

AKUTAGAWA AND THE *KIRISHITANMONO*: THE EXOTICIZATION OF A  
BARBARIAN RELIGION AND THE ACCLAMATION OF MARTYRDOM

by

PEDRO T. BASSOE

A THESIS

Presented to the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures  
and the Graduate School of the University of Oregon  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

June 2012

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

Student: Pedro T. Bassoe

Title: Akutagawa and the *Kirishitanmono*: The Exoticization of a Barbarian Religion and the Acclamation of Martyrdom

This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures by:

Dr. Jason P. Webb	Chair
Dr. Thomas Glynne Walley	Member
Dr. Mark Unno	Member

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research & Innovation/Dean of the Graduate School
-----------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

Degree awarded June 2012

© 2009 Pedro T. Basso

## THESIS ABSTRACT

Pedro Thiago Ramos Bassoe

Master of Arts

Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures

June 2012

Title: Akutagawa and the *Kirishitanmono*: The Exoticization of a Barbarian Religion and the Acclamation of Martyrdom

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, one of the most widely read and translated authors of the Taishō period, wrote some two dozen short stories centered on the theme of Christianity during his brief career. In this paper, I examine these works, known as *kirishitanmono*, both in the context of the author's oeuvre and the intellectual environment of his day. The *kirishitanmono* are examined for a pervasive use of obscure language and textual density which serves to exoticize Christianity and frame it as an essentially foreign religion. This religion becomes a metaphor for European ideology, which is criticized for its incompatibility with East Asian traditions and, in turn, presented as a metaphor for the impossibility of intercultural dialogue. Finally, I examine the image of the martyr, as presented in both the *kirishitanmono* and other religious stories, in which the convictions of martyrs are elevated as a pure form of ideology in defiance of modernity.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Pedro Thiago Ramos Bassoe

### GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon  
Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana

### DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, Japanese Literature, 2012, University of Oregon  
Bachelor of Arts, Anthropology, 2010, Ball State University  
Bachelor of Arts, Japanese, 2010, Ball State University

### AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Meiji and Taishō Era literature  
Exoticism in Intercultural Exchange

### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, Eugene, Oregon, 2010-2012

Tutor, Anthropology and Japanese, Muncie, Indiana, 2009-2010

Teacher's Assistant, Japanese, Muncie, Indiana, 2009

### GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Foreign Languages and Area Studies Scholarship, U.S. Department of Education,  
2011-2012

Critical Language Scholarship, U.S. Department of State, 2011

Alan Wolfe Memorial Scholarship, University of Oregon, 2010-2011

Joe and Carol Trimmer Award for Outstanding Honor's Thesis, Ball State  
University, 2010.

Burkhardt Scholarship for Excellency in Modern Languages, Ball State  
University, 2010.

Asian Language Scholarship, Ball State University, 2009.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Jason Webb for his inspiration as a teacher and scholar, genuine support as a mentor, and insistence that I aim high with my educational goals. I hope to follow in his footsteps as I continue my academic life. I thank Professor Glynn Walley for his patient reviews of this manuscript, his helpful revisions and suggestions, and the time he devoted to helping me fine-tune my thesis. I thank Professor Mark Unno for confronting me with areas in my scholarship that needed improvement, pushing me into gear, and helping me follow through to become a more-well rounded student and individual. I thank Professor Maram Epstein for facilitating my ability to carry out my studies at the University of Oregon and for the time and work she devotes to the students in the EALL department. I also would like to thank all of the other extraordinary professors at the University who have mentored me and pushed me to think in innovative ways about culture, language, and modernity.

For my mother who gave her all to support us, my father who always took us out on adventures, my wife who always reminds me to enjoy the little things in life, and my son, we are all waiting to see your beautiful face.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION: THE SONG OF THE HERETIC: AKUTAGAWA RYŪNOSUKE'S <i>KIRISHITANMONO</i> .....	1
II. THE EXOTIC LANDS OF THE CHRISTIAN BARBARIANS: "SAMAYOERU YUDAYABITO" AND "KIRISHITOHORO SHŌNINDEN" .....	22
III. THREE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE DEVIL: "TABAKO TO "AKUMA," "AKUMA," AND "RUSHIHERU" .....	47
IV. THE GODS LAUGH AS THE PEOPLE FAIL TO UNDERSTAND: "KAMIGAMI NO BISHŌ" AND "OSHINO" .....	79
V. AKUTAGAWA AS A MAN OF FAITH: MARTYR STORIES .....	102
VI. CONCLUSION: THE DEATH OF A RATIONAL MAN.....	126
REFERENCES CITED.....	134



## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION: THE SONG OF THE HERETIC: AKUTAGAWA

#### RYŪNOSUKE'S *KIRISHITANMONO*

The magic of the Christian *Deus*,  
The *capitão* of the black ships,  
From the strange country of the red-haired barbarians,  
The red-colored *vidro*, the sharp scent of the *anjelier*,  
The barbarians' woven stripes of *São Tome*,  
And the spirits, the *arak* and the *vinho tinto*

- Kitahara Hakushū, *The Secret Song of the Heretic*<sup>1</sup>

In his final days, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke claimed to have fallen in love with Jesus Christ. In “The Man from the West” (“Saihō no hito,” 1927)<sup>2</sup>, an essay he penned just months prior to his suicide, he wrote “As I became a biographer of the Westerner and his religion, I soon found myself falling love with Christ.<sup>3</sup> I cannot observe Christ today as though a passive onlooker standing by the wayside.” As he lay in bed during the last few months of his life, contemplating an intentional overdose on prescription barbiturates, he kept a copy of the Bible on his nightstand which he frequently studied and annotated heavily in red ink.<sup>4</sup> In his suicide note, titled “A Letter to a Dear Friend” (“Aru kyūyū he

---

<sup>1</sup> Kitahara Hakushū, *Kitahara Hakushū zenshū*, Vol.1 (Iwanami Shoten, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*, Vol. 9 (Iwanami Shoten, 1978), 230-256. Hereafter referred to as ARZ.

<sup>3</sup> All translations of writings by Akutagawa in the present paper are the work of the author unless otherwise noted.

<sup>4</sup> Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: Jitsuzō to kyojō* (Yōyōsha, 1988), 216-217.

okuru shuki,” 1927)<sup>5</sup> and addressed to fellow writer Kume Masao, he mentioned that he chose to end his life just like Jesus had done before him.

These curious references to Christ were by no means unprecedented in the writings of the quintessential author of the Taishō period. Akutagawa began publishing stories about Christianity as early as 1916 with the short piece “Tobacco and the Devil” (“Tabako to akuma”)<sup>6</sup>, followed by “Dr. Ogata Ryosai: Memorandum” (“Ogata ryosai oboegaki”)<sup>7</sup> in 1917, though posthumous manuscripts suggest that he actually began writing about Christian themes at an even earlier time.<sup>8</sup> By the end of his life, Akutagawa had written roughly two dozen short stories centered on the theme of Christianity in Japan, collectively referred to as *kirishitanmono*.<sup>9</sup> However, the significance of his interest in Christianity has been debated in the scholarly literature in both Japan and America in the decades following his death. Preeminent Akutagawa scholar Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi calls Akutagawa’s interest in the Bible purely “educational” or “cultural” (*kyōyōteki*)<sup>10</sup> while biographer Beongcheon Yu writes that he was attracted to the “pervasive spiritual intensity” of Christianity.<sup>11</sup> Akutagawa’s engagement with the

---

<sup>5</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 275-280. For English see Seiji Lippit, Jorge Luis Borges and Sakai Kazuya, Akiko Inoue.

<sup>6</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 275-286. For English see Glenn W. Shaw.

<sup>7</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 304-309. For English see Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra, Jay Rubin.

<sup>8</sup> Sekiguchi, *Jitsuzō to kyojō*, 211.

<sup>9</sup> An exact number of *kirishitanmono* is difficult to produce because some examples exist only as posthumous manuscripts and others are fragmentary in nature. In addition, some stories present Christianity as a minor or secondary theme but do not seem to fit into the category of *kirishitanmono*. I have chosen to focus on those stories that are frequently discussed specifically as *kirishitanmono* in Japanese academic studies of Akutagawa.

<sup>10</sup> Sekiguchi, *Jitsuzō to kyojō*, 216-217.

<sup>11</sup> Beongcheon Yu, *Akutagawa: An Introduction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972), 32.

Christian religion is indeed a complex matter and most accurately reflects the opinions of both of these scholars.

As a whole, Akutagawa's *kirishitanmono* interact with Christianity on three major levels. First, they exoticize the religion and present it as a barbaric European mythology. Rather than heralding Europe as a stronghold of rational thinking, Akutagawa pictures the European people as primitive believers in magic and legends. He intensely focuses on the most foreign aspects of Christianity, such as Latin and Semitic names and mysterious religious rituals, and thus frames Christianity as being a product of the Other, or in this case, the European barbarian. This leads to the second major theme, and that is criticism of Christianity as a system which is incompatible with Japan on both a spiritual and cultural level. As a spiritual practice, it lacks the profundity of expression found in Buddhism, and as a cultural practice, it is impossible to understand in the context of Japanese tradition. However, this aspect stands in contradiction to the third theme, and that is a positive appraisal of the Christian doctrine and its adherents. While the fantastical and critical natures of Akutagawa's Christian fiction have been widely identified by scholars, interpretations of his philosophical relationship with Christianity have seen little consensus in the academic literature. Yet, when read in total, the *kirishitanmono* clearly display a positive assessment of certain Christian ideals. Specifically, Akutagawa admiringly depicts martyrs and their willingness to sacrifice everything for their beliefs. In these stories, martyr characters are frequently set in opposition to the logic of modernity, and through their unshakable convictions, they are able to transcend the spiritual weakness of the rational world. Throughout the *kirishitanmono*, Akutagawa creates an oftentimes conflicting image of Christianity

combining elements of exotic barbarism, critical interpretation, and triumphant faith. It is a conflict that he returns to repeatedly in a major but little investigated area of his oeuvre.

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke began writing the *kirishitanmono* in 1916 during the incipient stages of his career. By then, he had already established himself as an important writer with a series of short stories based on *setsuwa*, or Buddhist-influenced folk tales collected by monks in early Japan. His career began in earnest in 1915 when he published what would become one of his most well-known and iconic short stories, “Rashōmon”<sup>12</sup>, while still attending the Imperial University of Tokyo. Although the story originally achieved little success, it was followed by an outpouring of similar works that propelled the author to instant fame and critical acclaim. He based many of these early stories on tales from the late Heian period anthology of *setsuwa*, *Konjaku monogatari*.<sup>13</sup> In his renditions, he remained largely faithful to the plots of the original texts, but reworked them using a more ironic and psychologically probing style. His fame rose rapidly with the publication of “The Nose” (“Hana”)<sup>14</sup> and “Yam Gruel” (“Imogayu”)<sup>15</sup> in 1916, which, similarly to “Rashōmon,” adopted the world of the *setsuwa* as a staging ground for experimental interpretations of the past. His novel style drew extensive critical and popular attention, which in turn helped to permanently secure his place as one of the most important figures in the history of modern Japanese literature.

---

<sup>12</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 127-136. For English translations see volumes by Jay Rubin, Seiji Lippit, Takashi Kojima (1952), Glenn W. Shaw, G.L. Anderson., Edward Seidensticker.

<sup>13</sup> Yamanouchi Hisaaki, *The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature* (Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 88-91.

<sup>14</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 140-150. For English see Jay Rubin, Seiji Lippit, Kojima Takashi (1961), Glenn W. Shaw, Ivan Morris, Dorothy Britton, Eric S. Bell and Ukai Eiji.

<sup>15</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 203-226. For English see Jay Rubin, Kojima Takashi.

After writing his first few stories based on selections from *Konjaku montogatari*, Akutagawa began to search for material in a wide range of sources, which included history, religion, philosophy, and literature, both Eastern and Western, as well as his personal life experiences. In 1916, shortly following his rise to fame with pieces such as “Yam Gruel” and “The Nose,” Akutagawa Ryūnosuke began publishing his first *kirishitanmono*, starting with “Tobacco and the Devil.” He did not stop with two or three stories focused on Christianity, but instead incorporated the theme as a central focus of upwards of twenty stories. Once Akutagawa began his first *kirishitanmono* in 1916, he published anywhere from one to four Christian-themed pieces nearly every year until 1924. His preoccupation with the *kirishitanmono* as fiction lapsed during the last few years of his life, until months before his suicide in 1927 when he wrote a Christian-themed movie scenario, “Temptation” (“Yūwaku”)<sup>16</sup>, and a pair of essays on the life of Christ as three of his final works. Akutagawa wrote most extensively on the theme of Christianity in these final essays, “The Man from the West,” and its sequel, “The Man from the West Continued” (“Zoku saihō no hito”)<sup>17</sup>, and even mentioned the death of Christ in his suicide note. Akutagawa’s concern with Christianity spanned his entire writing career and is certainly one of the more exotic and less explored subjects favored by the author. In this vein, E.G. Seidensticker, who considered Akutagawa to be a “virtuoso writer” with the ability change his style to cover every subject, remarked that Akutagawa’s most “remote and esoteric” concern was with Christianity.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> ARZ, Vol. 8, 401-419.

<sup>17</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 257-272.

<sup>18</sup> E.G. Seidensticker, introduction to *Tu Tze-Chun* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1964), 5.

