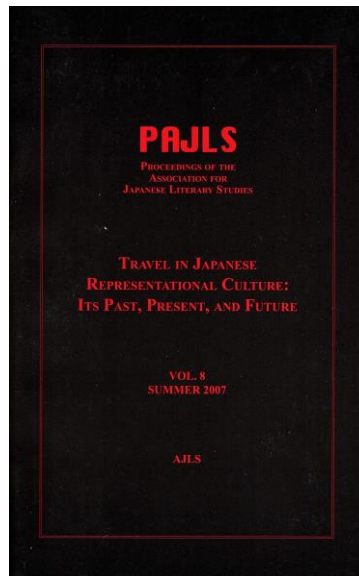


“Gender Politics and Kurahashi Yumiko’s  
*Amanonkoku ōkanki*”

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**GENDER POLITICS AND KURAHASHI YUMIKO'S  
AMANONKOKU ŌKANKI<sup>1</sup>**

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As with many of her works, Kurahashi Yumiko's 1986 novel, *Amanonkoku Ōkanki* (*Record of a Round-Trip Journey to Amanon Country*) too defies easy generic categorization, regarded variously as science fiction, political satire, feminist literature, metafictional postmodern parody, fantasy, and futurist picaresque. For reasons that will become increasingly apparent, I add "feminist anti-feminist satire" to this catalogue. Kurahashi was a prolific woman writer, one whose works are well known in her own country, boast a hearty critical following here and abroad, and are translated in multiple languages. *Amanonkoku Ōkanki* won the Izumi Kyōka prize soon after publication, and now two decades later has just been translated into both German and Chinese, although an English translation is yet to appear.<sup>2</sup> And yet, strangely enough, this novel is wrapped in a critical silence; indeed, only one sustained article in Japanese exists, other articles being merely brief *kaisetsu* or passing comments when discussing other of her many works.<sup>3</sup> This loud silence, I propose, suggests that the novel has been *misread* rather than *unread*; to be specific, in appearing to damn feminism, portraying it as a dystopic and ludicrous sexual revolution, the novel may satisfy some who remain smugly silent while distancing even sympathetic others from a work by a woman writer that burlesques both Japan and feminism while

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<sup>1</sup> My profound appreciation goes to Daniel O'Neill and Stanford University's Center for East Asian Studies for so generously inviting me to give a version of this essay at their luncheon series in April 2007. Thanks also to Katsuya Sugawara and the graduate student participants (especially my 2007 graduate seminar in Japanese women writers and feminist theory) of the Ohsawa Colloquium at University of Tokyo in May 2007 who provided a thoughtful critique of these ideas after my presentation there. I would be remiss if I failed to mention the provocative, and enlightening, discussions about this novel I had with SF expert and friend, Yutaka Ebihara.

倉橋由美子『アマノン国往還記』東京：新潮文庫、1986.

<sup>2</sup> Why translations into these languages at this time? Despite lacking a body of critical work, this particular novel's emergence globally now raises provocative questions, as this essay can only begin to explore.

<sup>3</sup> 与那覇恵子、「フェミニズム批評（実例）倉橋由美子『アマノン国往還記』。国文学、平成元年7月号第34巻第8号。115-121.

exaggerating patriarchal values, pornographic heterosexual sex, and misogynist acts.

The hypothesis here is that critics, feminist or otherwise, hesitate to enter the critical fray with novels that raise questions of “feminist misogyny,” as Susan Gubar describes it,<sup>4</sup> or that are written in ways incompatible with the usual reasons for celebrating a “woman writer.”<sup>5</sup> Feminist misogyny offers a conceptual tool for understanding the fundamental paradox feminists face, that of women who do not want to be “women,” especially as women exist currently in the society or culture they wish to change for the better.<sup>6</sup> In critiquing relations of gender and sexuality, feminists are often, if stereotypically, accused of hating men, sex, and women, too, especially mothers and motherhood. In taking up Kurahashi’s outer space travel fiction, *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*, I argue that direct approaches to the paradox of feminist misogyny in thematically anti-feminist stories or difficult quasi-pornographic texts such as this one can be productive, testing the limits while advancing the navigable terrain of gender discourse both in Japan and for transnational feminism.

#### A TRAVEL SCRIBE MINDS HER PS AND QS

*Amanonkoku Ōkanki*, as with Kurahashi’s *Sumiyakisto Q no boken* (*The Adventures of Sumiyakist Q*, 1969) tells the story of an errant crusader, P, named after a letter of the alphabet. While Q’s quest in the latter work is the conversion of others to his political beliefs, P’s cause is proselytizing *monokamikyō*, or monotheism. As early as the Prologue we learn that the theocracy of Monokami sends P as a missionary in a fleet of spaceships to Amanon, a largely secular world, in order to convert it to

<sup>4</sup> Susan Gubar uses this term to describe the paradox that motivates women to become feminists, that is, precisely in order not to be “women” as they know them. “Feminist Misogyny: Mary Wollstonecraft and the Paradox of ‘It Takes One to Know One.’” *Feminism Beside Itself*. Eds. Diana Elam and Robyn Wiegman. New York: Routledge, 1995. 133–154. It originally appeared in *Feminist Studies* 20.3 (1994): 453–73.

<sup>5</sup> In Japanese feminist criticism, a traditional and persistent focus on “positive representations of women” continues to limit the kinds of fiction that are taken up for “feminist” readings. Indeed, it has only been in the last decade or so that it has become more acceptable for fiction authored by men to be read through the lens of gender theory.

<sup>6</sup> Second wave feminists of color early on pointed out how the universal “woman” did not include women of the lower classes or women of color, while in *Gender Trouble* and much of her subsequent work, Judith Butler has shown how the category of “woman” excludes lesbians and non-normative sexualities and genders, actually working instead to regulate the sex/gender system on a heterosexual bias.

Monokami's monotheistic belief system. P's spaceship is the only one to make it through the barrier surrounding Amanon. At first, the novel seems to describe the cross-cultural communication problems of travelers to foreign lands, for P is treated as an "illegal alien" in Amanon, indeed, the first one in such a long time that he is the source of much curiosity and many high-level government meetings. It is only several hundred pages later in the novel that we, together with P, finally learn the truth about Amanon that we had already begun to suspect: Amanon is "unnatural." That is, its political, cultural, and social leaders are women.

The women of Amanon completely control society, nature itself, and certainly men and reproduction. Men are looked down upon as inferior beings, used merely as anonymous breeders in top-secret sperm banks or else allowed to work in the public sphere, such as the government, only so long as they agree to castration and become bureaucratic eunuchs (*raotan*). Children are brought to term in *rentaru shikyū*, or artificial wombs very like amniotic tanks, not in women's bodies. Women and men do not have heterosexual relations, and if they are found to have done so, their sexual coupling (野合) is deemed both illegal and obscenely bestial, the stuff of pornographic videos. While it is rumored that there are *angura no otoko*, or "underground men," who have escaped castration and are living underground, organizing to overthrow the government, they are never seen in the novel. Himeko, a young girl, can work for P as his *sekure* (as "secretary," simultaneously a clerical position and sexual consort role) because he is a foreigner and treated as special (for the time being at least), while she is lower class in Amanon society, born without the necessary paperwork to an outcaste male and a professional class mother. She has never known her father—and of course no one in Amanon knows or even cares about their fathers—but she calls P "Papa" upon learning about Monokami and gleaning P's nostalgia for that role; from her perspective, however, such fictions merely focus a lascivious light on her own virginal Lolita (*rorikon*) performance in their relationship (198).

As the novel progresses, the P of the protagonist's name alternately stands for Padre, the religious title of "Father" by which most characters call him, and then also "Papa," which Himeko calls him, suggesting the slide in meaning his role in Amanon increasingly takes on as he moves further away from converting Amanon's people to his religion and more involved in the necessary first step to their spiritual conversion: a sexual revolution. He calls his sexual revolution the "*Ossu Kakumei*," and it is his goal to return the country to a "natural," male-dominated society like

his own where women are naturally feminine, naturally serve men, and naturally reproduce their own children.

