have already begun to get the upper hand. It is noteworthy that the female kappas are not made evil by an evil social system, but are just born to be *femmes fatales*.

According to the genesis myth of the most popular religion, namely, Viverism, the omnipotent deity „Tree of Life“ creates the female of the kappa species first, which finds existence tedious and monotonous. The deity takes pity on her and creates the male kappa out of her brain. Judging from Bag's unborn baby's reluctance to be born due to the fact that existence is evil, the female kappa is already a *femme fatale* in the genesis of the species, for it is she who urges the „Tree of Life“ to create the male species. This is of course an ingen-

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29 See Ishii's comparison of the mirror-image relationship between Erewhon and England (Europe), and Kappaland with Japan, pp. 176–8.

30 All page references refer to the English translation by Bownas. My choice is based upon two studies of the English translations of the novelette. Takeda reported an experiment he conducted. In the experiment, the three English translations were given to two professors in Japanese literature, one writer, two graduate students specialized in Japanese literature, and eight undergraduate students. The subjects were asked to read as much as possible, the minimum being three chapters of each version. Takeda found that Bownas' translation was the easiest to read, p. 301. Tsuruta Kinya quoted Anthony Sweet's comparison of Shiojiri's and Bownas' translations that he was not satisfied with Shiojiri's translation, but found Bownas' excellent. See TSURUTA, „Akutagawa bungaku no hyōka-eigogen no baai“ [Evaluation of Akutagawa in the English speaking world], in: *ABKNH*, p. 235; also Tsuruta's own review of Bownas' translation rates this translation higher than the other two, even though there is a problem of some inaccurate renderings, p. 112.

ious twist of the *femme fatale* theme in the *Book of Genesis*. While Eve is made of Adam's ribs, which symbolize heart and hence emotion, feeling, and sentiment, the male kappa is made of the female's brain which symbolizes rationality, intelligence, and reason. No matter that woman is made of man's ribs, or man made of woman's brain, the implication is the same: male is largely rational while female is basically emotional. Moreover, while Eve is made of only a pair of Adam's ribs, implying that Adam is still capable of emotional life; the female kappa's entire brain is taken away, implying that she is devoid of the ability to think or act rationally. This genesis myth helps explain the irrational behavior of the female kappas recorded in other parts of the novelette.

Since it is the female kappa who in the first place wants to get a male kappa as a companion, it is just logical to find that in the country of kappas the female takes the initiative in love-making. She practically makes a mad dash at the male of her choice, nearly always just after she sets eyes on him. For the male kappa, union with a female is not necessarily agreeable, and ordinarily, he would take every measure to avoid it. Once he is chosen by a female as a target, however, the luckless male has only two choices. Either he is caught and begins a miserable marriage life with the female, or he escapes but only to be „obliged to take to his bed for a rest cure that could take as long as two or three months“ (p. 70).

The male kappa does on rare occasions take the initiative and start chasing the female. It is, however, always after his lust has first been aroused by the female kappa, and the result of this kind of romantic quest is often tragic. In the two incidents reported, one poor male kappa is entirely disillusioned by love, the other even gets killed. The vivid description of the two female kappas involved gives us an abhorrent impression of the ugly phases of female coquettishness, wantonness, and fickleness:

She was a crafty little bitch, she was; for, while making it appear, to all intents and purposes, as if she was fleeing for dear life, she would quite deliberately stop in her tracks from time to time, or try crawling along on all fours. After a good deal of this sort of play, she allowed herself to be caught. The timing and the acting were quite perfect – for though the act of capture was comparatively easy, she made it seem as if it was utter exhaustion that had made her give herself up.

... she was in full flight - a flight that had all the seductive and alluring elements that a she-kappa can express in her actions and movements... [suddenly comes a well-built he-kappa. She immediately asks for help, saying that the he-kappa chasing her is going to kill her. The strong he-kappa hits and kills the other].

But the she-kappa showed not the slightest concern. By now, she had her arms locked fast round the neck of the big kappa; the lewd grin on her face gave some hint of the pleasure she was getting from it (pp. 71–73).