The source of Akutagawa's interest in Christianity is not entirely clear and there are standing disputes on when he became interested in the religion and the degree to which he seriously studied it. Shibata Takaji presents both sides of the debate as voiced by opposing scholars. On one side is Miyazaki Satoru, who believes that Akutagawa began to demonstrate an interest in Christianity as early as 1910, and certainly by 1912, when he started sporadically attending church services and reading the Bible.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Akutagawa often wrote about Christianity in his personal letters and journal entries before he even began his literary career. In Miyazaki's framework, Akutagawa found it essential to understand the Western religion in order to understand Western literature, art, and culture. Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, however, contradicts Miyazaki's idea and finds that the Bible was a part of basic Japanese education during the Meiji era.<sup>20</sup> In his estimation, Akutagawa was not interested in the Bible as anything other than a document which provided him with a new imaginative context for his stories. Translator Jay Rubin, in a timeline of Akutagawa's life, finds that Akutagawa began to seriously read the Bible in 1926 out of a personal spiritual interest, but that he found its content to be unbelievable.<sup>21</sup> Either way, it is obvious that Akutagawa had a lifelong interest in Christianity based on his letters, essays, and fictional *kirishitanmono* whose creation spanned his entire literary career.

Akutagawa's interest in Christianity was not unique for his day and age. Kitamura Tōkoku, Kunikida Doppo, Shiga Naoya, Shimazaki Tōson, Tayama Katai, and

---

<sup>19</sup> Shibata Takaji, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Eibungaku* (Yashio Shuppansha, 1993), 226.

<sup>20</sup> Shibata, *Eibungaku*, 227.

<sup>21</sup> Jay Rubin, chronology in *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006), xi-xviii.

Masamune Hakuchō, to name only a few writers, were all devoutly Christian at some point during their careers, and other writers such as Miyazawa Kenji and Kōda Rohan incorporated Christian imagery and elements into their often Buddhist-themed short stories. In fact, as many scholars attest, a widespread concern with Christianity following the Meiji Restoration was a major force in shaping modern Japanese literature, and also in the construction of the notion of the new individual. Tomi Suzuki notes that, “The notion of the individual self as an independent ethical and moral subject” was “aided by the spread of Christianity.”<sup>22</sup> She goes on to say that Christianity provided the idea of a universal truth, one that extended to all countries and peoples.<sup>23</sup> The strongest proponent of the universal adoption of Christianity by the Japanese was Uchimura Kanzō, a convert from Hokkaidō who was directly responsible for the spread of the religion throughout much of the literary establishment. In Uchimura’s view, Christianity was inherently universal and was the only means by which the entire global population could become united.<sup>24</sup> In this manner, Christianity became an ideological and political force as much as a spiritual one. It became the method by which Japan could join the powers of the Western world through a shared practice and by which it could establish the individual as being more powerful than the traditional forces of society.

After the fall of the Tokugawa shogunate, once powerful samurai lost their promised place of power in society as the traditions which upheld them lost their binding force. Suzuki notes that, “For young sons of disenfranchised Samurai such as Yamaji

---

<sup>22</sup> Suzuki Tomi, *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), 33.

<sup>23</sup> Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Karatani Kōjin, *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*, trans. Brett de Bary (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993), 43.

Aizan, Shimazaki Tōson, and Kitamura Tōkoku, Christianity provided a universal value system which overturned the contemporary political and social ones,” and thus allowed them to retake the power they had lost.<sup>25</sup> Karatani Kōjin makes a similar statement in suggesting that Christianity became attractive to former samurai for its eradication of the contemporary power structure that had excluded them.<sup>26</sup> He states that Christianity became especially favored by these samurai because of their interpretation of the religion, which equated traditional Christian values with samurai ones. He writes, “It is no accident that, beginning with Nitobe Inazō, *bushidō* had been seen by the samurai class as having a direct link to Christianity. By becoming Christian adherents, these youths were able to secure for themselves identity as warriors.”<sup>27</sup> Karatani also notes that Japanese literature was deeply shaped by Christianity, which adopted the confessional form as the most popular structure for the novel in the late Meiji period, but he goes on to show that Japanese writers had only fleeting or superficial relations to the Christian religion, and that their interests died out quickly.<sup>28</sup>

Akutagawa does not figure into the traditional story of the spread of Christianity among the Japanese literary establishment because he is not assumed to have ever seriously converted. He was no doubt aware of the religious aspirations of many of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, but he was not one of the followers of Uchimura Kanzō and never became a part of any of the more serious Christian circles of authors. It is plain that Akutagawa was intimately familiar with Christianity and the Bible,

---

<sup>25</sup> Suzuki, *Narrating the Self*, 35.

<sup>26</sup> Karatani, *Origins*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> Karatani, *Origins*, 84.

<sup>28</sup> Karatani, *Origins*, 81-83.



as his references to Christian texts display a surprising depth of knowledge on par with or even superior to that of the average Christian, but the significance of his interest has long been in debate.

Different scholars who have written about Akutagawa have described his relation to Christianity as being everything from admiring to disparaging. Donald Keene writes that Akutagawa's treatment of Christianity displays a reverence that is in contrast to the cynicism that he reserves for Japanese traditions and that he envied the convictions of Japanese Christians of the Middle Ages.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Beongcheon Yu writes that Akutagawa was attracted to the faith and the spiritual resolution that he saw in the Christians, but he adds that the *kirishitanmono* also feature elements of conflict and confrontation between foreign missionaries and Japanese people.<sup>30</sup> Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, who takes a neutral ground, writes that Akutagawa became interested in the Bible as material for his fiction, but that he did become a more serious student of Christianity towards the end of his life. On the complete opposite end of the spectrum, Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra write that Akutagawa is always critical of Christianity whereas he treats Buddhism in an unproblematic and accepting manner.<sup>31</sup> Yu makes perhaps the best argument by taking the middle ground and presenting both conflict and admiration as essential elements of the *kirishitanmono*.

Christianity was just one of the many new concepts that had made inroads into Japan following the Meiji Restoration and which had become a significant cultural

---

<sup>29</sup> Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984), 569.

<sup>30</sup> Yu, *Introduction*, 53-54.

<sup>31</sup> Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra, "Kirishitan stories by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke," *Japanese Religions* 31 (2006): 25.

presence by Akutagawa's day. By the time he made his literary debut in the late Meiji era, ideas and materials from the West had become inextricable parts of the native culture and Christianity was one more tradition that continued to vie for ideological dominance in Japan. In this new Japan, Akutagawa stood at the center of a swirling struggle for self-definition in a culture that fought to find a middle ground between tradition and modernity, the East and the West. As Murakami Haruki notes, Akutagawa "wore Western suits, smoked cigars, drank coffee, ate beef, conversed now and then with foreigners, and appreciated opera."<sup>32</sup> Yet, as Donald Keene documents, he also wrote traditional forms of Japanese poetry like *waka*, *hokku*, and *sedōka*<sup>33</sup> and was well-read in Japanese and Chinese works such as Bakin's epic *The Eight Dog Chronicles* (*Nansō satomi hakkenden*) and the classic Chinese vernacular novel *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan*).<sup>34</sup> Akutagawa had a complex relationship with the "modern world" as exemplified by an image of the West, and while he adopted Euro-American ways of dress and lifestyle, he also criticized Japan's unquestioned infatuation with foreign culture. One of his protests against the universality of Western culture appears in the *kirishitanmono*. By exoticizing Christianity, Akutagawa was able to portray a West that was far more primitive than the modernity by which it was usually defined.

In his Christian stories, Akutagawa molds Christianity into an exotic image of magic, ritual, and martyrdom. The orthodoxy of the religion is liberally violated in favor of a newly imagined tradition of the supernatural, where demons and incantations figure

---

<sup>32</sup> Murakami Haruki, introduction in *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006), xxvi.

<sup>33</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 567.

<sup>34</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 557.

as prominently, if not more so, than God or the angels, and where fools sacrifice themselves for religion. Christianity is made into an exotic ideal of the religion of the Other by a concentrated focus on its most foreign elements, especially language and ritual. It is of great significance that in “The Man from the West” Akutagawa mentions Kitahara Hakushū as a major inspiration in his decision to write about Christianity, as Kitahara’s long poem “The Song of the Heretic” (*Jashūmon hikyoku*, 1909)<sup>35</sup> features the same elements of exotic mysticism and linguistic obscurity that are featured prominently in Akutagawa’s *kirishitanmono*. In fact, Akutagawa wrote a similarly titled piece of his own, “The Heretic” (“Jashūmon,” 1918)<sup>36</sup>, which features a fiendish Catholic priest with the ability to turn water into blood and to summon fiery spirits to attack Buddhist dissenters. Also similarly to Hakushū, when depicting Christianity, Akutagawa always embeds the text with extensive Portuguese, Latin, Dutch and Hebrew-origin words, often in archaic forms, which serve to heighten the sense of otherworldliness of the Christian stories. Once Christianity has undergone this treatment, it is no longer a rational product of Western intellectuals, but instead becomes an alien world of strange tongues and images.

There is another function of the exoticism found in the *kirishitanmono*, however, and that is to create a pleasurable sense of barbaric energy. In the essay “Literary, All Too Literary” (“Bungeiteki na, amari ni bungeiteki na,” 1927),<sup>37</sup> Akutagawa praises the “barbarian” aesthetic in Gauguin’s paintings of Tahitian women. Makoto Ueda summarizes Akutagawa’s words:

---

<sup>35</sup> Kitahara, *Zenshū*, Vol. 1.

<sup>36</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 294-359. For English see Kojima Takashi and John McVittie, W.H.H. Norman.

<sup>37</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 3-87.

In the first [of his series of debates with Tanizaki Junichirō], he recalls how repelled he was when he first saw Gauguin's paintings of a Tahitian woman who was, as he felt, 'visually emitting the smell of a barbarian's skin.' He then goes on to say that, despite his initial reaction, he gradually became fascinated with this orange-colored woman. 'Indeed,' he wrote, 'the power of the image was such that I felt almost possessed by the Tahitian woman.' Why he was so enchanted by her is clear enough. He saw in her a 'source of life,' the vigorous life of primitive people. 'Gauguin—at least as I see him—meant to show us a human beast in that orange-colored woman,' he reflected.<sup>38</sup>

Akutagawa's *kirishitanmono*, while denouncing the rationality of the West, also celebrate the barbaric intensity of an imagined Christian tradition. The terrifying magic, practiced by both priests and demons alike, and the fanaticism of the martyr are compelling elements of a fantasy world. Exotic tropes of barbarians and primitives display a West that is both repulsive and exciting in its pre-modern excesses. This exotic element is found throughout Akutagawa's Christian stories, from images of bat-winged, goat-legged demons in "The Devil" ("Akuma," 1918)<sup>39</sup> to the story of a superhuman, Syrian giant in "The Legend of St. Christopher" ("Kirishitohoro Shōninden," 1919).<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>38</sup> Ueda Makoto, *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 123.

<sup>39</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 253-255.

<sup>40</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 33-52.

The Christian West as displayed in the *kirishitanmono* may be fascinating when it is isolated as a distant and exotic tradition, but when it comes into contact with Eastern doctrines, a cultural clash ensues. This clash results in a critical element in the *kirishitanmono* in which the feasibility of the Christian doctrine is taken into question. Christianity goes from being merely different to being fundamentally incompatible with Eastern modes of life. In “The Man from the West,” Akutagawa compares the Christian European to the “Man from the East,” or specifically the Buddhist, Taoist, and Confucianist man.<sup>41</sup> It is inevitable that conflict emerges when these men who are defined by their histories and religious affiliations are forced to reconcile and find common understandings. “The Man from the East” might try to reason with and learn from this new neighbor, but not without compromising his own understanding of reality.

In many of his stories, Akutagawa criticizes the “Man from the East” for adopting Western modes of thought and behavior only because they appear fashionable at the moment. He does this not only in the *kirishitanmono*, but also in the *kaikamono*, or stories about the Meiji Restoration. In *kaikamono* pieces like “The Handkerchief” (“Hankechi,” 1916)<sup>42</sup> and “The Ball” (“Butōkai,” 1920)<sup>43</sup>, Akutagawa ridicules early Meiji Japanese who desire to speak, look, and act like Europeans and who can only appreciate native traditions if they are first mirrored through Western values. Yet, despite his criticism, he never uniformly dismisses all things Western, as he himself was deeply

---

<sup>41</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 230-256.

<sup>42</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 242-254. For English see Charles de Wolf, Glenn W. Shaw.

<sup>43</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 354-363.

influenced by Western writers such as Anatole France<sup>44</sup> and Ambrose Bierce.<sup>45</sup> The problematic nature of the East-West exchange is thus compounded by the author's own inability to escape its consequences. He is troubled when he finds that the cultural identity of the Japanese people is becoming confused within a globalized modernity. In one essay on Japanese and Western clothing, he goes as far to say that, "When the modern women of Japan wear Western clothes they look too Japanese, when they wear Japanese clothes they look too Western. Whichever they choose, it doesn't make for a satisfying feeling."<sup>46</sup> In the *kirishitanmono*, Akutagawa criticizes characters who mindlessly quote foreign Latin prayers and long for European rosaries and crucifixes, such as the cattle-driver in "Tobacco and the Devil" and Lady Hosokawa Gracia in "Lady Ito's Diary" ("Itojo oboegaki," 1923).<sup>47</sup> This criticism can be extended to the modern Japanese people who incorporate foreign words and concepts into their speech and yearn for Western fashions and materials, all without questioning the effect that these practices have on the traditional culture of the country.

In addition to his cultural criticisms, Akutagawa also questions Christianity on a philosophical level for its promotion of absolute moral guidelines. The characters in Akutagawa's universe are unable to act in accordance with any higher idealistic principles, not the law of Heaven in a Confucianist sense, the law of God in a Christian one, nor even by secular systems of ethics. In a short essay entitled "On Moral Instruction"

---

<sup>44</sup> Kobayashi Hideo, "The Muse and the Fate of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke," in *Literature of the Lost Home*, trans. Paul Anderer (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 101.

<sup>45</sup> Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra, "Kirishitan," 25.

<sup>46</sup> Kindai bungaku kenkyū kai, *Ningen: Akutagawa no kotoba: Akutagawa in okeru roman no seishin* (Shin Bungaku Shobō, 1969), 83.