P's sexual revolution does not go without challenge: the powerful politician Eios has in mind her own power grab, both from P as well as the government headed by Prime Minister Yumikos. While Eios harvests her eggs and has multitudes of children who will follow her and consolidate her power, P attempts to have sex with as many women as possible as part of his new television show called the Monopara Show, where he hopes to teach them about heterosexual love, impregnate them, and create his own superior race whose male lineage, biologically and theologically, may be traced back to Monokami through the Emperor. We do not find out who would have won this eugenics race to control the state in his or her own image, in fact, because Eios combats P in a comical and highly slapstick wrestling match for power at the end of the novel; soon after she finally loses the match, she loses her political and social power. As for P, Himeko's building jealousy over his sexual adventures as a sex star in his Monopara campaign results in his losing his power too, in the form of his—well, his P. She cuts off his penis in what can only be a parody of the infamous Abe Sada Incident, a crime of passion documented and eroticized in films such as Tanaka Noboru's *The True Story of Abe Sada (Jitsuroku Abe Sada, 1975)* and Ōshima Nagisa's *In the Realm of the Senses (Ai no koriida, 1976)*.<sup>7</sup> Jealous of P's many sexual partners and wanting to possess him all for herself, Himeko strives to do so literally, making her act of castration P's last sex act on TV for all of Amanon's viewers. Afterwards, although P's penis is physically reconstructed, it is useless for sex, become a mere memorial to his former sexual power.

By this point in our plot summary, we have reached the last chapter of the novel before the Epilogue, where the government learns that a huge and devastating eruption of Mt. Taizan is eminent, one that will destroy the world of Amanon. P decides then and there to take Himeko, his eunuch companion Kaganon, and the former politician Miyakos with him in his spaceship back to Monokami, even though he is aware that they may not succeed in piercing the barrier to get out. He gives

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<sup>7</sup> Christine Marran explores this event and its cultural representations pre- and post-war in her persuasive and thorough *Poison Woman: Figuring Transgression in Modern Japanese Culture*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007. The rhetoric of “poison woman” and its connections to literacy and reading, not only the post-war celebration of such women as liberated sexually, is relevant to Kurahashi's own theory of “literature as poison” and the Thanatos medicine in this novel.

everyone some medicine to make them sleep, and after starting the automatic pilot of the “coffin-like” (「棺桶に入って死の世界へ旅立つのと大差ないように」 533) spaceship, he too takes the medicine.

The story plays with the connotations of the letter P but by novel's end all the other meanings are overwhelmingly assembled under the single sign of phallus, signifying the vehicle for carrying the only sperm to pierce through the supposedly impenetrable barrier of the egg of Amanonkoku at the beginning of the novel. Indeed, it is with the Epilogue that we learn for sure that the outer space travels of P have been inner space travels in a woman's body all along; consequently, the imperialist plot to take over Amanon by spreading the word of Monokami-ism has also always already been a bio-political plot about reproduction, sexuality, and gender difference.

Calling on the terms of gender discourse to create and critique Amanon society and then upping the ante by destroying it and abandoning it all for Monokami's, Kurahashi's story gives a further turn to the plotted screw: the Epilogue situates us in an operating room on Monokami where a woman from Amanon is in troubled labor. Guided by a Professor INRI ordered by the Church to devise a virgin birth (「アマノン夫人処女懐妊計画」 534) by sending “the blessed spirit” (「恩寵を受けた精霊」 or sperm, 534) of Monokami into her and getting Monokami back in the form of a child, the other doctors and nurses suddenly realize that something has gone terribly wrong. The head doctor consults with the off-stage Archbishop who demands that the unspeakable thing born of the woman be disposed of, and then that she too be killed. Realizing the price of his failure, the head doctor downs a draught of *Tanotomin* that causes him to leap out of the window to his death. Dr. INRI, looking out the window at what has just transpired, mutters to himself, “It is as if he were trying to let everyone know that it was just a fool's errand all along” (「モノカミはわれわれに徒勞を与えたもうたようだ」 538). These final words suggest, of course, that P's mission was from the start an aborted one, and that our reading experience too has been a journey not only without purpose that fails to reach its destination, but also one that ends much closer to home than we could have realized. It has indeed become, if not a round-trip journey, at least a circular record, as the title's *Okanki* (往還記) promised.

Kurahashi Yumiko minds her Ps and Qs carefully on their quests through her novels, using the letter of the Symbolic law against itself to expose the strangeness of its so called “natural” signifying operations, particularly as regards gender politics in *Amanonkoku Okanki*. Her fictional characters are less characters per se than ideas, designated by

letters or with symbolic names that simultaneously tag and exceed their function, be they P or Q, “the Dokter” or “the writer.” Kurahashi mentions *Amanonkoku Ōkanki* in the same breath as *Sumiyakist Q no boken*<sup>8</sup> in her essay, “*Doko nimo nai basho*” (“The Place of Nowhere”), where she claims that her works are set in a “place of nowhere” that acts as a kind of “utopia,” and which therefore cannot be found in the real world.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, as “Yumiko(s),” the Prime Minister of Amanon playfully and self-referentially reminds us of the author herself, both character and author always busy manipulating “the plot” behind the scenes. In taking up the politics of feminism as subject matter in *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*, it is as if Kurahashi the writer is parodying the notion of the writer as politician, or as mouthpiece for political views. Despite Kurahashi’s repeated denials of any relationship between the real world and her “anti-world” fiction, it remains impossible to ignore the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (*anpō*) protests, the Communist Party and *Beheiren* anti-Vietnam demonstrations as the historical backdrop and part of the thematic content to her famous story “The Party” (*Parutai*, 1960) and later *The Adventures of Sumiyakist Q*. Kurahashi’s abstract *kannen shōsetsu* (観念小説) style diplomatically positions her to play both sides against the middle, the real world against the “anti-world” she claims she creates in fiction, always to her safe advantage as a fiction writer. Accompanying her debut and fame with “The Party,” she learned that fiction in the real world takes on a life of its own despite the author’s intentions. Although the story criticizes the Communist Party and the student groups of Zengakuren in a somewhat conservative and cynical fashion, as do her essays of the early years, ironically it was the Left that embraced her work both as fiction and as a chance for political *hansei*, or reflection, while conservatives on the Right in the literary *bundan* attacked her fiction for its poor subject matter and style.<sup>10</sup> The logic of Kurahashi’s

<sup>8</sup> Kurahashi Yumiko. *The Adventures of Sumiyakist Q*. Tr. Dennis Keene. St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979. Currently published as 『スミヤキストQの冒険』東京：講談社文芸文庫、1988.

<sup>9</sup> Kurahashi Yumiko, “Doko nimo nai basho.” *Kurahashi Yumiko Zensakuhin*. Vol. 2. Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1975–6.

<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere I detail the irony of these politics around Kurahashi’s “Partai” despite any view of her own that she may have expressed or had, and argue that the controversy contributed to the scepticism she already had about writerly “intentions” and to the kind of satirist and postmodern writer she later became. See メアリー・ナイトン, 「「バルタイ」から『スミヤキストQの冒険』へ——倉橋由美子の文学における審美的、政治的革命」。井上麻衣子、村井まや子訳。『世界から見た日本文化：多文化共生社会の構築のために』神奈川大学人文学研

aesthetics meets politics, we might say, in the metaphor of the role of writer as a savvy Yumikos-style politician: in playing the literary game, she is our representative whether we voted for her or not, one who claims to merely “represent” for us, setting herself to the side in favor of her readerly constituents; and yet, of course, she is calculating in her singular role of putting powerful representations into play in the fields of discourse in the first place. In other words, Kurahashi is not writing *of* the real world, rather, she is writing *in* the real world *with* her anti-world, and she is not responsible for the ways in which the real world becomes fictional or the anti-world true.