The description somehow also reveals to us the authors' misogynic psychology. While single female kappas are *femmes fatales* enough, married ones are more liable to engender harm greater and in a larger scale to their male species. One salient example is the capitalist Gael's wife Madame Gael. She is the



„boss“ of Gael who is responsible for all sorts of social problems and their human solutions (details to follow). Another one is the wife of the otter's friend. She is a real *femme fatale*, for it is she who causes the war between the kappas and otters. (Apparently, the otters are another kind of civilized humanoid animals living in the neighborhood of the kappas), in which 139,500 kappas and more than that number of otters died. Tempted by a life insurance policy, the kappas wife plans to poison her husband. The scheme is carried out when an otter, which is an important figure in the Country of Otters, visits her husband. By mistake, the otter drinks the poison and dies and that „murder“ causes the war. This episode can be merely a satire on human folly in the sense that he is too ready to go to war, an echo of the assassination that started the First World War.<sup>31</sup> The mutual suspicion between the country of Kappas and the Country of Otters prevents their leaders from judging the real nature of the murder case. As the philosopher Mag asserts, suspicion is one of the three human instincts that gave birth to all offences three thousand years ago (p.102). This reflection together with the fact that the root of the entire problem is a woman's avarice implies that the origin of human problems goes all the way back to human nature itself.

Akutagawa's treatment of the theme of *femme fatale* tempts us to draw an analogy with the theme of anti-feminism in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*<sup>32</sup>. In each important place that Gulliver has visited, namely, Lilliput, Brobdingnag, Balnibarbi (to which Laputa belongs), and the Country of Houyhnhnms, Gulliver constantly finds fault with the female species there. The Lilliputian King's mistresses are disgracefully called „cushions“.<sup>33</sup> The female body is magnified enormously and then harshly and critically examined in Brobdingnag. The nurse's „monstrous breast“, for example, is so offensive that Gulliver finds „no object ever disgusted me so much as this sight... [and] nothing could appear more nauseous [than her nipple]“.<sup>34</sup> Even the smooth and tender skins of woman appear coarse and uneven „with a Mole here and there as broad as a Trench, and Hairs hanging from it thicker than pack-threads“ when magnified to such degree.<sup>35</sup> Amazingly, the supposingly coarser skins of men escape his attention. Again, while the female body odor offends his olfactory faculty,<sup>36</sup> the male

31 Tsukagoe Kazuo pointed out that the war between the kappas and otters was a satire on the First World War, of which the cause was the assassination of the Austrian prince. See *Kappa*, ed. Bungaku hihyô no kai [Association of Literary Criticism], *Hihyô to kenkyû: Akutagawa Ryûnosuke* [Criticism and studies of Akutagawa Ryûnosuke] (Tôkyô: Haga shoten 1972), p.307.

32 See the discussion of Swift's theme of anti-feminism in Edwin J. BLESCH Jr.: „A species hardly a degree above a monkey“: Jonathan Swift's concept of woman“, *Nassau Review*, 3:76–7 (1977).

33 SWIFT, p.54.

34 Ibid., p.183.

35 Ibid., p.135.

36 Ibid., p.134.

body odor seems to produce no effect on him. In the land of Balnibarbi, Gulliver's focus shifts from the physical appearance to the nature of the female. Women there are so lewd and capricious that even the wife of the prime minister leaves her husband, the richest subject in the kingdom, and her several children to live with an old deformed footman who beats her every day.<sup>37</sup> Gulliver adds that „the caprices of womankind are not limited by any Climate or Nation“.<sup>38</sup> The female Yahoo in the land of Houyhnhnms is even more disgusting: she still engages in sexual intercourse when pregnant; she fights not only with other females but with males; she seduces the male Yahoo.<sup>39</sup>

Except perhaps for the critique on the female body, most of Gulliver's disparagements of woman can be duplicated in *Kappa*, especially the stress on woman's capricious and wanton nature. One hesitates, however, to jump to the conclusion that the *femme fatale* themes in *Kappa* are a result of the direct influence of *Gulliver's Travels*, for as one critic observes, the image of „angel-women“ appears in Akutagawa's works only in a brief period of four years, less than one third of his writing career, which forms a great contrast to the image of „vicious women“ which dominates his works almost from the beginning to the end.<sup>40</sup> It is quite unlikely that the single impact of *Gulliver's Travels* would have obsessed Akutagawa to such a great extent. Moreover, Akutagawa seems to be less biased than Swift. Although the female kappas are portrayed as sex maniacs, ready to nab any male passing by, the male kappas are not completely innocent. Deep down in their psyche, the latter „feel the stirrings of a desire to be chased by one of those loathsome she-kappas“ (p. 74).