<sup>47</sup> ARZ, Vol. 6, 279-289.

(“Kyōkundan,” 1923)<sup>48</sup>, Akutagawa brings up the act of cannibalism, which he asserts existed in ancient Japan, and argues that anyone could be driven to cannibalism under the right circumstances. He declares that people are beasts, exactly as any other member of the animal kingdom, and that as beasts they could be driven to eat each other if need, or even desire, pushed them to commit the act. Akutagawa spoke of the animal nature of man in some of his essays, but his stories provide the clearest example for a worldview where people act primarily in self-preservation.

Akutagawa’s characters might hold to guiding principles under ordinary circumstances, but when they are placed into confrontation with a brutalizing animal world, they become unpredictable. With this perspective in mind, Akutagawa is constantly posed to criticize human organizations or ideologies which promote order, which certainly includes Christianity. Every situation is eventually portrayed as being absurd and impossible to properly assess from a flawed, human perspective. Akutagawa’s fictional world is decadent and suspicious of progress, a la Baudelaire, and portrays a world of desire and madness like that seen in the poetry of Poe. Ueda Makoto writes that Akutagawa’s best stories “move the reader by showing a penetrating intellect desperately trying to cope with the murky, chaotic realities of the human subconscious and ending in failure.”<sup>49</sup> In the context of the *kirishitanmono*, stories such as “The Devil” and “Lucifer” question the ability of human beings to truly be good as they glorify evil and the triumph of sin. Stories such as these fit into Akutagawa’s larger narrative of the fundamental weakness of the human spirit.

---

<sup>48</sup> ARZ, Vol. 6, 25-26.

<sup>49</sup> Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 130-131.

A final element of Akutagawa's interaction with Christianity, and one which must not be overlooked, is that he frequently praises the religion and positively portrays Christian figures, especially saints and martyrs. While the religion as an entire system is critiqued and exoticized, the image of the martyr is glorified time and time again. Akutagawa especially extols the life of the religious fool as a pure soul who remains oblivious to the changing times. When society urges the fool to submit to the bitterness of reality, the fool keeps his or her eyes steadfastly turned towards heaven and sacrifices everything for a religious ideal. Martyrs and religious fools are repeatedly eulogized in Akutagawa's stories; upon death, their bodies are surrounded with light as peaceful smiles spread across their angelic faces. This image of the religious fool and martyr appears first as the protagonist of "The Death of a Believer" ("Hōkyōnin no shi," 1918)<sup>50</sup> and "Juliano Kichisuke" ("Juriano Kichisuke," 1919),<sup>51</sup> and eventually becomes a symbol of Christ in "The Man from the West." These individuals are completely unlike the self-assured, modern intellectual of Akutagawa's stories, a figure who is more often disappointed or rejected than successful.

Akutagawa's *kirishitanmono* display a pessimistic view of modernity as they celebrate the ability of the individual to overcome society. These stories emerged at a point in Japanese history when, as Susan J. Napier puts it, there arose a new "fascination with self-discovery and self-transformation."<sup>52</sup> In Japan, belief in Christianity was one way by which to completely transform oneself and transcend the conventions of society.

---

<sup>50</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 266-280.

<sup>51</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 202-205.

<sup>52</sup> Susan J. Napier, *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 118.



Akutagawa interpreted Christ as a figure who effectively resisted the pettiness of social norms and who focused only on heaven, a poetic realm beyond the materiality of the modern world. In “The Man from the West” he portrayed Christ as a champion of freedom and a humanist of the new generation.<sup>53</sup> He never expressed an even marginally orthodox acceptance of the tenets of Christianity, but he expressed enthusiasm about it as a new, radical ideology. He called Christianity “a poetic religion of paradoxes,”<sup>54</sup> and praised Christ as the quiet pacifist who was “cool and gentle as the sleeping snow.”<sup>55</sup> Whatever his reasoning, it is clear that Akutagawa did not exclusively criticize but also positively appraised Christian ideas.

Akutagawa never openly professed faith in any major religious or philosophical school of thought during his life, but he did occasionally speak about his work using religious terminology. Makoto Ueda has extensively presented Akutagawa’s views on the supernatural, in work which I draw on here.<sup>56</sup> Ueda notes that Akutagawa once wrote to a friend that the universe was ordered by logos, explaining that “Logos is neither intellect nor will. If we have to define it, we might say it is Supreme Intellect. Good and Evil are only utilitarian concepts that vaguely define men’s conduct in terms of their relation to Logos. Sometimes I feel as if the stars are mixed in my blood and circulating in my veins.”<sup>57</sup> His words invoke a mystical relation to the universe and might convince the reader that Akutagawa did aspire to some religious understanding of the world. Ueda

---

<sup>53</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 230-256.

<sup>54</sup> Sekiguchi, *Jitsuzō to kyojō*, 211. See ARZ, Vol. 9, 240

<sup>55</sup> Shibata, *Eibungaku*, 268. See ARZ, Vol. 9, 260.

<sup>56</sup> Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 111-144.

<sup>57</sup> Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 114.

notes that Akutagawa ultimately placed his faith in art rather than in any religiously defined ordering principle, and in fact, he even came to see art as his own religion, even if only in a metaphorical sense.<sup>58</sup> John McVittie summarizes Akutagawa's views on religion by positing that, "He interprets the mystic not as religious manifestations that are beyond human comprehension, but the relationship between mind and matter which, though experienced in everyday life, we find beyond human comprehension because our finite minds cannot comprehend the infinite, just as our languages—symbolic as their phraseology might be—cannot adequately discuss the nature of the eternal or the infinite."<sup>59</sup>

Although Akutagawa's religious ideas are commonly expressed as secular metaphor, there are times when he exemplifies the power of faith of religious believers, be they Christian, Buddhist, or Daoist. In "The Faith of Wei Sheng" ("Bisei no Shin," 1920)<sup>60</sup>, the hero of the story waits by a river for a goddess to appear even as the tide rises and takes his life, and in the Taoist story "The Immortal" ("Sennin," 1922)<sup>61</sup> a man's faith in the ability to transform himself into an immortal is so strong that he achieves the ability to fly, even though the source of his faith was a lie told to him by his employers. In these characters, we see a glimmer of hope, even in the eyes of the trenchantly cynical Akutagawa, that there are elements stronger than physical existence that are worth submitting oneself to. In his final days, Akutagawa studied the Bible obsessively, as though he might find some hidden message in the text. Yet, he always

---

<sup>58</sup> Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 141.

<sup>59</sup> John McVittie, "A Sprig of Wild Orange (Introduction)," in *Exotic Japanese Stories* (New York: Liveright Publishing Company: 1964), 37.

<sup>60</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 367-369.

<sup>61</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 377-383.

made a hesitant approach towards religion, and in the end, his writings exemplified the image of a modern man that Mori Ōgai describes in “Kanzan Jittoku” (“Hanshan and Shide”), a short Buddhist parable:

Between the nonchalant man and the man who truly seeks the Way, there is another kind of person who, while objectively recognizing the existence of a Way, is neither completely indifferent nor actively interested in seeking it himself. He resigns himself to the role of one somehow distant from it, yet admires those whom he feels have an intimate connection with it. . . . This is how blind admiration is born. And in the case of blind admiration, even if the object of admiration has drawn a correct response, it remains a superficial one lacking depth.<sup>62</sup>

Just like Ōgai’s hesitant believer, Akutagawa’s religious characters are torn between conviction and cynicism, and just when it seems like they have finally decided to commit one way or the other, they suddenly bolt in the opposite direction.

Through the course of this paper, I will explore Akutagawa’s *kirishitanmono* according to three major themes: exoticism, criticism, and praise. The first section, on exoticism, will examine the linguistic and imagistic methods that Akutagawa uses to create an image of the barbarian. “The Wandering Jew” (“Samayoeru Yudayabito,” 1917)<sup>63</sup> and “The Legend of St. Christopher” will be presented as stories rich with

---

<sup>62</sup> Mori Ōgai, *The Historical Fiction of Mori Ōgai*, ed. David Dilworth and J. Thomas Rimer, trans. Richard Bowring, Darcy Murray, et. al. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), 240.

<sup>63</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 445-455.

foreign words and images and which portray Christianity as a curiously exotic belief. In the next two segments, the theme of criticism will be divided into two subcategories: spiritual and cultural. In the section on spiritual criticism, “Tobacco and the Devil,” “The Devil,” and “Lucifer” (“Rushiheru,” 1918)<sup>64</sup> will be reviewed as stories where Christian concepts are portrayed as being incompatible with Eastern religious views. These pieces juxtapose the non-duality of Buddhism with the absolutism of Christianity and favor the devil as the true hero of Christianity. In the third section, “The Smile of the Gods” (“Kamigami no bishō,” 1922)<sup>65</sup> and “Oshino” (1923)<sup>66</sup> will be examined as examples of cultural criticism. In these stories, both Westerners and the Japanese fail to understand each other at the point of cultural exchange and the process of intercultural communication is ridiculed as an impossibility. In the final segment, I will present the theme of praise, especially for the figure of the martyr, through a number of writings. These will include “The Death of a Believer,” “Juliano Kichisuke,” “The Immortal,” “The Rebirth Picture Scroll” (“Ōjō emaki,” 1921)<sup>67</sup> “Temptation,” “The Man from the West,” and “The Man from the West Continued.”

The stories presented will follow a roughly chronological presentation, although a strictly ordered sequence is disrupted at various points. That is because Akutagawa often fluctuated between exoticization, criticism, and praise, sometimes in between publications and other times within the same story. For example, Akutagawa published a

---

<sup>64</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 362-368.

<sup>65</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 173-188.

<sup>66</sup> ARZ, Vol. 6, 79-88.

<sup>67</sup> ARZ, Vol. 4, 452-458.

story in praise of sin, “The Devil,” before one in praise of faith, “The Death of a Believer,” then followed with a story that mixes elements of both, “The Heretic,” followed by a praise of sin in “Lucifer,” and then again a praise of faith in “The Legend of Saint Christopher.” While one major theme will be delineated separately in each chapter for the sake of clarity, other themes will inevitably appear as supporting elements throughout.

Ultimately, Akutagawa’s portrayal of Christianity remains ambivalent, and while certain overarching themes may be discerned, a definitive evaluation remains impossible. When the *kirishitanmono* are examined as a whole, a narrative appears in which the past and modernity, reason and faith, and the East and the West are all desired simultaneously, but are forever incompatible. Murakami sees this incompatibility as having ultimately led Akutagawa to destruction<sup>68</sup> and Seiji Lippit demonstrates how his inability to subjectively distinguish these elements is echoed by the madness evoked in his late writings.<sup>69</sup> Whatever the result, the *kirishitanmono* exhibit a constant struggle to decide what exactly Christianity might mean for a Japanese person and fall short of providing any satisfying conclusions. After travelling through constant realignments of exoticism, criticism, and praise, the *kirishitanmono* end with a pair of cryptic essays in which Akutagawa leaves us with the surprising proclamation, “I soon found myself falling in love with Christ.”

---

<sup>68</sup> Murakami, introduction, xxxiv.

<sup>69</sup> Seiji M. Lippit, “The Disintegrating Machine of the Modern: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s Late Writings,” *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 58 (1999): 30.

## CHAPTER II

### THE EXOTIC LANDS OF THE CHRISTIAN BARBARIANS: “SAMAYOERU YUDAYABITO” AND “KIRISHITOHORO SHŌNINDEN”

And he said to them, “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste of death before they see that the Kingdom of God has come with power.”

- Mark 9:1

“In Italy, in France, in England, in Germany, in Austria, and in Spain, there is not a single Christian country where the legend is unknown,” opens “The Wandering Jew” (“Samayoeru Yudayabito,” 1917).<sup>70</sup> “The Legend of St. Christopher” (“Kirishitohoro Shōninden,” 1919) begins, “Many ages ago, in the mountains of Syria, there lived a giant named Reprobus.”<sup>71</sup> Set in the deserts of Egypt, the cathedrals of Germany, the universities of England, and other exotic locales, these stories transport Akutagawa’s audience to far-off Christian lands dramatically different from their own. In both examples, Akutagawa makes extensive use of foreign words and images of barbaric Christians in the creation of an exotic religious image. He presents Christianity not through contemporary theology, but rather through the medium of fantasy and legends, removing it from the modern experience and suggesting it to be an archaic system divorced from reality. By portraying this, the religion of the Europeans, as an irrational system of myths and legends, Akutagawa is able to question the entire logic of European

---

<sup>70</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 445.

<sup>71</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 33.

civilization and overturn the image of the always sophisticated Westerner. Yet, while he criticizes the religion as a system, he also begins a subtle narrative of praise for the individual believer that starts quietly here and increases in intensity over time.

Christianity as a whole may be suspect, but the figure of the fervent Christian is enviable precisely for his or her ability to live outside of modernity. These early examples of *kirishitanmono* are especially focused on the exotic images and vocabulary through which Christianity is presented, but these elements should not be taken as otherwise meaningless markers of style. Instead, they serve as the building blocks of a running narrative on the relevance of Christianity, in both cultural and spiritual terms, to modern Japan.

In 1917 Akutagawa Ryūnosuke published “The Wandering Jew” in the literary magazine *Shinchō*, one of the earliest examples of his *kirishitanmono*. The text features only a threadbare narrative and instead focuses on the presentation of a widespread Christian myth through the manipulation of fact and fiction. In the short story, Akutagawa retells a popular European legend about a Jew who abuses Christ and is cursed to wander the earth eternally. In many examples of the tale, including the one Akutagawa draws upon, the man repents and converts to Christianity, after which he eternally wanders the globe in order to preach the message of Christ. Akutagawa begins his version of “The Wandering Jew” by outlining the development of the legend through an exposé of historical evidence, of varying reliability, and then adds his own fictional twist towards the end by describing the Wandering Jew’s arrival in Japan.