Speaking of behind-the-scene manipulations, it cannot go unmentioned that stylized performance structures *Amanonkoku Ōkanki* and is itself thematized in the work. P is the central porn star of his own show on television, where performances of sex are highly scripted and rehearsed, making the male-female heterosexual coupling into something far from a private bedtime encounter, but instead, as Angela Carter reminds us in *The Sadeian Woman*, into the most codified and “staged” of social arrangements and cultural exchanges.<sup>11</sup> The pornographic novel that this book also is—just recall P’s numerous sexual seductions, performances, and rapes—manipulates the reader’s desire, despite him or herself, and laughs at it, whether that arousal be in readerly pleasure or as a form of writerly coercion, a matter of control.

This novel might also remind readers of Takarazuka, a theatre originally derived from the all-male Kabuki where women play all the roles, including those of men. In her essay “*Doko nimo nai basho*,” however, Kurahashi asserts that the Noh play best describes the movement and character types in *Sumiyakisto Q* and *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*, with her protagonists Q and P not the usual novelistic heroes but performing rather a *waki* type of role.

That is to say, just like the “traveling monk” of the *waki* role, the protagonist goes off somewhere, and sees and hears strange things. Before long, someone who corresponds to the *shite* role, someone who is superhuman in some way, appears. In *Sumiyakisto Q no boken*, the *shite* role is like those of the Rector, the Doktor, and the Theologian. These characters together with the world fall into a kind of madness, and with

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究所。東京：お茶の水書房、2007：5–50。

<sup>11</sup> Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: And the Ideology of Pornography*. London: Penguin, 1978.



that world's ending the *waki* as protagonist also leaves this world. I think it is possible to read my novels of this type as if one were watching a Noh play on the stage.<sup>12</sup>

In comparing her novel's characters to Noh actors, Kurahashi stresses that her characters play stock roles, their psychological interiority of less consequence than their formal, structural qualities and actions, drawn from stylized literary conventions that get further adapted, twisted, and staged for her own anti-realism, anti-novel purposes. The natural and mystical beauty of the mountain in Chapter 14 where P himself looks and travels like a monk on religious pilgrimage together with his comrades, evokes the monk's travel in Izumi Kyōka's *Koyasan no hijiri*. Although we usually do not associate Noh with science fiction or satire, Kurahashi often finds in the tradition the tools she needs to revitalize the (post)modern.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, "travel" itself serves as stylized movement forward in a "plot" that consists more of ideas in circulation than motivated characters in development via events or their own actions.

The dystopic visions of well-known science fiction writers—Numa Shouzo, Tsutsui Yasutaka, Aldous Huxley, Joanna Russ, James Tiptree, Jr., Ursula K. Le Guin, Margaret Atwood, among others<sup>14</sup>—share much

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<sup>12</sup> Kurahashi, "Doko nimo nai basho."

<sup>13</sup> Numerous long and short fictional works by Kurahashi revise classical literature, be they Japanese, Chinese, or Greek tragedies. Sakaki Atsuko's "Introduction" to her book of translated stories is informative in this regard: "The Woman with the Flying Head" and Other Stories. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> In her essay, Yonaha Keiko briefly connects Kurahashi's novel to Ursula Le Guin's *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), one of the first feminist science fiction novels to treat gender and sexuality. I contend that Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), as a futuristic satire of contemporary U.S. religious and reproductive politics in the mid-1980s is especially relevant to Kurahashi's novel. Indeed, a comparative work might also consider how the first sperm banks appeared in the mid-1960s simultaneously in Japan and Iowa, the state in the U.S. where Kurahashi lived at just that time and which overseas experience she once said germinated the idea for *Amanonkoku Okanki* (as it did for her more autobiographical *Bajinia*) realized many years later. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) and Tsutsui Yasutaka's *Salmonella Men on Planet Porno*, and Other Stories (recently translated from *Poruno Wakusei no Sarumanera Ningen* into English by Andrew Driver, 1977/tr. 2006) both share with Kurahashi's novel an emphasis on sex, reproduction, and gender roles in science fiction; however, Huxley also brilliantly satirizes his society's addiction to pleasure (figured as the

with Kurahashi's representations of futuristic reproductive technologies and a feminist utopia gone bad. Critic Amano Tetsuo and modernist playwright Betsuyaku Minoru caution readers to regard the science fiction qualities and other-world alphabet travelers in Kurahashi novels such as *Sumiyakisto Q no boken* and *Amanonkoku Ōkanki* as distinctly in the satiric vein of Gulliver, not of Crusoe, and its fantastic qualities as those of Welles, not Verne.<sup>15</sup> I would second that, especially Amano's comment that Kurahashi's works are revolutionary in a Copernican way, simultaneously disrupting our complacent, conventional notions of the world and unflinchingly showing us our universe as one in which we are not at the center.

In *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*, in particular, Kurahashi modifies science fiction with Menippean satire, a form particularly suitable for Kurahashi's *kannen shōsetsu* novel of ideas. Derived from the Greek cynic Menippus whose works were mostly lost but carried on in the

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medicine "soma") as escapism and a conspiracy by those in power to keep individuals ignorant and powerless. I am indebted to conversations and feedback from Yutaka Ebihara and Michael Foster, respectively, for leading me to the following works: Joanna Russ's "When it Changed," upon which *The Female Man* (1977) was based; Jame Tiptree, Jr.'s (male pseudonym for famous woman science fiction writer, Alice Sheldon); "Houston, Houston, Do you Read?" (1976) and "The Women Men Don't See" (1973); and finally, Numa Shōzō's cult classic, *Kachikujin Yapū* [*Yapoo, The Human Cattle*] (1957–1959), an S/M cult novel of the "yellow race" dominated and enslaved by a white matriarchal society. See Christine L. Marran's brief but informative essay on Numa's serial works in *PAJLS* 6 (Summer 2005): 147–152, entitled "The Scape of Empire in Numa Shōzō's Science Fiction Novel *Kachikujin Yapū* (1957–1959)."

<sup>15</sup> Amano Tetsuo, "Gendai Bungaku – Sono SFteki zenei, Kurahashi Yumiko" ["Contemporary Literature: Its Science Fiction Avant-garde, Kurahashi Yumiko"] *Kokubungaku: Kaishaku to Kyōzai no Kenkyū* 8 (1982): 124–125. Modernist playwright Betsuyaku Minoru wrote the *kaisetsu* included at the end of Kurahashi's paperback version of *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*: "Han/Gariba Ryōkōki," ["The Anti/Gulliver's Travels"] 544–549 (first written in 1989):

たとえば我々は、ひとりの主人公が見知らぬ土地を訪れ、我々の全く知らない風物、もしくは文化を体験する「ものがたり」といえば、すぐ「ガリバー旅行記」のことを考える。。。。

ガリバー氏が「リリパット国」を訪れた時、我々にとってはガリバー氏が同じ仲間なのであり、「リリパット国」の方が見知らぬ異国であった。もちろんこの「ものがたり」の場合でも、P氏が「アマノン国」の浜辺にたどり着いた時点では、P氏が我々と同じ仲間であり、「アマノン国」の方が見知らぬ異国であると、われわれは思い込む。しかし、「ものがたり」が展開し、P氏が次第に「アマノン国」の内部に深く侵入しはじめると、事情が逆転し始めるのである。つまり、「アマノン国」の方が我々の知っている世界なのではないかという「不安」に、我々は襲われ始めるのだ。(547–8)

writings of Varro and Lucian, the works that defined this form of satire are known for their characteristic staging of action as dialogue and their emphasis on Symposium-like argumentation. By putting such dialogue at the center, characters and their ideas are exposed to ironic scrutiny and ruthless, cynical ridicule. (In this context, we might recall that “poison literature” advocate Kurahashi names the Amanon creator of the Thanatos medicine “Dr. Cynicos.”) In *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*, the foreigner P is a traveler in negotiations with the new people, culture, and world of Amanon so different from his own, inspiring discussions whose cross-cultural (and cross-gender) explanations joyously skewer Monokami and Amanon each in their turn more often than reductively explain them. *Amanonkoku Ōkanki* and *Sumiyakisto Q* both place emphasis on travel as the engine of storytelling itself, with the narratives moving forward in distinct episodic chapters; nonetheless, each novel begins and ends in the same place, inscribing a circularity that can be read as a satisfying closure and unity, or just as easily as its stark opposite: the frustration of meaningful narrative progress and character development in favor of an extended, circumlocutious “argument” in a Menippean mode.