Whether or not a female kappa is married, she is always a trouble maker. It follows, therefore, that a family in which there are mother, daughters and female relatives would easily become a living inferno. The family of Lap, the student, is a remarkable example. Once Lap looks outside the window and notices some fly-catching violets. He describes what he sees. His sister's anger is aroused at that, taking his mentioning of the fly-catching violets as a satirical reflection on her nabbing a male kappa. Feeling their female dignity being challenged, his mother and aunt, even though not on good terms with each other, join his sister to quarrel with him. The whole family ends up in a bloody mess (pp.93–4).

In Kappaland, family is depicted as a great burden for each individual. According to Tok the poet, parents and children, husbands and wives, brothers and sisters, all spend their time indulging their sole pleasure, that of making life burdensome for each other (p.66). The narrator himself witnesses this picture:

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37 Ibid., p.184.

38 Ibid., p.184.

39 Ibid., pp.282–3.

40 TSURUTA, 1967, pp.50–70.

A kappa who was still quite young was staggering along the street, gasping desperately for breath; draped round his neck were seven or eight kappas, including two who looked like his mother and father (p.68).

This image can be construed in two ways. The first is that the family is a huge burden which is going to suffocate every one to death. The second is a symbolic reading. The young kappa, like the Japanese of Akutagawa's time, is trapped in between the old and the modern. On his shoulders are the burdens of keeping the old traditions from oblivion and that of modernizing Japan, and these two heavy loads are going to break him down.

Akutagawa's depiction of the family can be explained by his own pessimistic view of that institution. He had once said: „Family-system is hell. Every member of a family sacrifices oneself more or less for the family“ (sic. in English);<sup>41</sup> and „the first scene of our life-tragedy commences the moment we assume a parent-child relationship“.<sup>42</sup>

Although the family is such a detestable social institution in Kappaland, even the super-kappa Tok who openly despises the family system cannot help „ending up as jealous as sin“ when confronting a scene of family like the one quoted above (p.68). Thus, like women, the family brings miseries to life in Kappaland, but without the family, the kappas cannot live peacefully and happily either. It is, therefore, not surprising to find Mag the philosopher affirming that: „The shrewdest way to live is to despise the conventions of the age while yet managing to act in such a way as not to violate the convention at any point“ (p. 101).

The themes of women and family tell us that the main concern is perhaps not even a matter of „shrewdest way to live“ or not, because the kappas themselves are naturally inclined to welcome these two sources of evil and sufferings, while despising and hating them at the same time.

The themes of *femme fatale* and family point in one direction: kappas, and presumably human beings too, have a natural proclivity to create hell for themselves and for each other. It is not perhaps social or political systems that primarily account for human miseries, but human nature itself is chiefly responsible. These two themes dramatize Akutagawa's assertion that „no matter how often we repeat revolutions, man's life must remain depressing“.<sup>43</sup> In this sense, Akutagawa shared with many Western utopists the same conviction that a perfect order of the utopia is possible only when man's nature can be molded according to the utopists' need.

While Akutagawa's „perfect utopia“ would be realizable only when human beings change their nature, a bad social and political system will worsen the situation. Although Akutagawa does not dwell on the actual government set up in Kappaland, he paints a picture of the legal institutions. The experience of the

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41 Quoted in TSURUTA, 1967, p.42.

42 Ibid., p.43.

43 ARIMA, pp. 1578.

narrator alone is enough to show how ineffective the laws are in Kappaland. His fountain pen is stolen and the thief is caught a month later. The thief is set free simply because his status as parent when he committed the crime has changed since his son died a week before he was arrested. The penal Code, Clause 1285, states that if anything in the circumstances under which the offence takes place disappears, the suspect will not be prosecuted.

More ridiculous is perhaps the system of capital punishment: „All that happens is that the title of the offence is announced to the criminal“ (p.108). A kappa's special nervous make-up will not allow him to accept being called a criminal and that accused kappa will pine away until death as a result. As Gael points out, the defect of this punishment lies in the fact that every kappa is subjected to the same weakness in its nervous system, and capital punishment turns out to be the best method to commit a murder without being caught red-handed easily (p.109). In other words, in Kappaland law is set up to protect the criminals rather than the innocents.