The section that leads off “The Wandering Jew” enters directly into a dense presentation of the origin and content of the European legend. As a point of reference, I

will introduce the same history here in a manner similar to that of Akutagawa's text. The legend of the Wandering Jew is an apocryphal Christian story which tells of a man who was cursed to wander the world eternally for abusing Jesus Christ before the crucifixion. The oldest record which provides a probable basis for the story is found in the annals of St. Albans, in the *Flores Historiarum*, as transcribed by Roger of Wendover circa 1228 and then continued by his apprentice Matthew Paris.<sup>72</sup> In the original story, the Wandering Jew was not even purported to be Jewish, but was rather claimed to be a Roman heathen and doorkeeper by the name of Cartaphilus in the employ of Pontius Pilate. The first sighting of the wanderer was supposedly that of the Archbishop of Armenia while he was on visit to St. Albans in England. According to the account, the Archbishop claimed to have met a man named Cartaphilus who was present at the trial of Jesus Christ and who was cursed to wander the earth until the end of time after striking the Messiah. The man realized his sin and repented, was baptized by Ananias, a direct disciple of Jesus, and then adopted the Christian name Joseph. He began an endless pilgrimage of penance during which he spread the word of Christianity, and according to the Archbishop, his mission had presently brought him to reside in Armenia. Curiously enough, by placing Cartaphilus in Armenia, the early incarnations of the Wandering Jew pictured the figure as a symbol of the exotic East, centuries before Akutagawa would adopt him as a symbol of the exotic West.

The legend of Ahasuerus, the name by which the Wandering Jew is more commonly known, began in Germany in a widely distributed series of pamphlets in 1602

---

<sup>72</sup> R. Edelman, "Ahasuerus: The Wandering Jew: Origin and Background," in *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend*, ed. Hasan-Rokem, Galit and Alan Dundes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press: Bloomington. 1986), 5.



by an unknown author.<sup>73</sup> The pamphlets claimed to transmit a true story that was first recounted by Martin Luther's companion Paul von Eitzen about a real encounter with the wanderer. They state that in 1542, Von Eitzen was on vacation in Hamburg when he met a strange vagabond in a church. He conversed with the man and came to learn that he was a Jew from the Holy Land in the days of Jesus and that his name was Ahasuerus. He described how Jesus had stopped at his doorstep and asked for a brief respite, but that Ahasuerus had insulted and attacked him and was thus subsequently cursed to wander the world until the second coming of the Messiah. Since then, he had converted to Christianity and was currently on a journey to spread the Gospel across the world. By coincidence, the name Ahasuerus was chosen precisely because it sounded strange and artificial and was most likely taken haphazardly from the story of Esther to be representative of a Jewish Other.<sup>74</sup> Thus, the Wandering Jew continued as a generally exotic symbol of a faraway and mystical land.

The story of the Wandering Jew went on to become a curious legendary phenomenon that spread throughout Europe and eventually made its way across the Atlantic to the Americas as a great number of people began to make claims of having actually encountered the man. In addition to the multitude of sightings of the legendary Wandering Jew, hundreds of works both artistic and scholarly began to draw on the mythical figure for inspiration. An extremely abbreviated list of artists that took up the legend would include the likes of Wagner, Dumas, Goethe, Kierkegaard, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Matthew Gregory Lewis, Eugene Sue, and Paul Gustave Doré. *The Wandering Jew in Folklore and Literature*, a bibliography on the subject by Joseph J. Gielen, lists a

---

<sup>73</sup> Edelman, "Ahasuerus," 6.

<sup>74</sup> Edelman, "Ahasuerus," 6.

total of 1,521 entries, although even this is only a partial record.<sup>75</sup> When Akutagawa decided to make his own version of the story of the Wandering Jew, he was joining a centuries-long tradition that had been taken up by a great number of European and American thinkers before him.

In his own version of the story, Akutagawa claims that all Christian countries are familiar with the legend of the Wandering Jew, by which he frames the tale as a universal concern of all Western Christian peoples.<sup>76</sup> He begins the story with an extensive series of references to European writers and artists who would have likely been obscure to a contemporary Japanese audience. He mentions the engravings of French illustrator Paul Gustave Doré, stories by French novelist Eugene Sue and Irish theologian Doctor [George] Croly, a supposedly infamous novel by Monk [Gregory Matthew] Lewis where the Wandering Jew appears alongside Lucifer and the Bleeding Nun, and a short piece by Scottish writer and poet William Sharp, pseudonym Fiona MacLeod. Akutagawa then gives the aliases of the Wandering Jew, Cartaphilus, Ahasuerus, Buttadeus, and Isaac Laquedem, and mentions Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin, Pontius Pilate, Golgotha, Paul, and Ananias in his origin story. All of these foreign names are presented through Japanese phonetic renderings of the original words, making them readable to the Japanese audience, but because Akutagawa does not explain them, their meanings remain obscure. To borrow a turn of phrase from Indra Levy, they inhabit “an interlingual gap”<sup>77</sup> between the original language and the Japanese. By their simple presence as transliterated foreign

---

<sup>75</sup> Edelman, “Ahasuerus,” 2.

<sup>76</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 445.

<sup>77</sup> Indra Levy. *Sirens of the Western Shore: The Westernesque Femme Fatale, Translation, and Vernacular Style in Modern Japanese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 2.

words, they evoke a generalized image of the exotic Christian Other, but the reader would be hard-pressed to define them without extensive background in Christian history and literature. It is not the actual references that are important here; rather it is the suggestive quality of the names that matter.

As he proceeds, Akutagawa intensifies his exercise in obscurity by listing a series of sightings of the Wandering Jew across Europe. He begins with that of Austrian statesman Joseph Hormayr in Munich on June 22, 1721. He then goes back in time and finds mention of him in the *Chronique Rimeé (Sanbun no nendaiki)* written in 1242 by Flemish historian Philippe Mouskes. Next we find him in Bohemia in 1505 helping a weaver named Kokot locate a buried treasure and in 1547 he is seen by High Priest Paul Von Eitzen of Schleswig praying in St. Mary's Cathedral in Hamburg. Thereafter, Akutagawa spouts European place names and dates of sightings seemingly at random. He writes, "If I only provide the most certain cases, in 1575 he appeared in Madrid, in 1599 he appeared in Vienna, in 1601 he appeared in Lübeck, Revel, and Kraków. According to Rudolph Botoreus, he seems to have appeared in Paris in 1640. Thereafter, he visited Naumburg, Brussels, and Leipzig...after answering questions by teachers at Cambridge and Oxford, he proceeded through Denmark and Sweden, and then his tracks disappeared."<sup>78</sup>

Akutagawa then describes in detail that in 1658, the Wandering Jew stopped in Stanford, England in order to give a secret recipe to a man named Samuel Wallis who was suffering from a lung disease. He shows great ingenuity in relating the concoction through his uniquely formulated translations. He describes the recipe as consisting of two

---

<sup>78</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 446.

leaves of red salvia<sup>79</sup> (*aka sarubia*), an otherwise unknown transliteration of “red sage,” one leaf of something related through Chinese characters as Japanese dock<sup>80</sup> (*gishigishi*), but glossed phonetically as bloodworte (*buraddouato*), and finally beer, but rendered through the formal characters for the Dutch *bier* (*biya*) rather than the colloquial transliteration of the English *beer* (*bīru*). Here, the reader is faced with either breaking down Akutagawa’s casual renderings, or simply accepting them at face value as unknowable but certainly magical European ingredients. Finally, he ends his scholarly exposition with the apocryphal tale recorded by 17<sup>th</sup> century French Orientalist Berthélemy d’Herbelot in the *Bibliothèque Orientale* in which an Arab named Fadhilah spotted the wandering Jew chanting “Allah akubar”<sup>81</sup> (*araa akubaaru*) in the desert, a description that adds corrupted Arabic into Akutagawa’s already long list of foreign languages.

Akutagawa’s introduction to “The Wandering Jew” displays a characteristic in his writings that Seiji Lippit has referred to as “a marked textual density, an opaqueness of language resisting any smooth transfer of meaning between author and reader.”<sup>82</sup> He maximizes the exotic tone of his narrative through especially obscure word choices, all without references to assist the reader. His words stand as markers of the Western Other and as things to be enjoyed for their exotic value rather than to be carefully dissected. The density of his text may be off-putting to the casual reader, but for those who are

---

<sup>79</sup> “Red sage” in the original. See Francis Peck, *Academia Tertia Anglicana; or, The Antiquarian Annals of Stanford in Lincoln, Rutland, and Northampton Shires* (London: James Bettenham, 1727), 153.

<sup>80</sup> “Bloodwort” in the original. See Peck, *Annals of Stanford*, 153.

<sup>81</sup> “Allah Akbar” in Akutagawa’s source. See Peck, *Annals of Stanford*, 11. For the original source, see Berthélemy D’Herbelot, *Bibliothèque Orientale* (Paris: Moutard, M., 1781 – 1873), 607. The original itself is an early French rendering of the Arabic “Allāhu Akbar,” usually translated as “God is Great”.

<sup>82</sup> Seiji Lippit, “Disintegrating Machine,” 50.

willing to indulge his playfulness, it creates a sense of a profoundly mystical European world unlike any modern image of the West.

At this point it is important to point out that Akutagawa in fact did almost no original scholarship in “The Wandering Jew,” borrowing almost all of his references wholesale from Sabine Baring-Gould’s *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* without ever directly acknowledging their original source.<sup>83</sup> The only exceptions appear to be his references to works by “Monk” Lewis and William Sharp (a.k.a. Fiona MacLeod), and his recounting of the magic potion incident. This latter story most likely originates in a considerably obscure work by Francis Peck known in short as *The History of Stanford*.<sup>84</sup> The degree of appropriation found in this work opens Akutagawa up to the oft-cited charge that he was no more than an imitator and that his work was soulless, placing a high value on intelligence and antiquarianism but having no substance.<sup>85</sup> To be sure, as has already been well-documented, Akutagawa borrowed extensively from a range of sources, including *Konjaku monogatari*, the poetry of Bashō, the satire of Jonathan Swift and Anatole France, the Bible, and long list of other works. Yet, even though it is certain that Akutagawa did draw heavily on other sources for some part of his literary inspiration, this does not negate the cultural impact of his fiction.

Beongcheon Yu is one scholar who takes up the case of defending Akutagawa’s original contributions to literature despite the author’s known penchant for borrowing heavily from other sources. Yu defends Akutagawa’s use of old stories and historical

---

<sup>83</sup> Sabine Baring-Gould, *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages* (Boston: Roberts Brothers: Boston, 1882), 1-29.

<sup>84</sup> Francis Peck, *Academia Tertia Anglicana; or, The Antiquarian Annals of Stanford in Lincoln, Rutland, and Northampton Shires* (London: James Bettenham, 1727).

<sup>85</sup> Yu, *Introduction*, 21-22.

periods by arguing that Akutagawa adapted these settings in order to investigate something new.<sup>86</sup> He draws on Akutagawa's own words in showing that he approached these materials "in a detached manner as if he were a contemporary eyewitness," and that he would "introduce various contemporary social conditions."<sup>87</sup> Translator Glenn W. Shaw makes a similar assessment of Akutagawa's approach to borrowing by suggesting that Akutagawa's work with old material paid great attention to the detail and atmosphere, a worthy artistic achievement in itself, but furthermore, that he explored new territory by adding modern psychology to the mix.<sup>88</sup>

Seiji Lippit refers to both Yu and Donald Keene with the frequent charge of unoriginality against Akutagawa.<sup>89</sup> Rather than denying the imitative element of Akutagawa's approach, Lippit asserts its merit and its intentional use as a means to universalize narrative. He says of Akutagawa's adoption of other materials:

This was precisely the point of literature; it provided unlimited access (through the gestures of imitation, citation, rewriting) to all other cultures and historical periods. In turn, it is this concept of universality (which might also be rendered as "textuality" or "literariness") that provides the context for situating his own subject position in relation to modernity. In this sense, "literature" for Akutagawa mediated between the particular

---

<sup>86</sup> Yu, *Introduction*, 30.

<sup>87</sup> Yu, *Introduction*, 30.

<sup>88</sup> Glenn W. Shaw, introduction in *Tales Grotesque and Curious by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke* (Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1930), iv.

<sup>89</sup> Lippit, "Disintegrating Machine," 30.

world of the individual and the universal world of modernity, serving as the conceptual basis for his articulation of subjectivity.<sup>90</sup>

For Lippit, Akutagawa was able to engage with the universal modern through his “imitation” of sources ancient and modern, Western and Eastern. He dismantled borders between discursive realities and opened up the possibility of experiencing all times and places through fictional settings.

In “The Wandering Jew,” Akutagawa creates a sense of an exotic Christian world by directly copying from his European sources and densely layering them without explanation. His lack of citations obfuscates the background of his story as well as the reality of the narrative. The reader is left only with a sense that the legend of the Wandering Jew is an entrenched Christian tradition that is faithfully believed in every corner of Europe. The extent to which the legend is apparently incorporated into Christian life raises questions about the logic of Europeans, a people who appear to unanimously believe in a Jew who was cursed with immortality by Jesus Christ. Through an unorthodox use of historical sources, Akutagawa subverts Christianity and uses its own texts to illustrate Europe as a barbaric land of curses and superstitions. His open borrowing, at least in this case, thus serves an artistic purpose that is achieved precisely by relying on the source material for the bulk of the story. By imitating his European sources, he mirrors Europe as a land of irrational thinking.