#### **GOING AWAY AS GOING HOME: THE SEARCH FOR ORIGINS AND ESSENCES**

If the ending of Kurahashi’s novel tells us anything, it appears at first to be all about failure: the failure of revolutions sexual and political; the failure of imperialistic crusades; the failure of utopias; the failure of conception, both in the literal terms of the virgin birth and in the sense of the feminist ideology that a world ruled by women would be better, even a paradise compared to the hell of one dominated by men. In reversing the order of things as revolutions promise to do, the sexual revolution that established Amanon merely put women in men’s roles, repeating the same old abuses and oppression of patriarchy in familiar ways. Indeed, in historical asides, the chapters devoted to Professor Tryon and the Emperor in the heart of the novel hint that Amanon was founded by earlier visitors, men and women, escapees outcast from another planet very like Monokami. In other words, Amanon may well have its origins in the male-dominated society of a Monokami.

Kurahashi’s novel, however, found its origins in its publication in the 1980s, an illuminating context for this novel’s emergence. For one thing, Cold War rhetoric in general, but specifically Ronald Reagan’s early 1980’s language of the “evil empire” (*akuma teikoku*, 267), shapes the stand-off between the sexes depicted in the novel. And it is not irrelevant that Reagan’s close international partner was the U.K.’s

Margaret Thatcher, a “masculine” world leader often cited as evidence that more women in power would not result in a change in the status quo. Literary critic Yonaha Keiko compares the populist machinations of Eios to those of LDP power broker and scandal-ridden ex-Prime Minister Tanaka Kakuei, showing us Amanon as a caricature of 1980s Japan; after all, in both worlds slogans of *kokusaika* mask fears of globalization and opening to the world outside.<sup>16</sup> In this decade in Japan, Aoki Yayoi, a feminist proponent of eco-feminism, and Ueno Chizuko, feminist sociologist, sparred over the concept of a feminine principle as grounds for building a better, more peaceful world, with Ueno writing a book called *Can Women Save the Earth?* to refute what she deemed the essentialist ideas of Aoki.<sup>17</sup> If we were to position Kurahashi’s book into this debate we would hear how it answers Ueno’s title question, in thunder.

Little wonder that feminists have not taken up this novel, as it appears to be a scathing attack on “career women” and feminism itself. Other critics may simply find it a daunting task to handle this novel’s themes and language without being perceived as sexist and misogynist. Yonaha Keiko alone has taken up the poison-dipped sword that is Kurahashi’s satire. First repeating feminist literature scholars Komashaku Kimi and Mizuta Noriko’s call for criticism not simply to protect, but also critique, women and women’s fiction as rigorously as they have men and their literature, Yonaha then goes on to read this novel as a feminist one from which neither the career woman utopia nor the patriarchal status quo emerges completely victorious over the other. Patriarchal power belongs, she argues, to whoever thinks it up, regardless of gender.<sup>18</sup> The virgin birth experiment reveals the male envy and desire to create life as women do, and some evidence suggests that it was Monokami’s idea that created the “world” of Amanonkoku gestating as, and in, the body of the Amanon woman. In the context of Kurahashi’s story, then, women’s pursuit of their own country ultimately means the

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<sup>16</sup> Yonaha, 121.

<sup>17</sup> Aoki, Yayoi, *Feminizumu to ekoroji*. Tokyo: Shinhyōron, 1994 [expanded edition]. 上野千鶴子著, 『女は世界を救えるか』東京: 勁草書房, 1986. See interviews and discussion of the debate between these two feminists in Sandra Buckley, ed. *Broken Silence: Voices of Japanese Feminism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.

<sup>18</sup> 「フェミニズム批評 (実例) 倉橋由美子『アマノン国往還記』与那覇恵子。国文学、平成元年7月号第34巻第8号。水田宗子、『ヒロインからヒーローへ』(1982), 駒尺喜美、『魔女の論理』(1978)。See p. 121 in Yonaha.

damned pursuit of a kind of male logic, which, Yonaha argues, is in itself a feminist critique of feminism worth pondering.<sup>19</sup>

Yonaha and I concur on many points; indeed, I pick up from her insights to go in a different direction that her scholarship has enabled. But here I stress far more than she does the power of vengeful pleasure and ribald humor for women and feminist readers in such reversals as Amanon's whereby traditional male supremacy in Japan's society as represented by concepts such as *teishu kanpaku* (亭主関白) and *danson jōhi* (男尊女卑) gets both questioned and made fun of, and where women use sex for their own pleasure, putting men in their reproductive places. Failure to laugh and delight in this reversal risks a fall into either literalism or literary utilitarianism, besides reproducing the very "male logic" that needs to regulate women and their pleasures *for some end*. In other words, this is a trap for feminist literary critics, reminiscent of the old epistemological one of essentialists /constructionists: unable to see an escape from male logic and not wanting to duplicate it by celebrating a mere reversal of roles, critics find themselves dismissing the complexity of Kurahashi's novel for a safer, one-dimensional political message that reduces the novel to a woman writer's false consciousness and the work to one that is not useful for feminist ends. I want to counter this with a Kurahashi logic, one specific to her novel of ideas, the *kannen shōsetsu*. This logic will effect its own reversal in turn, overturning Monokami's overturning of Amanon's reversal. As a result, we might come to question the assumption that all reversals are necessarily mere substitutions that repeat the same mistakes, looking instead for the difference in the details and the "feminist" in the terms the novels themselves give us rather than in our own preconceived ideas born not from the text but from a world outside of it.

Certainly feminist critics, including myself, tend to advocate that society and history play vital roles in our reading of literature; yet here, with the example of Kurahashi's *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*, I propose there also be more openness and less dogmatism towards a new critical formalism. The reading of the language of fiction as fiction and literary offers something valuable to politics and to the feminist project, something that approaches to literature as simply mimetic or as simply consumer artifacts produced in time cannot; without such creativity and imagination, we risk blindness to new and unconventional ideas and insights that can only be born first in a fictional realm. Kurahashi's frequent claims to write in a space that is anti-world (*han sekai*), not just

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<sup>19</sup> Yonaha, 118, 120–1.

anti-roman, and in and of a place that is nowhere (*doko nimo nai basho*), are her attempts to breathe new power into words and life into ideas rather than allow old ones to take roots in a “reality” that actually constrains the possibilities for historical change or new vision.

Kurahashi’s essay, “Literature as Poison” (*Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku*) resonates with the feminist second wave move away from idealization and good representations and towards the possibilities of the margin and madness, even of crime. She mentions three types of novel: the popular novel grounded in the real, plausible world; the experimental anti-roman; and the novel that rejects both the real world and the conventional novel. She dismisses the first out of hand, and although she admits her admiration for the second, she concludes that she writes the third.<sup>20</sup> Set in the special world that fiction creates, weirdly parallel to the world and books we know, Kurahashi’s fiction injects a poison into reality and creates deformations that make our familiar world strange, even a little dangerous, to us. It should be clear that Kurahashi’s *kannen shōsetsu* will not give us realism or simple allegory; it will certainly not satisfy us with “positive representations.” If she deals in the marketplace of ideas, it is on their black market side, for her writing trades in taboo, the abject, the Rabelaisian, and the absurd. My sense of Kurahashi’s work is of an intellect that laughs great belly laughs at our discomfort when reading her writing, one that sees its “purpose” and that of literature in the complexity of the world and its existence inseparable from the lawless, and thereby creative, imagination.