Still worse, in the dystopian Kappaland, law is abused to justify class exploitation. Kappaland suffers from unemployment as a result of mass production. The superfluous workers are slaughtered and their flesh is sold as meat. This is obviously an echo of Swift's „A Modest Proposal“. Only that Swift was just proposing cannibalism satirically, whereas Akutagawa „put it into practice“ in *Kappa*. Indeed, the scheme works in Kappaland. Not only is the problem of unemployment solved, but also the price of meat is reduced. Gael the capitalist is able to introduce and carry out this solution simply because it is covered by a statute. In fact the inhuman act is considered „benevolent“ because it saves an unemployed worker all the bother of suicide or death by starvation. As Chak says in a mocking tone, the slaughtering is done in a human way: „All it is is a whiff of poison gas, so that there is no pain worth mentioning“ (p.48). We are not told how the working class receives this law. Apparently, lowering the price of meat pleases them, so that there is no protest against this inhuman law. The application of law to justify an inhuman act marks a major theme in the dystopian novel. That is, the theme of corruption of principles by expediency.

The legal apparatus is of course evil, but the kappas are also partly responsible for the exploitation. That the anti-capitalistic movement fails is due to the fact that „kappas always tend to be for [themselves] – and that this self takes priority over anyone or anything extraneous“ (p.80). When everyone gives a selfish priority over everything, it is really impossible for any revolution or movement to be successful. Again the cause of the dystopian condition in Kappaland goes back to the nature of kappas.

The kappas also have their own interpretation of social evils. Instead of finding fault with the social system, they lay blame entirely on heredity. The only demonstration we find in Kappaland consists of propagandizing for eradicating hereditary evil. We can put this theme in the context of Akutagawa's belief in the relationship between human nature and utopia. As argued by utopists in the West,

eugenics may be a biological way to improve human nature.<sup>44</sup> Since Akutagawa believed that the prerequisite of a utopia was an improved human nature, to eradicate hereditary evils is perhaps a preliminary step to attain a utopia.

Nevertheless, Akutagawa did not really advocate eugenics in *Kappa*, even though the means to curb the incorrigible human nature he envisaged has something to do with one's biology. The happiest kappa in the entire country is Bag, the fisherman, who leads the narrator in and out of this dystopian land. Born old and growing younger in his old age, he is able to circumvent the pitfalls that his evil nature lays on him. He manages to attain a peaceful life, because „I am not a prey to the covetousness of the older person, nor do I wallow in the lust of the younger man“ (p. 134). In other words, Akutagawa suggested that a physiological mutation would probably keep one's wanton nature under control. Akutagawa's vision might be right. But even in Kappaland only Bag was born with such special endowment; this solution to check human nature is after all merely a pure fantasy; and such physiological mutation is certainly not what eugenics could bring about. As the narrator observes, the way the kappas manage their life at present is already the optimal condition, which „brings the greatest happiness of all“ (p. 74). As the anti-utopists in the West, Akutagawa did not believe in the possibility of a better future.

The dystopian themes in *Kappa* can also be seen in the philosophical thoughts and religious beliefs in Kappaland. The Kappanese philosophy is represented by Mag's Words of the Fool. Many excerpts from this book quoted in the novelette embody the author's own pessimistic view of the future as a result of his despair of human life. The following selections are the examples most relevant to Mags', and presumably Akutagawa's, utopian outlook:

1. The ideals essential to our livelihood were burnt out three thousand years ago. No doubt all that we do is to add new flames to old faggots.
2. Pride, passion, suspicion – all offences, three thousand years ago, grew from these three. Yet, at the same time, perhaps all virtue too.
3. After Baudelaire turned imbecile, he summed up his view of life in one simple word. The word is „women“. But such a word did not necessarily express the man himself. Rather it seems he forgot the word „stomach“...
4. To lessen material lust is not inevitably to bring repose. To gain repose, we need also the lessening of spiritual lust.
5. We are less fortunate than human beings. The human being is not as highly evolved as the kappa.
6. If we live our lives by reason, then as a matter of course, we would negate our own existence. The fact that Voltaire, who made a god out of reason, ended his life happily, indicates that a human being is not as evolved as a kappa (pp. 102–3).

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44 Peter WEINGART: „Eugenic Utopias: Blueprints for the Rationalization of Human Evolution“, in: Everett MENDELSON (ed.), *Nineteen Eighty-four Science between Utopia and Dystopia* (Dordrecht, Boston, Lancaster: D. Reidel Publishing Company 1984), pp. 173–188.