After thoroughly proving that Christianity is a foreign, European concern, and one that is difficult to understand at that, Akutagawa begins to explore the cultural relevance of Christianity to Japan in the latter half of “The Wandering Jew.” He proposes the

---

<sup>90</sup> Seiji Lippit, “Disintegrating Machine,” 30.

tongue-in-cheek question that, after having been given an eternity to wander every region of the globe, why would the Wandering Jew shun making an appearance in Japan? As an answer, he presents an imaginary set of apocryphal documents which relate that, in fact, the Wandering Jew did make one stop in Japan. He uses the incident as an opportunity to introduce a medieval Japan obsessed with the West, much like the perpetually modernizing Japan of his day. He again draws heavily on borrowed words and images to construct a picture of a country that once defined itself through its relation with Europe. Akutagawa writes:

In feudal era Japan, where the nobles called *daimyō* wore golden crucifixes around their necks and kept the *pater noster* on their lips, where the noblemen rubbed coral *kontasu*<sup>91</sup> through their fingers and knelt before the *biruzen maria*<sup>92</sup>, there is no reason why he would not have visited there. In an even plainer manner of speaking, in Japan during those days, would legends concerning him not have come in with the *giyaman*<sup>93</sup> and the *rabeika*.<sup>94</sup> That is what caused my doubt.<sup>95</sup>

Through this use of Christian imagery and vocabulary, Akutagawa depicts a medieval Japan that is almost unrecognizable in its hybridized European-Japanese form.

---

<sup>91</sup> Rosary, from Portuguese *contas*.

<sup>92</sup> Virgin Mary, from Portuguese *Virgem Maria*.

<sup>93</sup> Diamond, either from Dutch *diamant* or Portuguese *diamante*.

<sup>94</sup> Rebec, a European fiddle-type instrument of the Middle Ages. From the Portuguese *rabeica*.

<sup>95</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 448.



Yet, with a little modification of the vocabulary, he could easily have been depicting the modern Japan in which people wore Western business suits, spoke about democracy and modernization, and purchased bonnets, top hats, and foreign books. At a second glance, the strangely European Japan that he is describing would not be unfamiliar to the audience of his day. Here in “The Wandering Jew,” Akutagawa finds a peculiar place in history that appears fantastic for its indiscriminate mix of Eastern and Western motifs, but the image he finds also reflects a modern Japan that is once again vying for relevancy by becoming more European. By asking, “Why does the Wandering Jew not come to Japan?” as though in indignation, Akutagawa affirms that Japan must naturally be included in even the most absurd of European traditions, both in the past and today.

In the last few paragraphs of “The Wandering Jew,” Akutagawa presents the contents of the lost documents that he purports to have found. He claims to have found them in Hirado and Amakusa, two areas of Kyushu with prominent Christian histories, and he says they relate an incident in which Francis Xavier and another monk encountered the Wandering Jew off the coast of Japan. Akutagawa has fooled casual readers and even serious students before with his reference to rare manuscripts in his possession, indicating that he was not averse to pulling tricks on his readers.<sup>96</sup> Since he conceals all of his sources in “The Wandering Jew,” both actual and fictional, it can be difficult to identify where it is that the history ends and the fiction begins, yet his account of finding the manuscripts is framed with a set of curious remarks that clue the reader in to his parodic intentions. He writes: “As for a further expert opinion on these ancient documents, I don’t have the leisure to explain it here. It suffices to say that it was a

---

<sup>96</sup> Shaw, *Tales Grotesque*, v.

recorded memo as related by a Catholic believer of the day and that it was recorded in the vernacular just as he spoke it.”<sup>97</sup>

Akutagawa’s next piece of linguistic exoticism is one that he draws upon elsewhere in his *kirishitanmono*, that is, the invention of a vernacular that was supposedly spoken by Japanese Christian converts of the feudal age. He famously employed a semi-fictitious ancient dialect in “The Death of a Believer”<sup>98</sup>, although the language in “The Wandering Jew” appears to be of a different nature. Akutagawa’s “ancient vernacular” is marked by extensive use of the archaic personal pronoun *soregashi*, the honorific prefix *on-* when referring to any aspect of the *on-aruji esu kuristo*, or the Honorable Lord Jesus Christ, and a general conflation of modern and classical Japanese that results in a peculiar reading experience. In one section he repeatedly applies the honorific *on-* when referring to the crucifixion of Christ, apparently as a means to signify the extreme feudal-like respect that the Japanese Christians of the middle ages paid to the foreign religious figure. In this section, the Wandering Jew relates to Francis Xavier that he personally witnessed the *on-arisama* (honorable scene) of the *on-junan* (honorable suffering) of the *on-aruji* (honorable Lord).<sup>99</sup>

Akutagawa finally reaches the account of the Wandering Jew, a segment which adds an element of more serious religious commentary to the story. He writes:

---

<sup>97</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 449.

<sup>98</sup> Howard S. Hibbett, introduction in *Rashomon and Other Stories* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation. New York, 1952), 13.

<sup>99</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 452.

Therefore, though Jerusalem was wide, it seems that I was the only one who realized the sin of humiliating the Lord Jesus. It was precisely because I understood it to be a sin that I fell under the curse. If you do not recognize a sin as a sin, then there is no punishment that comes down from heaven. As it were, I was the only one who carried the sin of nailing the Lord to the cross. Yet, it was only because I was punished that I was redeemed, and thus the only one who experienced the Lord's salvation was I and none other. It is only when you recognize a sin as a sin that you understand that both punishment and salvation come down from the same heaven.<sup>100</sup>

In a manner, this passage introduces the religious martyr that becomes prominent in later *kirishitanmono*. The Wandering Jew accepts the burden of the entire sin of mankind through his conscious recognition of his own sins, which thus allows him to truly experience heaven. He is one, alone, among all of the people of the world, and through his mental self-persecution he has realized what no other human being has yet understood. In the end, he transcends society by accepting the burden of the supernatural and sacrificing his secular life for an idea of heaven. The martyr character introduced here is only at the incipient stages of its formation, but it becomes increasingly clear as the *kirishitanmono* progress.

To summarize the trajectory of "The Wandering Jew," Akutagawa begins by exoticizing European Christianity and distancing it from the modern world through the use of archaic language and mythical images. He suggests that all European people in all

---

<sup>100</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 454.

historical contexts have firmly believed in the irrational legend of the Wandering Jew, and thus frames Europeans as a people lacking in rationality. To borrow from Dipesh Chakrabarty, “The Wandering Jew” finds Akutagawa “provincializing Europe,”<sup>101</sup> or demoting Europe from the position of an accepted standard by which to measure modernity. Midway through the story, however, he asks why the Wandering Jew never visited Japan, and thus demands that his nation also be accepted into the glorious tradition of the European legend. By doing so, he ridicules a Japanese people who are uncritically obsessed with becoming more like Europeans, while also implicating himself as one among their number. He demonstrates a world where the West is inadequate as a standard gauge of modernity, but where it is accepted nonetheless. As Karatani Kōjin writes, the post-Meiji enlightenment period witnessed emerging critical thought that measured all progress by Western models, but as Kōjin points out, social mores, customs, emotions, and attainments of the West do not make for an accurate or reasonable standard for all cultures.<sup>102</sup> At the end of “The Wandering Jew,” however, Akutagawa switches gears and asks if there might not be some redeeming factor in Christianity after all. The story ends with the depiction of a self-conscious martyr who has overcome rationality by realizing the truth of heaven and who thus supersedes modernity, Western or Eastern.

In 1919, Akutagawa published “The Legend of St. Christopher,” an imitation of Christian hagiography combining both the legends of St. Christopher and St. Anthony into a single narrative. It finds Akutagawa well outside of his usual geographic territory as the story is set in Syria and Egypt, one of a handful of his pieces set outside of East

---

<sup>101</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2000).

<sup>102</sup> Karatani, *Origins*, 14.

Asia. Akutagawa again blurs the line between fact and fiction by claiming that he is actually copying the story from a manuscript in his possession, the *Legenda Aurea*, which is not the European *Legenda Aurea*, a collection of hagiographies compiled by Jacobus de Voragine circa 1260, but is rather purported to be a Japanese manuscript celebrating native Christian martyrs.<sup>103</sup> In fact, he does draw his narratives from the European title and not the fabricated version that he claims to have found. Akutagawa makes the same claim of presenting a legend from the Japanese *Legenda Aurea* elsewhere in “The Death of a Believer,” but on both accounts he presents false information to the public.<sup>104</sup>

Akutagawa goes to great lengths to prove the authenticity of the original manuscript in these stories. In “The Death of a Believer,” he claims that his copy is written on Japanese style Mino paper in cursive *kanji* script mixed with *hiragana*, that the copy he has is exceedingly unclear and difficult to read, that it was copied in the Year of our Lord 1596, or the third month of the second year of the Keichō era, and that it’s split into two volumes, of roughly sixty pages each, the first being eight chapters long and the second ten.<sup>105</sup> He also claims that the writing is unrefined and appears to have been directly translated from a foreign language, indicating that it was written by European priests. The story that he presents is, in fact, written in imitation of an archaic style found in another medieval Japanese manuscript, *Isoho Monogatari* (*Aesop’s Fables*), a translation published by the Japanese Christian publishing house Amakusa-ban in 1593.<sup>106</sup> So, in summation, “The Legend of St. Christopher” is purported to be based on

---

<sup>103</sup> Kanda Yumiko, chūkai in *Hōkyōnin no shi*, (Shinchō bunko, 1968) 199.

<sup>104</sup> Kanda Yumiko, *Hōkyōnin no shi*, 199.

<sup>105</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 179-280.

<sup>106</sup> Kanda Yumiko, *Hōkyōnin no shi*, 203.

the Japanese *Legenda Aurea*, which does not exist, is actually based in part on the European *Legenda Aurea*, and is modeled after the language of *Isoho Monogatari*. Noriko Lippit has noted that Akutagawa tends to obscure the distinction between reality and fiction in his literature<sup>107</sup>, and there are few examples of this as convoluted as “The Death of a Believer” and “The Legend of St. Christopher.”

The entirety of “The Legend of St. Christopher” is written in an archaic dialect that is drawn from the Amakusa-ban publications of medieval Japan.<sup>108</sup> The unorthodox style can be distracting at first, but it creates an exotic tone that appears to exist somewhere between the hagiographies of the European middle-ages, the early Christian legends of the Middle East, and a burgeoning Christian culture on the Amakusa islands in 16<sup>th</sup> century Japan. Grammatically, the style makes extensive use of the copular particle *ojaru* at the end of sentences, as well as the conjunctive particle phrases *ja ni yotte* and *shibashi ga hodo*. It replaces the intentional *-yō to suru* with *-ōzu tote* (*kirō to suru* becomes *kirōzu tote*), and changes *shi* to *i* in certain verbal conjugations (*nokoshita* becomes *nokoita*). In conjunction, the grammatical peculiarities create the feeling of a placeless world that the reader is free to imagine as he or she pleases. In addition, they also make the text dense and potentially difficult to approach, a prospect that Akutagawa never seems to worry about. As Ueda Makoto notes, Akutagawa disdained “popular” and

---

<sup>107</sup> Noriko Mizuta Lippit, *Reality and Fiction in Modern Japanese Literature* (White Plains, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1980), 68.

<sup>108</sup> See Jurgis S. A. Elisonas, “Acts, Legends, and Souther Barbarous Japanese,” in *Portugal e a China: conferências nos Encontros de História Luso-Chinesa: Convento da Arrábida, Fevereiro-Dezembro 2000*, ed. Alexandra Curvelo; Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves; et al (Lisboa : Fundação Oriente, 2001) for extensive information on Christian publications in medieval Japan.

“commercial” writing that was too accessible and was willing to make his readers work to discover a deeper didactic message.<sup>109</sup>

Akutagawa begins the narrative of “The Legend of St. Christopher” by describing a giant man named Reprobis, the Latin name of St. Christopher before his conversion, who lives in the wild mountains of Syria. He describes the man in a colorful manner:

In his hair, which was like a thick bundling of grape vines, a vast number of innocent sparrows had built a nest. His arms and legs were so great they could be mistaken for the pines and cypresses of the deep mountains and his footsteps were so heavy that they reverberated in the seven valleys.

When he went hunting, he could crush animals like deer and bears with only the tip of a single finger. Occasionally, he would go to the seashore to scavenge for fish. He would lower his chin with a beard tangled like bunches of seaweed close to the sand and suck in the sea, eating whole sea bream, bonito, and tuna fins. The force of his breath was so great that it disturbed the open ocean and caused a commotion among the seasoned sailors and helmsman out at sea.<sup>110</sup>

Akutagawa’s introduction of the Christian saint pictures a perfectly savage creature. His great mass of tangled hair and his giant beard create the image of a barbarian that recalls once-typical Japanese words used to describe Europeans, those such as *kōmōjin* or *ketō*, or “red-haired person” and “hairy head” respectively. Akutagawa

---

<sup>109</sup> Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 139.

<sup>110</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 34.

reminds us that foreigners are physiologically different from the Japanese, like shaggy giants living in the mountains. As such, the religion of the Europeans is also barbaric; their saints are not refined paragons of wisdom and virtue but are rather beastly mountain men with the ability crush bears and swallow oceans. Granted, St. Christopher is acknowledged to have been a large man even in Christian accounts, but Akutagawa's depiction exaggerates the physical representation of the man as a superhuman giant. The halo and majestic countenance of St. Christopher that is found in European art is ignored in favor of the exotic features of a wild barbarian.

Akutagawa continues to describe the giant as a good-natured simpleton who drinks cheerfully with the local woodcutters and farmers and who assists lost children and weary travelers through the mountains. The giant Reprobis is not troubled with questions of philosophy or ethics, but rather kills animals when he needs to eat and helps peasants when he sees them in need. There is no complication in his interaction with the natural world. This image, while positive, also subverts the image of the scientific and modern man from the West. It is no longer the Asian who is unsophisticated and in natural communication with the nature, but the Westerner. Through his nuanced depiction, Akutagawa's legend of St. Christopher presents a Western man who is both barbaric in his action and simple in his thinking.