Perhaps the medicine that P takes at his suicide exit from Amanonkoku, the タノトミン, or Thanatos sleeping drug, is this same tough medicine, a kind of antidote to the useful or happy or predictable

<sup>20</sup> From Kurahashi’s “Literature as Poison” (*Dokuyaku toshite no bungaku*):

さて、わたし自身はこの第二種の《芸術》小説制作に参加して新しい小説の発展に寄与しようというまじめな人間ではありません。わたしが今後老年の道楽として考えているのは、第一種の小説、すんわち《世界》を拒絶する。いや、本音を吐くなら、《世界》に毒をもち、狂気を感染させ、なに喰わぬ顔をしながら《世界》の皮を剥きとったり顛覆させたりすることをくわだてる文学です、まあ、それはほどごむ必要はありませんが、これは合法的殺人あるいは完全犯罪をたくらむのに似ているといえましょう。ここで、「合法的」、「完全」ということにはもちろん重要な意味があります。わたしは《世界》を拒絶するどころか、承認し、服従することから出発し、完璧な《技術》を用いて、それとさとれぬまに、《世界》の中身をすりかえなければなりません。  
(倉橋由美子、「毒薬としての文学」『毒薬としての文学：倉橋由美子エッセイ選』（講談社文芸文庫1999）：68-77。[『われらの文学21』10月1966])

ending we are trained to prefer to read (what Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* and elsewhere described as our “soma” addiction). The suicide medicine taken by the head doctor in the delivery room, unsure if it is the suicide medicine or its antidote, creates the parallel and poisonous frame story to the internal story of P’s adventures, one where P is merely the comical sexual plaything of an indifferent God-like “father” who controls his fate, with his “cause” as much a “fool’s errand” as Monokami’s experiment of a virgin birth or Amanon’s utopian feminist exclusion of men. Both worlds’ attempts to engineer their own origins threaten to take them back to that which they most want to escape or exclude.

#### WHAT IS IN THE IMPERIAL DUSTBIN OF HISTORY?

The strategic offensive of P’s Monopara Show is to spread the word of Monokami and covertly indoctrinate women into their true heterosexual natures and natural roles as women by having sex with P. *Monogamy* as an equivalency for *Monokami* (347) begins to sound a lot less like theology and more like ideology, especially as P moves further and further away from monogamy himself and closer and closer to advocating male supremacy. When P first meets and discusses political matters with Amanon historian Dr. Tryon, he comically and oh so casually allows that religion is no longer that important to him anymore: since he does not believe *that* fervently in Monokamikyō, he claims he is able to bend the rules a bit, especially when it comes to pleasures while on Amanon, doing as the Romans do, so to speak.<sup>21</sup> In exposing P’s blind hypocrisy about the means to the ends of his mission, Kurahashi’s satire harnesses the conjoined rhetoric of religion and imperialism, summoning the examples of the Crusades and Christianity in the justification of invasion and colonialism, but all finally is in the service of her novel’s representation of “the war between the sexes,” the war of these two

<sup>21</sup> 「なるほどね」とトライオンは言った。「モノカミ教の精神からすると、カミに酔い、カミへの信仰で満腹するのが正しい道であって、口腹の楽しみを追求するというようなことは論外なんじゃないかな」

「おっしゃる通りです。私はもともと生え抜きの聖職者ではないということもあって、その点に関してはモノカミ教の思想にそれほど忠実にはなれませんね。いわゆる禁欲主義は私の性に合いませんし、生活の充実、楽しみを蔑視すべきではないと思っています。アマノンに来て以来、その考え方はますます固くなってきたようです」

「つまりアマノンで美味料理と快適な生活を知って墮落なさったというわけですか」

「墮落のモノカミ流定義によれば、ですな」(Chapter 11, 248-9)

worlds. This is no clichéd “Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus” popular culture version of the heterosexual universe, however.

Gendered metaphors that describe international relations between countries are hardly new, being a handy and insidious way to “naturalize” relations of power (Ueno Chizuko, for one, has touched on this as the “marriage” between the US and Japan in “Are the Japanese Feminine?” as well as in *Gender and Nationalism*).<sup>22</sup> But the wrestling match between the two rivals P and Eios, or penis/sperm P and ova Eios, reproduces this discursive construct to both comical and instructive ends. For what is best illustrated in the offensive Monopara sex shows of P is the comical failure of monogamy/Monokami as P gets caught up in an orgy of sexual acts instead, sex that is perfectly scripted and performed as just that, an act. Even his struggle with, then final conquering rape of, Eios is a performance to a crowd of spectators cheering and betting on the contestants.

What is P’s delight, that the Emperor of Amanon turns out to be male, is surely but another disappointment for those who would wish a women’s country to have female leadership and gods. Yet this chapter makes clear what we already know about Japan’s Emperor in the postwar period, that he serves only a symbolic function. Moreover, Amanon’s Emperor never appears in social ritual except on his birthday, otherwise always secluded and kept from public view. He is irrelevant to Amanon society as it has evolved under the women’s rule; despite this, Professor Tryon remains invested in restoring him to his proper place as the real father of the country and enlists P’s help. In telling P of Amanon history as he has both reconstructed and imagined it, Dr. Tryon actually lets P know that the Emperor is immortal—more an idea than human, the Emperor as family-state system itself (*kazoku kokka*) is what Dr. Tryon actually teaches P. He teaches P the terms of male-only succession and pure blood lineage (for example, 「代々人は替わっても一つの継続する人格であり」; 「長子相続」、420). But it is Dr. Tryon’s great theory that the Emperor has his origins, and therefore those of Amanonkoku, in the nation’s first founders 1000 years ago who had fled from another world, a world Tryon is convinced was Monokamikoku.

And yet, this Emperor is not simply immortal but *an* Immortal, it appears; that is, he is of those people on Amanon who live forever,

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<sup>22</sup> See Buckley’s interview and translation of Ueno’s essay in *Broken Silence*. With the same title in Japanese, see the English version: Ueno Chizuko, *Gender and Nationalism*. Trans. Beverley Yamamoto. Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2004.



unable to die and suffering the effects of age and boredom in a life without end. How can this lower class be connected to the Emperor with his divine status? After all, we read about the Immortals near Amanon's old capital of KIOTO in a village on a secluded mountain, living in trashy, ghetto-like conditions. There, they are treated like animals, living in their own filth, kept away from society by a tall stone wall.

“Somehow, this is creepy,” muttered P.

“What do you mean?”

“Well, the truth is it makes me think of a prison wall. Or else, the reformatory of some monastic asylum or mental institution.”

“Perhaps it is meant to prevent people from getting in, or those inside from getting out,” Himeko said.

“Basically, it is a quarantine,” the guide casually added. “Over there is the gate. There appears to be no guard, however...”

Upon closer inspection, it turned out that the strong steel gate had a rusty lock on it, but for some reason the key was in it. P tipped the guide and after asking that their bags from the Mt. Senzan hotel be sent ahead, here the guide left them. (376)

P and Himeko all-too-blithely comment on the forced containment that keeps the Immortals well within the pale and allows others like themselves to move beyond it. That the key is in the lock to the Immortals' prison insinuates that no one wants to go in and that no one is trying to get them out, either. As “quarantine,” it suggests contamination, or perhaps more accurately, fear of it by the outside world. More than anything, it appears to be a world about which the rest of the world of Amanon wants to remain ignorant.

P and Himeko leave the “lost world” of the Immortals at the end of this chapter entitled “*Hikyō tanpō*” (秘境探訪). The word *hikyō* literally means unexplored territory, but its usage connotes, for example, the Amazons, a legendary civilization cordoned off from history's present, even lost to it. The resonance, or contrast, between Amazon and Amanon, both terms for worlds dominated by women, is not coincidental (despite Dr. Tryon's dismissal of any connection, 232–3); that is, *ama* as woman in the former case existed (*zon*, 存) but as the latter does not (*non*, as in the French “no”). The wordplay cuts both ways: Kurahashi condemns the “male” Amanon women with such language even as she

implies too that women do not have to mimic men to be Amazons, strong women and leaders in society.