The first two statements underline the notion that there is no possibility for a better future for mankind. First, since all ideas essential to our welfare were burnt out already, and for three thousand years men have not succeeded in creating a good society, we simply should not hold any hope for a brighter future. Second, since all virtues and offences originated from pride, passion, and suspicion three thousand years ago, it follows that these three elements „pride, passion, and suspicion“ are in fact basic ingredients of human nature.

The war between the kappas and otters is the best evidence of the dominance of suspicion over human nature and its destructive power to mankind. Another example is censorship in Kappaland. Fine art and literature are seldom prohibited, because they are relatively intelligible. Musical performances are, however, often banned, simply because the ruling class has nothing substantial to know what exactly is going on. Their suspicion does not allow them to permit the most abstract form of art to grow healthily in Kappaland.

The theme of pride is seen in the comic yet satirical scene in which the Society for Psychic Studies through the medium Madame Hop conjures up Tok's spirit. Tok, who is asked why he manifests himself as a ghost after his suicide, answers that he wishes to know his posthumous reputation and confesses that he „cannot stop [himself] craving such fame“ (p.127). The craving for fame, born out of one's sense of pride, makes Tok return to the world of which he is so weary that he left it by committing suicide. The fact that Tok cannot get rid of his selfpride even after death makes the hope for a change of human nature all the more gloomy. In fact Tok's description of the world of spirits makes us realize that the other world is more or less the same as our human world. There exist, for example, still all kinds of religious institutions. Instead of speculating on the nature and meaning of human life, they change the subject to spirit's life. The pessimistic philosopher Schopenhauer, for example, is now working on „something called Spiritual Pessimism“ (p.130). Thus, at the recess of Akutagawa's mind, human nature remains incorrigible even after one dies, and the other world is not any better than ours.

The theme of passion is of course closely linked with the theme of *femme fatale*. Seizing male kappas out of uncontrollable passion derives from the nature of the female kappa. Given kappas' nature as such, there is really not much possibility of attaining a perfect utopia „no matter how often we repeat revolution“, not to mention that the Revolutionary“ ideals are either not essential to our existence or merely „new flames“ from „old faggots“.

The third statement explicitly discloses that when boiled down to its most basic elements, life is but a matter of sex and eating. This notion echoes the religious doctrines of the most prevalent religion, namely Modernism or Viverism, in Kappaland. The narrator explains the meaning of „to live“ in the word „Viverism,“ that it should be understood in the sense of „eating rice, drinking wine and having sex“. In the genesis myth, the first kappa couple were told to „Eat. Have Union. Live life vigorously“ (p. 122). It is important to note that Viverism is also known as Modernism, implying that so-called Modernism is

again new flames from old faggots. The nature of life under Modernism is nothing new, but still eating and having sex. Modernization is, therefore, not the means to achieve social betterment. If human nature comprises „pride, passion, and suspicion,“ and the nature of life is eating and having sex, how can a better society be attained by utopian planning? We can see here the author's pessimistic view of life and his despair of ever attaining what he called „a perfect utopia“.

The fourth statement is somehow anti-utopian in spirit. It implies that the only way to get rid of trouble is to stop striving for a better future both materially and spiritually. This ideal sounds very Taoist and certainly reminds us of Andô Shoeki's (1701–1758?) utopian ideal „world of nature“.<sup>45</sup>

The last two statements can be construed in two ways. The first is that these statements are actually ironical. The second, also the more plausible, interpretation is that Akutagawa believes that human beings are confronted by a depressing future. The Kappaland described is a possible image of future Japanese society when modernization is at full steam. The last statement is especially anti-utopian. The faith in reason in the Enlightenment period was utopian in nature. Historical reality has already proved those *philosophes* like Voltaire too optimistically naive.<sup>46</sup> Reason cannot be imposed on human life indiscriminately and permanently. For Mag, the Kappanese philosopher, life and reason are even incompatible. Whether men can be molded by reason to lead a rational life according to a utopian blueprint is actually one of the basic queries that has bothered thinkers for centuries, and also one of the big questions the anti-utopian thinkers keep on asking themselves and other utopists. Akutagawa's answer was negative and in this he shared the same feeling with many modern anti-utopian thinkers.<sup>47</sup>

The aforementioned suicide of Tok embodies another dystopian theme. Tok commits suicide not only because he is weary of the present world, but also because he expects a better world in his afterlife. He writes just before he puts an end to his life this short poem:

Come. Let us up and go  
To the Valley dividing this brief world,  
Where the rock walls are cool.  
Where the mountain stream is pure, Where the herb-flower is fragrant  
(p. 112).