After introducing Reprobis, Akutagawa writes that the giant decides to venture out into the world after a lifetime in the mountains. He discusses his options with a group of local woodcutters in a scene that brings Akutagawa's exotic wordplay to the forefront. To begin, Reprobis and the woodcutters engage in conversation over a bottle of *sake*



heated in a *takkuri*, or a traditional Japanese rice wine bottle.<sup>111</sup> Reprobus laments that he would like to try his hand at war by joining one of the local *daimyō* but he is unsure of who the strongest warlord might be. The woodcutters agree; there are many *taishō* (great generals) who brag of being peerless under heaven (*tenka musō*) but obviously one of them must be greater than all of the rest. Finally, they suggest that he visit with the *Mikado* (Japanese Emperor) of Antioch. In a flipped image of crucifix-wearing nobles in “The Wandering Jew,” this episode in “The Legend of St. Christopher” portrays woodcutters in the Syrian mountains drinking *sake* and discussing the political campaigns of the *daimyō*. On one hand, it demonstrates a point of cultural convergence where Europe and Japan become indistinguishable from one another, yet on the other hand, it illustrates the impossibility of truly understanding another culture without twisting it to one’s own worldview.

Through his complex collage of images, Akutagawa transforms the world of St. Christopher into a cultural satire where hairy barbarians and noble Japanese generals live side by side. It is again through crafty wordplay that Akutagawa achieves this effect of the nonsensically exotic which intensifies the fantasy of his *kirishitanmono*. In Syria’s reflection of Japan, and Japan’s reflection of Syria, one recalls Benedict Anderson’s “spectre of comparison,” a cultural phenomenon in which a “restless double-conscious” prevents one image from ever completely being itself.<sup>112</sup> Rather, one image infinitely reflects the other without ever reaching a satisfying point of definition. Neither East nor West can any longer be understood in isolation, but only exist as reflections of each other.

---

<sup>111</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 35.

<sup>112</sup> Benedict Anderson, *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 229.

Akutagawa's creation of a freely mixed language reflects the reality of his age, the globalizing Meiji and Taishō eras during which the vocabulary of the West was increasingly in use in Japan. The result of this linguistic breakdown was troubling to cultural purists who were unable to accept a world where words no longer had a proper home but were blended with democratic abandon. As these kinds of cross-cultural contaminations became increasingly prominent, artists became nostalgic for a "purer, richer past" that was no longer accessible in modern Japan.<sup>113</sup> The desire for a pure Japan would lead to decades of cultural debate and upheaval in an arc that led from Romantic nostalgia for the past to Fascist regulation of language and image.<sup>114</sup> In a globalized Japan, Akutagawa's parodic use of language was not just amusing, but reflected a real cultural conflict that had emerged in his time over the proper use of language.

Akutagawa continues his linguistic experimentation in "The Legend of St. Christopher" as Reprobus decides to travel to Antioch, in Anatolia, in order to join the forces of the local *Mikado*, a title normally reserved for the Japanese emperor.<sup>115</sup> In Antioch, he becomes a powerful warrior with the ability to subdue dozens of soldiers single-handedly and advances quickly through the ranks of the army. One evening, a *biwa* player comes to the palace to entertain the *Mikado*. Suddenly, the *Mikado* realizes that the *biwa* player's song is actually an evil incantation, a trick which he responds to by crossing himself for protection. Reprobus asks a retainer what this symbol means, to which the retainer responds that the ruler is defending himself from the magic of one

---

<sup>113</sup> Napier, *Fantastic in Japanese Literature*, 1.

<sup>114</sup> Alan Tansman, *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009), 35.

<sup>115</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 35-36.

greater than him, that is, the devil. Upon hearing this, Reprobus immediately decides to quit his job and search for the devil in order to join his ranks. After fighting the forces of his former master, Reprobus is met by the devil. The devil tucks Reprobus under his coat, makes him disappear, and flies with him through the air like a giant bat. They fly over Egypt where they focus in on the scene of a Christian hermit being tested by the illusions of the devil. The hermit is St. Anthony, a character who does not take part in St. Christopher's official hagiography, but who Akutagawa decides to include in his version

As St. Anthony witnesses a series of ghastly images in his desert hut, Akutagawa once again decides to engage in an imaginative round of linguistic experimentation.<sup>116</sup> At first, St. Anthony is assaulted by a lustful siren with scenes of hell painted on her *uchikake*, or bridal kimono. As the old man struggles with this first temptation, pleasure districts as wild as those of Murotsu or Kanzaki appear before his eyes. The siren becomes like a *tennyo*, or any of the various celestial maidens and female deities that are frequently represented in Buddhist art. Also, her voice becomes like that of the *Karyōbinga* (Sanskrit *Kalavinka*), originally a Himalayan bird mentioned in various Indian sutras who becomes a half-bird, half-woman deity in Japanese Buddhist art. The hermit almost takes the hand of the siren but then realizes that there is no reason for a harlot of Antioch's pleasure districts to be in his room in the middle of the desert. He figures that she must be nothing other than a trick of the devil. To void her power, St. Anthony chants a *dharani* (a piece of ritual speech used to ward off evil in Buddhism), crosses himself, calls on the name of Jesus Christ, and tells her to submit to his power. Both the siren and the devil are covered in *sakura* flowers as they fade away.

---

<sup>116</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 44-45.

This hybrid Buddhist/Christian scene of St. Anthony overcoming temptation illustrates Akutagawa's familiarity with both religions and the ease with which he manipulates the boundary between them. This episode nearly makes the case for a truly universal narrative within Akutagawa's Christian stories in which the powers of good, whether they stem from Christ in the form of a cross or the Buddha as a *dharani*, overcome the forces of evil. However, it must be noted that evil is primarily equated with Buddhism in this passage, as well as with cultural images of Japan in general. Thus, Akutagawa appears to be framing the message of Christianity as one which opposes sin as symbolized by the East. St. Anthony is not only battling the devil, but rather a corrupted pantheon of Buddhist deities and diabolic women in kimonos. His portrayal of the East through Western Christian eyes is apt, as Western theologians who first came upon Buddhism envisioned the religion as being "indulgently ritualistic" and "diabolically corrupt."<sup>117</sup> In this story, the evil of the East is eventually trumped by Western Christianity, but in other stories Akutagawa sides with the aesthetically superior Eastern spirit, as will be explored further in the following chapter. In this scene, once again, exotic language becomes a center of cultural conflict.

Following St. Anthony's defeat of the devil, Reprobus decides to join forces with the hermit's master, Jesus Christ. St. Anthony tells Reprobus that none who have once been companions of the devil can become servants of Christ, but Reprobus persists until he is eventually baptized and christened with his new name, Christopher. He is unable to meet Christ due to the heaviness of his past sins but he decides to serve the Lord nonetheless in the hope that one day he will be forgiven. He becomes a ferryman of sorts

---

<sup>117</sup> Masuzawa Tomoko, *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005), 121.

carrying travelers on his back across a raging river. After many years, Christ appears to St. Christopher in the form of a child, but the giant does not recognize his master. The child appears on an especially stormy night, but figuring that the small-framed youth will be easy to ferry across the river, St. Christopher hauls him on his back and heads into the savagely whirling waters. The child grows unbearably heavy as St. Christopher proceeds and he struggles with all of his might to reach the other bank. In the middle of the river, a halo of brilliant light breaks out over the head of the Christ child which clues the giant into his passenger's true nature. After he barely manages to reach the opposite bank, the Christ child informs St. Christopher that he has just shouldered the pain of the entire world by bringing his lord, Jesus Christ, across the river and that he has been accepted as a true servant of God. The child then disappears and in his place appears a bundle of beautiful and fragrant crimson roses.

The progression of "The Legend of St. Christopher" is thus similar to that of "The Wandering Jew." Both stories begin with heavily exotic presentations, proceed into different criticisms of Western ideologies and their relations to Japanese culture, and end with the redemption of a Christian who shoulders the weight of the world's sins and emerges victorious. They are ambiguous narratives in which Christianity is criticized and foreignized but its adherents are praised for their steadfast beliefs. As stories, they are somewhat lacking in narrative and focus foremost on linguistic ornamentation and exotic images. The question of whether Christianity is good or bad for Japan is not proposed or answered with any seriousness, but the idea of Christianity as a strangely foreign and even barbaric belief is emphasized through the use of various exotic elements.

Akutagawa's obscure linguistic choices in both of these *kirishitanmono* create an image of a religion far-removed from the logical organization of modernity. Intellectuals during the Meiji period began a process of reforming Japanese in order to make it more accessible for the modern reader, dispensing with some of the more difficult characters and compounds,<sup>118</sup> but Akutagawa decided to venture in the exact opposite direction by utilizing less standard language and more archaic wording. His image of Christianity is built upon a foundation of linguistic experimentation which exoticizes its subject as belonging to a pre-modern world. His language is marked by extensive foreign loan words that are not part of the modern lexicon, dense blocks of foreign people and place names, a convoluted classical styling that is only occasionally accurate, and references with no sources or citations. It is a style imitative of a time when conventions for writing were not yet established and alien concepts stretched the boundaries of the native language. The exaggerated linguistic presentations of these *kirishitanmono* are both fantastical and difficult to understand as they mirror a barbaric Christian world predating modern logic. As fascinating as they might be, they remain forever alienating due to the exotic language and textual density employed within. As Akutagawa continues his Christian stories, he repeatedly evaluates and reevaluates Christianity as an ideological system, but regardless of the direction in which he takes his analysis, he maintains the foreignness of the religion through constant linguistic experimentation.

---

<sup>118</sup> Ariga Chieko, "The Playful Gloss: Rubi in Japanese Translation," *Monumenta Nipponica* 44 (1988): 318.

### CHAPTER III

#### THREE CONVERSATIONS WITH THE DEVIL: “TABAKO TO AKUMA,”

#### “AKUMA,” AND “RUSHIHERU”

“In order to create a work of genius, it is not a rare thing for an author to sell his soul to the devil.”

- Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, “Art, etc.”<sup>119</sup>

Three of Akutagawa’s earliest *kirishitanmono* feature the same theme, that of a dialogue that takes place between Christians and the devil in medieval Japan, though the significance of the encounter changes through the arc of the three stories. The first of these works is “Tobacco and the Devil” (“Tabako to akuma,” 1916), the title piece of Akutagawa’s second collection of short stories and the first of his *kirishitanmono*. It presents the devil as he would be recognized in a mainstream Christian context, as a deceiver and enemy of Christian believers. The next story is titled simply “The Devil” (“Akuma,” 1917), and the episode presented therein is reworked in the third piece, “Lucifer” (“Rushiheru,” 1918). In contrast to “Tobacco and the Devil,” these latter two stories exhibit an unorthodox view of the devil by portraying him as a morally ambiguous figure rather than the archfiend of traditional Christianity. He faces psychological battles similar to those faced by all human beings as he struggles between the desires to do both good and evil. Through the arc of these three narratives, Akutagawa shifts towards an increasingly critical appraisal of Christian theology after having already established the

---

<sup>119</sup> Kindai bungaku kenkyū kai, *Ningen: Akutagawa no kotoba*, 32. See Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*, Vol. 5 (Iwanami Shoten, 1996).

exotic nature of the religion. He begins to investigate the particularities of the Christian faith and questions whether it has any relevance for the Japanese. Specifically, he questions Christianity as a system which divides good and evil into positive and negative poles and then contrasts this with the non-dualistic nature of East Asian religious thought.

In his devil stories, Akutagawa presents characters who are unable to completely embrace either good or evil regardless of the effort they expend in search of salvation. He then juxtaposes the absolutist nature of Christianity with what he depicts as the less rigid nature of Buddhism and finds that the two have completely incompatible views of the world. In the Buddhist framework, both good and evil are understood to be natural parts of the universe, or more accurately, two illusory categories within a non-discriminating reality. Neither good nor evil really exist, but are rather perceived as opposing forces by the unenlightened human being. In the light of Buddhist ideology, the dualistic nature of Christianity, in which good is forever good and evil is always evil, is untenable. This fundamental division of moral categories is shown to be nothing more than another illusion of reality and not reality itself. By utilizing the non-dualistic form of Buddhist ideology, Akutagawa criticizes the Christian devil as a fundamentally Western and, moreover, unenlightened idea.

Akutagawa continues to use exotic wordplay in “The Devil” and “Lucifer,” as he does in nearly all of the *kirishitanmono*, but here he makes the philosophy of Christianity as alien as its presentation. He utilizes more than just the outer form of Christianity, but instead examines its theological core as a fundamentally foreign idea. Even at its center, after having been stripped of its exotic outer layer, Christianity is shown to be an uncomfortable religious fit for the Japanese. It makes little sense in the context of



traditional Buddhist views and remains foreign for even the most enthusiastic Japanese convert. Some of the earliest of the *kirishitanmono*, such as “Dr. Ogata Ryōsai: Memorandum” and “The Wandering Jew,” use Christianity mostly as a novel setting in which to stage eccentric stories of the supernatural, but subsequent stories show an increased engagement with the religion as a system of spiritual teachings, and one that must be examined critically and within the context of Japanese traditions.

“Tobacco and the Devil,” Akutagawa’s first widely published *kirishitanmono*, is one of his most accessible Christian stories, containing little of the linguistic density that makes many of his other works more difficult to approach. Nonetheless, despite its entertainment factor, it also shows elements of a brewing cultural conflict between East and West. Specifically, the story presents the history of the arrival and the spread of tobacco in Japan, and by extension, the naturalization of a foreign product in a native setting. Tobacco is an especially apt example of an invading Western tradition because, for one, it is relentlessly addictive, and as such there is little hope of completely eradicating its hold on society. The danger of its use may be widely acknowledged, and yet its consumption continues unabated. Also, tobacco is a product with centuries of history in Japanese culture; its use had become a natural part of society by the time that Akutagawa penned “Tobacco and the Devil” and continues to be so today.