P meets and interviews an Immortal through an interpreter but the Immortal was so ancient and decayed that it was impossible to tell its gender. Kurahashi relays the whole conversation scene to us as if it were the script of a play. Presented as a mixture of kanji and katakana without any hiragana, the Immortal's way of talking is meant to seem "ancient" and foreign. All of the people of Amanon have katakana names and their language is in katakana, too, rendering it as foreign compared to P's more modern Japanese, enough so to require a lengthy, detailed glossary at the back of the book. While one might read this extensive use of katakana in Amanon to mean the invasion of a foreign Western feminism into Japan, it is more persuasive in my view to see P and Monokami as the foreign invaders, and the katakana as Japan's native language used primarily by women. The use of katakana in the novel then reminds us of the traces of a lost history and a devalued feminine culture in Japan: the *Amazon* locked away and abjected within a modern *Amanon*/Japan.

When P visits the Immortal ghetto, just two chapters before the Emperor chapter, he and Himeko notice that the back door to the village (*shuraku*, 聚落) of the Immortals leads directly to KIOTO, and by implication, to the Emperor as well:

When we opened the gate and stepped out, there was the town laid out below us.

"It's KIOTO," Himeko cried out in welcome surprise.

"We climbed Mt. Senzan and went deep into the lost enclave of Immortals, so how can it be that KIOTO is right here where we are leaving it?"

"It appears that the back door to the Immortals' home directly connects to KIOTO. Who knew we were so close to home all along." (376)<sup>23</sup>

The paradoxical representation of the Emperor and his origins in Chapter 16, as simultaneously from Monokami (rendering him God-like for P and Tryon as evidence of male origins) and an Immortal (the despised

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<sup>23</sup> 扉を開けて外にでると、そこは人家の立ち並んだ街だった。「キョトだわ」とヒメコが懐かしそうな声を上げた。「仙山からさらに奥の秘境まで踏みこんで、出たところがいきなりキョトの街とはどういうことだろう」「イモタル郷の裏口がキョトに接していた、ということでしょ。帰りはこんなに近くて助かったわ」(Chapter 15, 376)

underbelly of Amanon society whose origins and language are more ambiguous because repressed), suggests that the Emperor represents indeed the secret of a different class, gender, ethnic or national origin. As Tryon claims, then, is the Emperor one of those original men and women who were oppressed and fled from Monokami, suggesting in turn those bearers to Amanon/Japan of culture and ethnic origins from elsewhere, perhaps Korea or China?<sup>24</sup> Or then again, as the representations of the Immortals' *shuraku* so strongly hints, could his origins be in Japan's former untouchable castes before they were officially designated such in the Edo Period, the *eta* (穢多, literally "pollution abundant") and *hinin* (非人 non-human), later known as *burakumin*?

Certainly, *buraku* writer Nakagami Kenji's story "Fushi" (「不死」, or, "The Immortal"), which appeared in 1980, resonates with Kurahashi's term for the excluded, the trash of society. The mountain Senzan (仙山, suggesting a holy mountain retreat) and the hilly area of Taizan where the Immortals live evokes places such as Mt. Koya and/or the mountainous areas of legendary Kumano or other sites with which one associates, for example, itinerant priests, *hijiri*, *marebito*, and *mikō* (simultaneously divine vehicles of the gods' "spirit" but also outcastes). Indeed, one of the most famous of wandering priests mentioned in this particular Nakagami story from his Kumano collection (「*Kumanoshu*」 1984) is Kūkai (774–835), also known as Kōbō Dashi. This historical and legendary priest informs the various hermit-like travelers among the stories of Izumi Kyoka, Nakagami, and Kurahashi in being a wandering religious figure on a sacred mountain who encounters there another "immortal" world of beings, a figure who himself is all too "earthly" and flawed as human (in Nakagami's case, he is criminal, and in Kurahashi's, a sexual profligate). It is not insignificant for Kurahashi's story that

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<sup>24</sup> The current Emperor Akihito on his 68th birthday publicly asserted that there is Korean blood in the imperial lineage, a subject greeted with mostly silence in Japan and welcomed in South Korea as a step towards greater reconciliation of their past histories.

"Invasion and migration from China and Korea continued until the 9th century, by which time nearly one-third of the aristocratic clans in the Chinese-style Heian capital (present-day Kyoto) were of Korean or Chinese ethnicity. Immigrants were well received as they were recognized as bearers of a superior cultural tradition, not only as nobility but as craftsmen, priests, and educated professionals. Their traditions in literature, art, and religion were absorbed and became a foundation on which much of Japanese culture was based" (George Sansom, *A History of Japan to 1334*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1958, as paraphrased and cited on page 1 in Stephen Murphy-Shigematsu, "Multiethnic Japan and the Monoethnic Myth." *MELUS* 18.4 [Winter 1993]: 63–80).

Kukai is credited with developing the *kana* syllabary, the written Japanese language itself, as well as founding the Shingon sect of Buddhism for which Mt. Koya serves as holy mountain. The patronage of Emperor Saga, who gave him the temple Toji at Kyoto's southern gate, resonates with Kurahashi's creation of an Emperor whose back door leads to the Immortals. In this way, the highest (the Emperor's home as one close to heaven, *kōtenbara*, 高天原) and the lowest (that home as that of the dead or even hell, *yomi* [黄泉/ヨミ] or *myōkai* [冥界]), blur together so that even P feels the vertigo in the concept (cf. 426). Kurahashi's "anti-world" fiction about a female civilization that rejects the Emperor shares more than a little with Nakagami's critiques of *monogatari* and the Emperor system as dependent on mixed origins that have been disavowed and abjected in order to create patriarchal Japan's official "culture" and its "family state" with unbroken lineage in pure blood. Just how radical such critiques of the Emperor system are can be judged by more direct, and banned, fictions in the postwar period that depict violence against the Emperor and result in violence in real life, such as the infamous cases of Fukazawa Shichirō's *Fūryū Mutan* (1960) and Oe Kenzaburō's *Seiji Shōnen Shisu/Sebenteen* (1961).

The description of the Immortal *shuraku* as a trash dump filled with the decaying ancient ruins of the Immortals themselves evokes the tombs of emperors past in Japan, particularly those *kofun* such as the largely unexcavated Daisen *kofun* that have been conjectured to include evidence of Korean or Chinese presence in the imperial lineage (cf. 420). Japan's "native" outcastes, on the other hand, were created to deal with the dirty jobs of slaughtering animals, handling filth, burning the dead, and guarding the criminal and imprisoned. At the very end of the Immortal chapter, we are reminded of this:

Closing the gate behind him as he walked out, P noticed some lettering on the gatepost.

"KIOTO Trash Dump Trespassing Forbidden." (377)

Here, "trash dump" derives from *jinkai shoriba* (塵芥処理場), where the character for *chiri* or *jin* refers to the dirty and to trash generally, but as with *jinkyō* (塵境) or *jinsei* (塵世) connotes as well the sensual, earthly world, where abjected outcastes form an "other world" within the world of Japan. Apparently, the lost traces of another civilization as implied in the word *hikyō* refer not only to the Immortals who are dusty rotting traces of the past but also to the secret of Amanon's origins just beyond our reach. Kurahashi almost laughingly warns us that not only the

“aberrant” Amanon, but the apparently “normative” P and Dr. Tryon as well, will not find what they seek there. By the end of the novel, certainly, the state as *kokutai* has become a *botai*, a maternal body, one whose conception is figured as ideologically pure but which, practically speaking, required an incestuous rape.<sup>25</sup>

#### FAILED CONCEPTIONS, GROTESQUE ABORTIONS

So far, we have explored ideas of dystopia and failure in this novel. We have touched on the thematization of failure in a female-dominated society not at all free from men, male logic, or patriarchal values. Feminism, we have seen, is itself a failed conception, implied by the abortion at the end of the novel and the murder of the Amanon maternal body, the *botai* (母体). And yet, what if we asked instead what, if anything, was successful? Or rather, how was P successful in his mission?