45 See a discussion of Andô's utopian thought in YASUNAGA Toshinobu: *Nihon no yutopia shisô* [Japanese utopian thought], Tôkyô: Hôsei Daigaku shuppan-kyoku 1971, pp.167–216; see also TOSHINOBU Yasunaga: *The Major Writings of Andô Shoeki*, Tôkyô: J. Weatherhill.

46 See Carl BECKER: *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven & London: Yale Univ. Press 1932). Becker demonstrates convincingly that the philosophy of the so-called Age of Reason is but another form of heavenly city of St. Augustine rebuilt with more up-to-date material. See also Franco VENTURI: *Utopia and Reform in the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press 1971).

47 See George KATEB: *Utopia and its Enemies* (London: The Free Press of Glencoe 1963), pp.139–209.

This poem paints Tok's conception of the other world, which can be described as a utopia to which the admission fee is one's precious life. But even forsaking one's life does not guarantee the reward of a utopia; Tok's testimony of the other world reveals that it is only a continuation of the present one. Here, Akutagawa expressed his sceptical view of those religious promises of heavenly utopias in the afterlife.

Although Kappaland has a mild totalitarian government keeping the masses under rigid control, a religious institution encouraging indulgence in one's natural physical appetite, a legalized system of class exploitation, the ultimate root of evil goes all the way back to their incorrigible nature. The implication is that kappas, presumably men also, are not only innately incapable of building an utopia, but inclined to create a dystopia for themselves and their species. Modernization accompanied by capitalism and mechanization only helps worsen the situation, changing the already disagreeable world into a genuine dystopia. The novelette can be, therefore, seen as Akutagawa's warning to his contemporary Japanese government, which was too much enthusiastic in modernizing or rather Westernizing Japan.

According to George Bikle Jr., capitalism and modern utopianism have a very intricate relationship with each other. While capitalism as a socio-economic system is rejected by modern utopists, the science and technology upon which capitalism is based is welcomed. He elaborates that „those entrepreneurial modes of thought [of modern capitalism] that seek to manipulate available means to achieve economic ends do not differ in essence from the practical proposals for institutional reform proffered by the utopian seer“. What the modern utopists really protest against is „the inequitable distribution of surplus value under capitalism“ but not „the plant and technology upon which that capitalist order is based“.48 In other words, in Bikle's opinion, what the utopist objects to in capitalism consists in its moral effects on society, but not in the scientific spirit behind capitalism. It is by and large true that in *Kappa* Akutagawa set his critical eyes primarily on the social problems created as a result of the implementation of capitalism, problems like unemployment and the inhuman solution proposed and carried out by Gael. It is also obvious that Akutagawa did not have much confidence in the products of machines, considering his skeptical attitude toward the idea of employing technology itself.

The production of books in Kappaland is an eminent example. All they do is to pour paper, ink, and ass-brain powder into a funnel-mouthed machine. „In barely five seconds, they [the ingredients] are ejected as octavos, duodecimos, royal octavos and so on“ (p.82). This satirical scene suggests that with the availability of machines, even books of inferior quality and value would have a chance to be published. The machine is, therefore, an evil agent which degrades human culture and the quality of life. Economic growth and material

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48 George B. BIKLE, Jr.: „Utopianism and the Planning Element in Modern Japan“, in: *Aware of Utopia*, pp.37–8.



improvement and abundance together with advanced technology are only false ideals. They indubitably will promote the material standard of our life, but actually degrade rather than improve the quality of life. Underneath the glamorous outside, as Akutagawa saw it, modernism is only „Viverism“, a movement to encourage indulging in a kind of life represented by the slogan „Eat. Have Sex. Live Life Vigorously“.

In this way, Akutagawa criticized not only the distribution of goods, but also the quality of life in a capitalist economy and mechanized modern society. That is to say, he castigated also the part in capitalism that the modern utopists support, the part Bikle called „the entrepreneurial modes of thought that seek to manipulate available means to achieve economic ends.“ In this sense, therefore, like many modern dystopias, *Kappa* criticizes the „scientific world view“ of modern utopias.<sup>49</sup>

Dwelling in such a dystopian country, the narrator might be expected to become „gradually more and more disenchanted with life in Kappaland“ (p. 133). Unlike Gulliver who is exiled from the land of Houyhnhnms, he leaves Kappaland of his own accord. Ironically, his return to the human world, like Gulliver's, is a disillusioning experience. He soon finds human society much worse than the kappas' world, and finds the kappa „a clean-living race“ compared with mankind (p. 137). The odor of man offends his nose and his appearance inspires dread. A conversation with another man is not comfortable either, for he drops frequently into „Kappanese“. Within half a year, he cannot stand life in human society and picks his way back to Kappaland. The poor Japanese Gulliver fails to reach Kappaland only because he is caught on his way and kept in a mental hospital thereafter.