The use of tobacco by the Japanese began around the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the intensification of Portuguese commerce in Japan and was already widespread by the mid Edo-period, a time during which, according to Timon Screech, “Fortunes were to be made in the tobacco trade,” and “men with any spare resources at all spent it on

smoking.”<sup>120</sup> Native Japanese artisans established an entire industry around tobacco pipes, pouches, and other paraphernalia, creating tobacco-related objects that doubled as works of fine art, such as *netsuke* (small figurines used to hold pouches in place), *tabako-ire* (tobacco pouches) and *kiseru-zutsu* (cases for Japanese-style tobacco pipes).<sup>121</sup> Santō Kyōden, one of the leading writers and artists of the Edo period, owned a smoking-goods shop which he frequently advertised in his writings.<sup>122</sup> By the early Meiji period, and even more so by Akutagawa’s day, tobacco had become irreversibly Japanese. It was one part of a Western-modeled lifestyle in an age when, as Alan Tansman notes, the Japanese began to see European traditions as their own.<sup>123</sup> Western tobacco, like other European traditions, could no longer be expelled; no matter how much it was objected to or how problematic people knew it to be, it was in Japan to stay.

In the Meiji period, tobacco was emblematic of a West that had invaded Asia specifically through the process of commodification. It was a cultural product as much as it was a cultural practice, and as such it indicated the power of the West to conquer economically. Through attractive products such as tobacco, Western modernity had become available to the East in the form of commodities, and moreover, ones which created insatiable desire. As Iriye Akira notes, the Meiji Japanese “were obsessed not so

---

<sup>120</sup> Timon Screech, “Tobacco in Edo Period Japan,” in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 98-99.

<sup>121</sup> Suzuki Barnabas Tatsuya, “Tobacco Culture in Japan,” in *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, ed. Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (London: Reaktion Books, 2004), 82.

<sup>122</sup> Screech, “Tobacco in Edo,” 98-99.

<sup>123</sup> Tansman, *Aesthetics of Fascism*, 35.

much by military confrontation as by commercial competition with the West,”<sup>124</sup> and in the West they saw the power of the new global market. Tobacco demonstrated how one world power could thoroughly infiltrate and subdue another through seductively economic means, until the traditions of the conquered completely mirrored those of the conqueror. The spread of tobacco painted an image of a Japanese nation that was powerless to the advances of Western commerce, but which adopted and cherished Western commodities as its own. In fact, Akutagawa himself was, as Glenn W. Shaw notes, “an inveterate smoker of cigarettes”<sup>125</sup>, and was thus well-acquainted with the seductive power of the Western product.

“Tobacco and the Devil,” in common with “The Wandering Jew,” also plays with the idea that Japanese modernity is justified via the demonstration of a parallel history with the Western world. “Tobacco and the Devil” illustrates this link through a history of tobacco usage while “The Wandering Jew” does so through a mythological connection, but both instances demonstrate that Japan has been positioned within the cultural nexus of the Western world for centuries before the arrival of the supposedly more global era. The satirical tone employed by Akutagawa in these stories suggests that such links are being called into question for their validity as measures of modernity, and yet they are also treated at least nominally as serious enterprises. In their mock seriousness, these stories satirize a real movement by the Japanese of the Meiji era to call upon their parallel history to the West as a source of legitimacy in their rise to global predominance.

---

<sup>124</sup> Iriye Akira, “Kayahara Kazan and Japanese Cosmopolitanism,” in *Personality in Japanese History*, ed. Albert M. Craig and Donald H. Shively, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1970), 376.

<sup>125</sup> Shaw, *Tales Grotesque*, v.

Japanese scholars of the late Meiji and Taishō eras had become determined to demonstrate that Japan was always on a level with the West as a major world power and that their ascendancy to the peak of Asian modernity had been predicted by their history. John Whitney Hall notes that Meiji period historians “were fascinated by the remarkable congruence they saw between Japanese and European political and social institutions,” and that their “search for institutional similarities between the two societies became something of an obsession.”<sup>126</sup> It was as though the scholars of the late Meiji period had taken the advice of journalist Kayahara Kazan when he said, “Do not consider Japan your homeland... Take the entire world as your homeland.”<sup>127</sup> Only through similarity with the West and proof of a cosmopolitan Japanese history could the nation demonstrate its worthiness to become a major world power. In “Tobacco and the Devil” and “The Wandering Jew,” Akutagawa engages in the same rhetoric of a historical linkage with the West, but he does so with an ironic tone.

As with almost all of the *kirishitanmono*, “Tobacco and the Devil” opens with a brief historical introduction. Akutagawa starts the tale by presenting the possible dates that tobacco might have first been imported to Japan, suggesting sometime during the Tenbun (1532 – 1555), Tenshō (1573 – 1592), or Keichō (1596 – 1615) eras, but he comes to the conclusion that, in any event, it was already flourishing all over the country by the tenth year of the Keichō era (1615).<sup>128</sup> Akutagawa provides historical proof of the extent of tobacco’s intrusion into Japanese culture by quoting a Bunroku (1592 – 1596)

---

<sup>126</sup> John Whitney Hall, “Terms and Concepts in Japanese Medieval History: An Inquiry into the Problems of Translation,” *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9 (1983): 1-32, 5.

<sup>127</sup> Iriye Akira, “Kayahara Kazan,” 377.

<sup>128</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 275.

era satirical poem, or *rakushu*, that reads, “Pointless measures, the prohibition of tobacco and of coins<sup>129</sup>, in the emperor’s honorable voice, the haughty doctor.”<sup>130</sup> Akutagawa then presents the most widely-accepted theory for how tobacco arrived in Japan, that it was imported by the Portuguese or the Spanish, but then informs the reader that he is aware of an alternative story which he is eager to present, that being, that it was actually imported by the devil.

The pattern of presenting a brief historical introduction, an accepted theory, and then providing a radical alternative quickly becomes a mainstay of Akutagawa’s *kirishitanmono*. He hints to his own deceptive technique before launching into the story by saying:

However, I am unable to verify whether that devil really did or did not bring tobacco into the country. According to Anatole France’s writings, the devil was able to tempt a priest with a mignonette flower.<sup>131</sup>

Considering that much, we can’t possibly say that it is an absolute lie that the devil also brought the tobacco flower to Japan. Yet even if it is a lie, it

---

<sup>129</sup> Specifically refers to *zeni hatto*, more formally known as the *erizenirei*, or prohibition on the selective trade of currency. During the Muromachi era the circulation of counterfeit Chinese (Song and Ming) coins was rampant and Japanese merchants often rejected these coins or traded them in great quantity for higher quality, legitimate Chinese coins. Many daimyō attempted variously to outlaw this practice or to regulate the exchange between counterfeit and legitimate money at a legally specified rate, but the merchants continued to discriminate between types of money. This created discrepancies in currency value.

<sup>130</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 275.

<sup>131</sup> Akutagawa says *mokuseisō*. Mignonette is an aromatic flower that decorated windows in the Mediterranean region during the middle ages.

is possible that it still bears some meaning, or perhaps some semblance of the truth.<sup>132</sup>

Here, Akutagawa explicitly states that the story that follows is not necessarily true, while in other *kirishitanmono* he holds fast to his claim that he is unveiling genuine information to the public. Regardless, in the opening of “Tobacco and the Devil,” he specifically asserts the value of the semi-truths, or even outright lies, that are so prevalent in his *kirishitanmono*, if they contain a reflection of a larger truth. In this way, his Christian stories become like Buddhist *hōben* (Sanskrit *upaya*), or indirect methods of arriving at a deeper truth.<sup>133</sup> The content of the story is not necessarily factual, but where the allegorical story can cause reflection in the reader or serve some other didactic purpose, even lies or semi-truths become a valuable tool.

It is also important to explain here Akutagawa’s allusion to a story by Anatole France in the aforementioned passage. Akutagawa’s earliest published writings were not works of fiction but rather translations of Anatole France and William Butler Yeats.<sup>134</sup> He began his career as a writer by translating France’s short story “Balthasar,” part of a collection of the same name, which he based on the English translation of the French

---

<sup>132</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 276.

<sup>133</sup> Also known as expedient means, or a roundabout way of bringing one closer to the goal of enlightenment, using methods specifically suited to that individual’s current understanding of the truth.

<sup>134</sup> Howard S. Hibbett, “Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and the Negative Ideal,” in *Personality in Japanese History*, ed. Albert M. Craig and Donald H. Shively (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1970), 12. For Akutagawa’s translation of Anatole France’s “Balthasar” see ARZ, Vol.1, 3-23. For his translation of Yeats’ “Celtic Twilight” see ARZ, Vol. 1, 32-38.

original.<sup>135</sup> As has been previously noted, Akutagawa claimed Kitahara Hakushū as his major influence for writing the *kirishitanmono*, but France must also be included as one of the most important sources for these stories, perhaps even more so than Kitahara. The short stories in France's collection *Balthasar* are echoed, if not outright copied, in almost all of the *kirishitanmono*. It is hard to imagine that these stories would have even existed if Akutagawa had not read *Balthasar* during his early days as a writer.

The short story "Balthasar" by Anatole France is a Christian narrative that takes place in the exotic orient, in this case Ethiopia, and follows the life of one of the three magi before his discovery of a new star and his commitment to Christ. The story opens with a quote from early Christian writer Tertullian, "Magos reges fere habuit Oriens" ("The East commonly held kings versed in magic"), which immediately posits the east as a land of magic and fantasy.<sup>136</sup> Balthasar is the black king of Ethiopia who falls in love with the light-skinned Balkis, Queen of Sheba. He is determined to make Balkis his own but he soon finds that she is a deceitful and promiscuous woman. He is heartbroken and decides to dedicate himself to gaining wisdom as he trains to be a mage under the counsel of his advisor, Sembobitis. Sembobitis teaches him the names of planets, Bel, Merodach, Nebo, Sin, and Mylitta. He also teaches him about astrology, fate and magic, and the incantations of Astrampsychos, Gobryas, and Pazatas. Eventually Balthasar finds a new star in the sky which leads him to the newborn Christ, to whom he devotes his life.

---

<sup>135</sup> Kanda Yumiko, *Hōkyōnin no shi*, 188. For the English translation see Anatole France, *The Works of Anatole France in an English Translation*, Frederic Chapman, J Lewis May, trans., eds., (London: John Lane; New York: John Lane Company, 1908).

<sup>136</sup> Anatole France, *Balthasar*, trans. Mrs. John Lane (London: John Lane, The Bodley Head; New York: John Lane Company, 1909), 3.

In “Balthasar,” we see the kind of exotic wordplay and themes that became an essential component of Akutagawa’s *kirishitanmono*. In this way, France’s inspirational contribution to Akutagawa’s works is similar to Kitahara Hakushū’s, that is, he demonstrates a method in which the Other is invoked through suggestive linguistic methods. In “Balthasar,” however, the basic structure of the *kirishitanmono* is apparent, that in which a fictional story is based on a traditional piece of Christian narrative and a didactic message is tied in at the end. France’s prose is also more playful than the austere images of Kitahara’s poetry, and Akutagawa seems to reproduce a large part of France’s ironic touch in his own works. As famed Japanese literary critic Kobayashi Hideo writes, “Akutagawa clung stubbornly to the intellectualism of Gourmont and Anatole France, whom he evidently loved.”<sup>137</sup>

While “Balthasar” shows some indirect influence on the *kirishitanmono*, other works in the eponymous collection reveal a greater level of similarity, beginning with the story alluded to in “Tobacco and the Devil,” “The Curé’s Mignonette.” The very brief story tells of a holy man who denies himself every indulgence and practices renunciation day and night. The man considers himself safe from the charms of the devil and is secure in his life of religious devotion. However, one day temptation comes from an unlikely source, a fragrant mignonette flower in his garden, into which the devil has intruded. When the man realizes that he is being led to hell by this flower, he is shocked and resolves to remove the plant immediately. France writes,

---

<sup>137</sup> Kobayashi Hideo, “The Muse and the Fate,” 101.



Not without reason do we say that all our natural inclinations lead us toward sin! The man of God had succeeded in guarding his eyes, but he had left his nostrils undefended, and so the devil, as it were, caught him by the nose. This saint now inhaled the fragrance of mignonette with avidity and lust, that is to say, with that sinful instinct which makes us long for the enjoyment of natural pleasures and which leads us into all sorts of temptations.<sup>138</sup>

The message of this excerpt is echoed repeatedly in the early *kirishitanmono*, especially in the pieces presented in this chapter. Akutagawa alludes to “The Curé’s Mignonette” in “Tobacco and the Devil,” the first of his Christian stories, and then maintains his homage in subsequent works; indeed, he would draw on *Balthasar* on many other occasions.

After his historical presentation and allusion to Anatole France, Akutagawa jumps into the narrative text of “Tobacco and the Devil.” He begins by presenting a hypothetical situation in which the Jesuit missionaries inadvertently take the devil on board their galleon while docked in Macau. From Macau, the devil shifts his shape and stealthily finds his place aboard the Jesuit ship. In describing the event of the demonic stowaway’s boarding, Akutagawa depicts the prototypical devil of Christianity. He writes that the devil “curled his tail around the yard of the ship, and while hanging upside down, stealthily observed the situation onboard,” and later describes the devil as having horns. Thus, the devil of this first *kirishitanmono* becomes a picture-book character with fantastic demonic qualities, not yet taking on the aesthetic attributes of Akutagawa’s later depictions.

---

<sup>138</sup> France, *Balthasar*, 30.

As the devil disembarks in Japan, the story quickly takes on a satirical tone. The fiend finds Japan to be completely unlike anything he had been led to believe. Contrary to the expectations of the Western reader, especially one convinced of the universalism of Christian cosmology, the devil has never been to Japan, and in fact, his only previous exposure to any kind of description of the country was in Marco Polo's *Travels*.