One way to begin to answer this is to foreground the notion of experiment. The Epilogue reveals that P’s journey has been inside the body of the Amanon woman all along, and that he himself has merely been a tool in the theocracy’s medical experiment of trying to create a virgin birth. The novel then too, this record of a round-trip journey, has been an experiment in giving life to ideas, the very project of the *kannen shōsetsu*. With the virgin birth, Monokami tries to erase heterosexual relations from reproduction, treating the Amanon woman as a mere vessel for the “spirit” whose material form is sperm. In this way, of course, Monokami ideology is no more “natural” than is Amanon’s. They are more parallel worlds, their political and social structures only a *seeming* reversal into opposites, but actually each using similar reproductive technologies as ever greater means of control over each other. The final upending of the gender system away from Amanon and back to Monokami at the end of the story stresses not simply that revolution alone is no guarantee of successful change, but that it may inscribe a vicious circle. That the sacrificed *kokutai/botai* of the Amanon woman at the end of the story is the daughter or daughter-in-law of the Archbishop of Monokami might remind us of not only the body of the

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<sup>25</sup> I wish to thank Nishida Kiriko for pointing out that the theme of father-daughter incest so common in Kurahashi’s work (see, for example, *Seishōjo* [Holy Maiden]), may also mark this scene in the Epilogue. The Amanon woman is only indicated as the daughter of the Archbishop, and there is no mention of her husband or how she got pregnant in the first place. Ostensibly, this is due to the “experiment” in immaculate conception, but Ms. Nishida’s interpretation provokes this more literal presentation of events.

*mikō* who was herself despised as outcaste and female and yet whose body served as a vehicle for the word of the gods, but also the Emperor of Amanon, whose origins may be in the early outcast(e)s, male and female, of Monokami.<sup>26</sup> In other words, these two worlds are connected. The way they are connected is evident in the figure of the Amanon woman who is daughter to the Monokami Archbishop, the violence of the sexual amalgamation / mongrelization of different “races.” They are also connected via the trope of a vaginal tunnel, a sort of worm hole in this novel’s time travel, where the excluded of society, the outcaste Immortals and *hinin*, Monokami men in Amanon and Amanon women in Monokami, consort with the highest and most guarded levels of society, Prime Minister, Emperor, and High Priest. The well into which Dr. Tryon throws himself in suicide that serves as an umbilical cord of nutrition to the Emperor with its “holy water,” and the cave and tunnel-like space in a writhing living body like an animal’s through which P and his party go to reach the Immortals both suggest a larger picture, the landscape of the maternal body where Monokami and Amanon meet.

With the Epilogue, we learn that the story born of the Amanon woman—this novel, in fact—may not be the failure we first thought. After all, P is no longer really Monokami’s P but rather Amanon’s P: as we have seen, he never strongly believed in his religion/Monokami’s ideology, the very mission he was sent on, and this “flaw” in P explains why he alone was able to penetrate the barrier to Amanon. P is also not really a P in the sense that he can no longer use his “natural” penis but rather has an artificial phallus, fully in the mode of Amanon, we might say.

The Amanon woman is sacrificed literally to the experiment of the virgin birth (an allusion to Christianity), but more broadly her death represents the violence of sacrifice in religion’s name. As in Kurahashi’s “The Party” and *The Adventures of Sumiyakist Q*, religion lends its zealous passion to the greater ends of mocking and satirizing the unquestioning blind pursuit of political “causes.”<sup>27</sup> Feminism is certainly

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<sup>26</sup> モノカミ教団大司教の娘に当たるアマノン夫人の容体が急変したのは最初の陣痛がやってきた直後のことで、今回の「アマノン夫人処女懐妊計画」の責任者であるインリ博士は、この段階で計画が不首尾に終わったことを悟った。(534) 「母体とは誰のことか忘れてもらっちゃ困るね。そちらの方には問題があることは最初からわかっていたじゃないか。それだからこそ、こんな一か八かの方法を採らざるをえなかったんだ。」(536)

<sup>27</sup> The blind and zealous belief of utopian or student revolutionaries, as in “The Party” or *Sumiyakisto Q*, is blatantly satirized in Kurahashi’s work, and as in those works here too the ideology of feminism in Amanon is described as

one such cause here but male supremacy is another. That is to say, male supremacy as the universal “human” is what P actually propagates in this novel, which takes its comical form in “seeds” being sown in orgies, never religion per se. Religion simply provides the needed charge of motivated “enthusiasm” to P’s thoroughly ideological task. As his Symbolic Phallus at the end of the novel suggests, P’s imperial spaceship of sperm is rather less a figure for any real penis or sperm just as the “show” of Monopara advertised so conspicuously, but rather, more the vessel for carrying his ideology of universal (male) humanism. We might recall at this juncture paintings and Christian stories of Mary’s Annunciation, where the Word/“spirit” of God is inseminated in her open ear by His proxy angel and via the sexual organ of the trumpet lily.

Could we not say then that it is the *kannen* of blind belief in male supremacy that is the butt of dark laughter at the end of this novel, effecting Kurahashi’s final upset of the Monokami upset of Amanon’s upside-down feminist world? After all, it is the Amanon-like P accompanied by Lolita/Abe Sada-esque Himeko, the ex-politician Miyakonos, and the eunuch Kaganon who together represent the possibility, and so-called “perversion,” of multiple genders and sexualities; in other words, in the eyes of Monokami, they are “an abortion,” an unspeakably monstrous idea that is its own crime. This idea is born just as Amanon, an artificial world, is seemingly destroyed by a “natural” disaster and just before the Amanon woman is destroyed for having had a “natural” birth by “artificial,” “immaculate” means. That is, P and his crew do not make it back because it is impossible for them to be conceived as the progeny of Monokami ideology and survive: in this sense, it is Monokami ideology that fails to conceive in the metafictional terms of this *kannen shōsetsu*. And if indeed Amanon’s very origins are in Monokami, then certainly Amanon represents one possible, if failed, experiment itself, but it does not mean that all such “conceptions” of a better system of gender relations are necessarily doomed to the same

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religious passion and as mindless ants and bees busy in a hive (蟻、働き蜂; cf. 237, 258; also Eios is described as a Queen Bee) quite unable to see beyond the immediate needs of family, food, and daily life. (On Amanon, as Prof. Tryon tells us, the women have no interest in history, and therefore do not understand diplomacy or the need for a military; as Eios will later say, women have no interest in ideas [or *kannen*], either). Amanon may have its origins in the belief systems of an ordinary Monokami system but it is also accepting of religions of all types, a sort of pantheism, and has a more flexible morality as Amanon’s liberated sexuality for pleasure instead of reproduction suggests. Monokami, on the other hand, brooks no disbelief in the monogamous relation of believers to the phallogocentric male authority of its one God.

Epilogue. In a figure consummately Kurahashi-esque and grotesque, the monstrous freak unable to survive in a Monokami world is the hope for a better future in this novel.

Yet, do not misunderstand: Kurahashi is ruthless in her depiction of Amanon's politicians and bureaucrats as ugly old mannish women, to a degree that even Tokyo Governor Ishihara Shintarō could appreciate. As you may recall, Ishihara in 2001 infamously declared that old women, without beauty or reproductive function, have nothing to offer society (生殖力のないババアは無駄). That P does not recognize these women as women for more than 200 pages into the novel, assuming that they are important and male but look and smell like old women is insulting; and yet, this representation is a double-edged sword since it does not merely insult women who try to be men (ostensibly, "feminists") but also insults Japanese male leaders and politicians for being that which they disparage as weak and unnecessary: women. When the term "woman" is derogatory in society at large, to pretend it is celebratory when used for the weak and powerless, or somehow "feminine," Kurahashi implies, is laughable. The paradox of feminist misogyny crystallizes at moments like this

Women in Amanon speak in first person *boku* but their names end in *ko* to suggest a feminine name, with an *s* added when the girls get older to make it *kos* and thereby evoke perhaps Greek names and the feminist idealization of Sappho's Lesbos (just as an allusion to Amazon society can be found in the country name, Amanon). And yet, despite her creation of "strong women" in defiance of an Ishihara-style attack on useless older women, Kurahashi refuses to show only one side, also portraying female government leaders as seduced far too easily by P's penis; that is, while Amanon's lesbian relationships between older women and younger secretaries are only hinted at, P's hetero sexual adventures on his show and with Miyakonos, as well as pederastic relationship with his own beautiful secretary, Himeko, are exaggerated for us in such detail as to be both pornographic and comical.