The way that the Japanese visitor reacts to his native environment on returning to the human world is extremely similar to Gulliver's after he is exiled from the Country of Houyhnhnms, but their attitudes toward the imaginary worlds they have left behind and the reason for departure are different: Houyhnhnmland is probably a utopia,<sup>50</sup> while Kappaland is certainly a dystopia. What

49 For details of how modern utopian and anti-utopian thinkers differ in their concepts of science, see *Nineteen Eighty-four Science between Utopia and Dystopia*.

50 Whether Swift's Houyhnhnmland should be considered as a utopia or dystopia is an unresolved controversy. James L. Clifford describes the two opposite interpretations, the „hard“ and „soft“ schools. The „hard“ school accepts Houyhnhnmland as a positive ideal, whereas the latter argues that Swift's satire is against the Houyhnhnms. See his „Gulliver's fourth voyage, 'hard' and 'soft' schools of interpretation“, in: Larry S. CHAMPION (ed.): *Quick Springs of Sense* (Athens: Univ. of Georgia Press 1974), 33–50. The often cited defense of Houyhnhnms as a positive ideal is of course George SHERBURN: „Errors concerning the Houyhnhnms“, *Modern Philology*, LVI: 92–97 (November 1958). More recently, Gorman Beauchamp reasserts the standpoint of the „hard“ school and argues that Houyhnhnmland corresponds to the summit of the Platonic hierarchy. See his „Gulliver's return to the cave: Plato's *Republic* and book IV of *Gulliver's Travels*“, *Michigan Academician*, vol.7, no.2 (Fall 1974), 201–9. For the whole question of the interpretation of Book IV of *Gulliver's travels*, a handy reference is *A Case Book on Gulliver among the Houyhnhnms*, ed. Milton P. FOSTER (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company 1961).

makes the Japanese visitor change his mind from resenting Kappaland to loving it and even forsaking his native land for it? In the text itself Akutagawa did not provide us with an answer. Donald Keene contends that one of Akutagawa's recurrent themes is that: „The realization of a dream brings not satisfaction but disillusionment.“<sup>51</sup> We can see traces of this recurrent theme in the narrator's change of attitude. Although he is so weary of the dystopian Kappaland and so eager to escape back to the land of mankind that when shown the passage to the human world, he jumps „for sheer joy in [his] excitement – rather like a child that had just seen its first aeroplane“ (p. 136), and ignores Bag's warning that he might never be able to come back, once he sets his feet on earth again, he regrets. From this we may infer that were he given a chance to reach Kappaland again, he would still yearn for the human world. Or perhaps the incongruous ending is simply the manifestation of Akutagawa's weakness: his „inability to resist adding a surprise ending where none was needed“.<sup>52</sup>

No matter which interpretation is correct, the prediction and warning characteristics of the dystopian genre still exist in the novelette. Akutagawa regarded modernization as nothing new but merely a reaffirmation of a relationship between life on one hand and sex and eating on the other hand. Modernization is dramatized as a religion in *Kappa* whose sole aim is to encourage indulgence in these two human basic needs. Mechnization and capitalism, which promote mass production and class exploitation, bring great disasters to society. Akutagawa pessimistically envisaged these forces as a form of cannibalism in disguise. Weighing modernization or Westernization as a utopian hope for Japan after the Meiji restoration, Akutagawa arrived at a negative evaluation. Mechanical changes, however, are not entirely responsible for the evils in society. Although we see the bitter fruits of modernization, Akutagawa did not attribute all structural faults to modernization itself but mainly to kappas' nature, which primarily accounted for the miserable dystopian condition in Kappaland. The passion of women, the suspicion of the government, the selfishness of kappas that makes the family institution like a hell, the pride of the super-kappas who are responsible for the abuse of mechanization and modernization, all these bring disasters to Kappaland and make it a dystopia.

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51 KEENE, p.564.

52 KEENE, p.565.