Just when we, together with P, learn that Amanon is a woman's country, Dr. Tryon also tells us that in ancient Amanon language, the *on* of *onna* (woman) originally referred to males, especially to effeminate men or men who acted like women; however, at some point, women gained power and became the men (女が男性化すること), taking on for themselves and their country the name of *Amanon* (232). The lectures of Professor Tryon, as with those of everyone else in the novel, have to be taken with a grain of salt but that does not mean his words can be ignored. If there are no "true" women on Amanon, it is hard to find any true men, either, despite the comic fun Kurahashi has in making P the



exception—the only healthy, virile man on a planet of women. In the end we see, then, Amanon is, as *Ama* = heaven [天] and *non* = no suggests, quite literally, no heaven, for either women or men in Kurahashi's depiction. *Ama*, after all, means not only heaven or nuns or female divers, but also a colloquial, derogatory term for women in general.<sup>28</sup> But I suppose that my main point so far has been who would go to a Kurahashi work and ask for heaven anyway?

#### THE MOUSE'S ROAR

In conclusion, we might ask what this novel says to Japan, feminist literary criticism, and gender politics. First of all, it says, I think, that Yonaha Keiko is right, and this is a feminist novel that critiques feminism by drawing an anti-feminist picture. In doing so, this work challenges those who cannot reconcile misogynist representations and feminist literary objectives to ask specific questions of each work they analyze before imposing on it templates of their own gender needs or political “causes.” Critics’ failure to recognize this in Kurahashi suggests how fragile feminist scholarship and thinking still is, particularly in Japan, where only a few decades ago the women’s lib meaning of “feminism” in Japan did not refer to women at all, but rather to men who were “nice” to women (consider P’s running amuck in Amanon from this angle!). And yet, academic feminism has gained some foothold in figures like women’s historian Takemure Itsue, sociologist Ueno Chizuko, academic harassment pioneer Kotani Mari, and queer and feminist literary theory scholar Takemura Kazuko, among so many others, and especially in literature fields pioneered by Mizuta Noriko where gender studies now is everywhere evident.

However, in recent years, we see a growing backlash against women, feminists, and gender education, represented most strikingly by Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s task force on gender equality [男女共同参画]<sup>29</sup>

<sup>28</sup> It is important to note that the novel plays among these possible signifiers for *ama*, not resting on any one of them. The novel begins and ends, for example, with the fisherwomen and divers who discover P on the shore after his spacecraft crashes and when he departs. Moreover, “the eyes are the window of the soul,” it is said, and the language of the soul evoked by the term etymologically (as in the French *âme*, a language which Kurahashi studied) also comes up in the emphasis on eyes blue and red (the lakes of Mt. Taizan, 219, 530) or animal- or snake-like eyes through which the “other world” can be seen (366).

<sup>29</sup> Government policy initiatives, legal text, mission statements, and affiliated politicians for the Basic Law for a Gender Equal Society can be found in both Japanese and English, beginning at this government site: <http://www.gender.go.jp/index.html>.

However progressive it looks on the face of it, in reality, the task force has been part of a broader effort to condemn and question sex education and so-called “gender-free” speech and gender studies while resurrecting ideas of *otokorasshisa* and *onnarasshisa* as distinctively Japanese cultural and family values. It is part and parcel of the contemporary panic that women are not marrying enough or having enough children, mixed with a strong political current that wants to teach patriotism, to force women to choose between parenting and work, and seeks to revise Article 9 of the Constitution. Feminists and activists against Constitutional revision warn of similarities in today’s rhetoric to prewar “*umeyō, fuyaseyō*” sloganeering as its complements Abe’s regime calls for increased independence, strength, and “masculinization” (*dokuritsu no kaifuku*), all in the context too of Japan’s moves toward increased militarization and US-Japan base realignments. The hasty revision of the Fundamental Law of Education [教育基本法] in December 2006, together with current efforts to rush through legal procedures for revision of the Constitution, amply support these charges against the Abe regime.

A few more contemporary examples speak for themselves: (1) There was the Kokubunji case of feminist Ueno Chizuko last year, one in which she was dropped from a speaking engagement at a municipal site for fear she would use the term “gender-free,” a term which has been unofficially banned by the Tokyo Metropolitan Education Board, even though she was not scheduled to speak on gender issues at all. (2) Prime Minister Abe’s vacillation in recognizing the so-called “comfort women” and the more sordid aspects of Japan’s history, contrasting so sharply to his concern instead for a “Beautiful Japan” and elevating “pride” in Japan’s youth, is troubling to say the least. (3) Article 772 of the Meiji Civil Code as it conflicts with the revision of national marriage laws came into focus early this year: in short, the time to remarry after divorce was shortened from six months to 100 days; however, Civil Code 772 states that any child born within 300 days after divorce or separation, even if biologically demonstrable otherwise, will be the child of the woman’s previous husband. Interesting to notice for us reading Kurahashi today is that the very term for unauthorized union outside of marriage seen in the Meiji Civil Code is the same *Amanonkoku Ōkanki* uses to refer to taboo heterosexual relations: *yagō* (野合). (4) Most infamously, that the Labor Minister Yanagisawa Hakuo could, to international ridicule and feminist renunciation at home, describe women’s role in society as *umu kikai*, or birthing machines, and keep his job, makes the “rental wombs” of Amanon once again, unfortunately, as relevant in the first decade of this new century as were Huxley’s in *Brave New World* in the early 20th (産

む機械、装置の数は決まっているのだから、あとは一人頭で頑張っても  
らうしかない)。We will refrain from more than mentioning his proclivity  
to count women by the “head,” as if cattle.

As Audre Lorde wrote a long time ago, “the master’s tools will  
never dismantle the master’s house.”<sup>30</sup> And yet, critics and readers will  
fall into the gender trap Kurahashi lays for strictly doctrinaire feminists  
or male supremacists if they begin by dismantling a house that is not  
there. Kurahashi Yumiko’s house of fiction begins in negation and  
deconstruction, and moves in the rambling Menippean satire of  
Symposium-like dialogue that leaves all its characters exposed to  
ridicule’s harsh elements, finally leaving the reader no point of view to  
trust, save her own. As the saying alluded to in Kurahashi’s final chapter  
title “*Daizan no odou*” (大山の鳴動)<sup>31</sup> implies, religious and political  
missions sure stir up a lot of fuss but often turn out to be mere molehills,  
not mountains—a mouse that roars, not a lion. In *Amanonkoku Ōkanki*,  
Kurahashi shows us that it takes a *kannen shōsetsu* to spawn the now  
monstrous idea that might be tomorrow’s truly revolutionary one. Or  
then again, she may be more interested in the powerful circuits in which  
discourses travel and become mobilized, the better to point out the  
paradoxes, vicious circles, and limitations of all ideological causes, be  
they feminist, political, religious—even novelistic.

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<sup>30</sup> Audre Lorde, “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.”  
*Sister/Outsider: Essays & Speeches*. New York: The Crossing Press, 1984.  
110–113.

<sup>31</sup> 「タイザンの鳴動」＝大山鳴動して鼠一匹。前ぶれの騒ぎばかりが大きくて、  
実際の結果の小さいことのたとえ。Not a mountain, just a molehill. Literally, this  
saying is “A mountain that roars like a lion but turns out to be only a mouse.”