Akutagawa writes:

First of all, according to that travelogue, an abundance of gold was to be found in every corner of the country, but no matter where he searched, he found nothing of the sort. Moreover, it was supposed that the Japanese could produce gold by rubbing any small pebble, which would have made for an irresistible temptation indeed. It was also written that the Japanese had acquired a pearl of some sort which could raise men from the dead, but this too appears to have been no more than another one of Marco Polo's lies. While on the subject of lies, he had also said that if you spit into any well in the land, it would give rise to a terrible pestilence that would cause suffering so great that all men would forget their aspirations for paradise. While following Saint Francis Xavier, touring the country and admiring its sights, the devil secretly thought about these things and let slip a satisfying grin.<sup>139</sup>

In this passage, Akutagawa satirizes the Orientalist tendencies of Western accounts of Asia that came into existence long before his time. He enacts his vengeance

---

<sup>139</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 277.

on the West by ironically highlighting the preposterousness of the Orientalist imagination and then casually dismissing it. Even the devil cannot help but smile when he realizes that the Europeans have it all wrong and that their knowledge of the Orient amounts to little more than lies. Once again, the European is primitivized for his false beliefs and his ignorance of worldly matters. Even though Akutagawa was deeply influenced by the art of Europe and the Western world, he was always quick to point out superstition and ingenuousness in his European materials, an ambivalent treatment which he centralized in his encounter with the West.

After finding that he knows nothing about the real Japan, the devil also realizes that he is unable to tempt any of the Japanese people. That is because, for one, he is unable to speak the language, and secondly, the Japanese have not yet been converted to Christianity, and so they have no concept of the Christian devil or sin in the first place. In this manner, the ultimate adversary and paragon of evil in the Christian tradition becomes little more than another European in Japan, that is, a foreigner who cannot speak the language and who lacks even a basic knowledge of the culture. This is a trope that Akutagawa uses repeatedly in the *kirishitanmono*, that of foreign religious figures who are unable to speak Japanese. It goes to show that, not only do the foreigners fail to understand the philosophical content of the culture which they encounter, but they fail at even the essential task of mastering the foreign tongue. The mastery of the native language is shown to be an essential step in mastering the culture, and the foreigner is precluded from every truly grasping the Japanese tongue. Later Christian writer Endo Shūsaku echoes this essential separation of the Western mind from the Japanese one by

positing that the very language and psychology of the two cultures are inherently incompatible.<sup>140</sup>

It must be noted here that Akutagawa's insistence that none of the foreigners in his texts can ever learn to speak Japanese is problematic. The fact that his foreigners are inherently incapable of learning the Japanese language risks the very absolutism that Akutagawa opposes in his criticism of Marco Polo's Orientalist imagery, one in which Japan is profoundly Other. This is an essentializing tendency, the kind that, according to Leela Gandhi's interpretation of Frantz Fanon, leads to "an insidious racialization of thought" via an "unconditional affirmation" of one's own culture.<sup>141</sup> To be Japanese means to have an absolute command of the language, and to not be Japanese means to never fully grasp it. Of course, Akutagawa is being satirical in this instance, and his intentions do not appear menacing, but he is participating in the codifying of a rhetoric of linguistic superiority, and if language is then equated with culture, then he is also positioning Japanese culture as being apart from and superior to others. Once a culture has asserted its linguistic superiority, it is in a position to absorb those around it into a hegemonic structure in which it permanently occupies the top position. While it is useful to question the cultural systems and assumptions of the foreigner, as Akutagawa does in this scene, to portray each and every foreigner as being unable to learn one's language is unrealistic, and potentially absolutist.

In any event, regardless of its political implications, within the context of "Tobacco and the Devil" the devil's lack of knowledge of Japanese serves as a plot

---

<sup>140</sup> Mase-Hasegawa Emi, *Christ in Japanese Culture: Theological Themes in Shūsaku Endō's Literary Works* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008), 63.

<sup>141</sup> Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 123. Quotes Frantz Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 171.

device to further the narrative. Since the devil cannot speak the language, his only recourse in tempting the Japanese is to plant tobacco and encourage its spread, and so he diligently pours all of his efforts into farming a tobacco field. As he begins his endeavor, he hears the toll of a bell from a distant Buddhist temple that gives him an oddly uncomfortable sensation:

It was right during the heavy humidity of early spring. From the depths of a lingering haze, a faraway temple bell tolled with a lulling sound that resonated through the air. The sound was infinitely tranquil, and unlike the bell of a Western church, it didn't vibrate with a *clang* and go straight to the head. Within such calming scenery, you would think that even the devil would find himself relaxed, but this was most certainly not the case.

Once he heard the toll of the Buddhist temple bell, he felt even greater discomfort than he ever felt from the sound of the bells at Saint Paul's Cathedral. He furrowed his brows and began to strike violently at the earth with his plow. That is because, upon hearing the relaxing tones of the temple bell, as he bathed in the faint sunlight, he strangely felt his heart go soft. He no longer had any desire to do good, nor evil. If he let this go on, there would be no point in his having crossed the ocean with the express purpose of tempting the Japanese.<sup>142</sup>

---

<sup>142</sup> ARZ, Vol. 1, 278.

This passage presents the devil as being perplexed when he lands on Japanese soil and realizes that he has no background in Asian religion. He is even frightened by the tone of the temple bell, a sound that exudes the tenets of Buddhism, specifically the non-dualism of reality. The sound of the Asian religion overwhelms him and threatens to destroy his being as he begins to realize that even evil is no more than an illusion. Thus the devil, as just another foreigner in Japan, discovers that he is not the owner of the absolute truth, but that there are others with insights that he has yet to arrive at. In fact, the devil's surprise when encountering the Buddhist bell is reminiscent of the real-world shock of the European public when they first took notice of the Buddhist religion. As Masuzawa Tomoko writes, "The discovery that there were so many Buddhists in the world by educated Europeans was greatly troubling and alarming and called for some way of reasoning or contextualizing..."<sup>143</sup> The tolling of the bell also recalls the opening line of the medieval Japanese epic, *Heike Monogatari* (*The Tale of the Heike*), which reads: "The sound of the Gion Shōja bells echoes the impermanence of all things..."<sup>144</sup> In summoning the image of the bell, Akutagawa encapsulates an Eastern aesthetic of transience that is in direct opposition to the Western Christian emphasis on permanence. He presents this Eastern aesthetic as a powerful force which can destroy even the devil's belief in absolute evil.

This part of "Tobacco and the Devil" also posits Buddhism as a more enlightened and universal tradition than Christianity. The fact that the devil may be defeated by the mere toll of a Buddhist bell indicates that the traditional powers that have tried to keep

---

<sup>143</sup> Masuzawa, *Invention of Religions*, 138.

<sup>144</sup> *The Tale of the Heike*, trans. Helen Craig McCullough (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988).

him in check, those of the Christian religion, are inferior to the powers of Buddhism. In non-duality and the acknowledgement that both good and evil are only illusion, Buddhism trumps the narrow-minded categorization of the West. Akutagawa questions how advanced a civilization can be when even its greatest powers are easily defeated by the briefest encounter with a new idea. Here, once again, Akutagawa is found provincializing Europe, or compartmentalizing European tradition, as he disavows the universal power of Christianity.

“Tobacco and the Devil” goes on to depict a Japanese Christian’s encounter with the devil disguised as a Jesuit priest. A wandering cowherd and Christian convert spots the devil planting a mysterious flower and is intrigued by the unknown plant. He asks the devil the name of the plant, to which the devil replies that he is prohibited from saying but that he agrees to let the cowherd have the entire crop if he can correctly guess its name. He adds red wine and a painting of the Garden of Eden to his offer, tantalizing the Christian by counting on his obsession with foreign goods. The devil then informs the cowherd that if he loses, he will have his soul, after which he reveals his horns and his true identity. The man is petrified and prays fervently to the *Virgem Maria*<sup>145</sup> to save him. The man gets the devil to give away the secret when he sets his cows loose on the devil’s field, causing the devil to vocally curse at the beasts for ruining his tobacco plants and thus forfeiting his crop to the farmer. Akutagawa seems to indicate that the Japanese convert has won the wager through his clever ingenuity, but at the very end of the story he remarks that the victory might in fact belong to the devil, as he was successful at permanently rooting tobacco use into Japanese life.

---

<sup>145</sup> Portuguese: Virgin Mary.

The cowherd in “Tobacco and the Devil” appears as the first in a long series of Japanese characters in the *kirishitanmono* who are hopelessly attracted to the material culture and the customs of the West. His desire for the red wine and the Western painting are so strong that he nearly loses his soul in his bargain to obtain them. The West to him becomes attainable through its commodification. It is interesting here to note Marx’s definition of a commodity, that which is “in the first place, an object outside of us, a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another.”<sup>146</sup> Marx’s words ring especially true in this situation, because the Western objects exist completely outside of the cowherd’s existence, and they have the potential to satisfy his desire to transform himself into the Other. The West becomes attainable by an imitation of its form and an embrace of its commodities, but in the case of the cowherd, these impulses lead only to trouble and an endangerment of his very soul.

The fact the devil ultimately succeeds in importing tobacco to Japan also demonstrates that the commodities of the West ultimately overtake the traditions of their target. Akutagawa might be suspicious of the religion of the West and might criticize its shallowness in the face of Buddhism, but tobacco, the Western product, is not easily defeated. If tobacco is so readily accepted and becomes so ingrained in Japan that not even the shogun can eliminate its usage, it is possible that more Western traditions will take root in Japan once they are made into desirable products. Dualism and non-dualism both become of little consequence when the secular world of consumption comes into play.

---

<sup>146</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital, Vol I.*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: The Modern Library, 1906), 41.



In 1917 Akutagawa published “The Devil,” an exceptionally brief story that relates a conversation that takes place between a Jesuit priest, Brother Urugan<sup>147</sup>, and the devil. The story begins by detailing Brother Urugan’s supernatural ability to see beast-like demonic spirits, a power his Japanese converts firmly believe in. Akutagawa specifically describes the Japanese converts as *hōkyōnin* that attend *Nanban-ji* where they worship *Deusu-nyorai*, all of which are ideologically significant terms.<sup>148</sup> That is because, in conjunction, they establish the aesthetic of a hybridized foreign tradition that takes an increasingly central role in Akutagawa’s *kirishitanmono*. First, there is the term *hōkyōnin*, a word used during the medieval period to designate Japanese Christians. The word literally means a person (*nin*) who serves the teachings (*hōkyō*), and would no longer be used by Akutagawa’s day, unlike the modern terms *kurisuchan* or *kirisutokyōto*. Next there is *Nanban-ji*. The word consists of two elements, the first of which is *nanban*, or Southern Barbarian, a term applied to Europeans in general in pre-modern Japan,<sup>149</sup> and then *ji*, which normally means a Buddhist temple. The term *nanban-ji* as used in the medieval period could refer generally to any Christian church or specifically to the *Miyako no Nanban-ji* (The Southern Barbarian Temple of the Capital), a great cathedral built in Kyoto by Father Organtino and officially known as The Church of the

---

<sup>147</sup> The traditional Japanese transliteration of Organtino, and thus a reference to Padre Gneccchi-Soldo Organtino (1530-1609). Organtino was an Italian Jesuit missionary who was known to hold conferences with Oda Nobunaga and who was granted permission to build a large Catholic church in Kyoto, colloquially known as the *Nanban-ji*.

<sup>148</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 258.

<sup>149</sup> The term originally referred to “a mythical primitive people said to lie to the south of the Chinese cultural epicenter” but later came to designate the Europeans who indeed arrived in Japan from the south. It was perhaps meant as a joke but it stuck as a descriptor for the “barbaric” peoples from the West. See Screech, “Tobacco and Edo,” 92.

Assumption of the Holy Mother (*Seibo no hishōten kyōkai*).<sup>150</sup> This word stands out immediately as an archaism and reminds the reader that he or she is in a vastly alien world, one of bizarre Southern Barbarian temples, but also one which really existed at some point in Japanese history. The final word, *Deusu-nyorai*, is exceptionally vivid in its appendage of a specifically Buddhist term for an enlightened being, *nyorai*, to the Portuguese word for the Christian God, *Deusu*. This sort of syncretism furthers the illusion of an ancient world where God was vaguely understood to be a European Buddha, and thus a world where Christianity was understood as another form of Buddhism.<sup>151</sup>

The story continues to relate that Oda Nobunaga regularly holds meetings with Brother Urugan. One day, Nobunaga becomes fond of a certain princess, but both the princess and her family disapprove, and because Nobunaga insists that he will have the girl, Brother Urugan rebukes him. Brother Urugan decides to meet with the princess, and to his astonishment, he notices a devil sitting on top of her palanquin. The devil is unlike any of the other demons that he has seen thus far. While the others are beastly, with faces like humans, wings like bats, and legs like goats, this devil is supremely beautiful and has the visage of a king. This is a new devil, one which is aesthetically pleasing and more akin to the angelic Lucifer of the Christian tradition than the tobacco-farming devil seen earlier. The priest, however, is unimpressed by this new devil's beauty. He captures the demonic spirit and drags him before a statue of Christ in the *Nanban-ji* where he

---

<sup>150</sup> Gono Takashi, *Nihon Kirisutokyō shi* (Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1990), 110.

<sup>151</sup> There was, in fact, a brief period during the earliest stages of the Jesuit missions when both Portuguese and Japanese believed that they were practicing the same religion. The Japanese believed that the Portuguese were actually monks from India (*Tenjiku*) who belonged to a previously unknown sect of Buddhism, while the Portuguese believed that Dainichi Buddha was in fact God the Father (*Deus*) and the head of the Christian trinity. It was not long before the gravity of this mistake was exposed. See John Whitney Hall, et. al. *The Cambridge History of Japan, Vol. 4* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988-1999), 308.

interrogates him. The devil pleads his case to the Jesuit priest, asking him to understand his troubling predicament. The devil bemoans that he is constantly driven to dirty the souls of the pure and drag them down to hell even though he is mesmerized by the beauty of their purity. One half of his being is trapped in the gloom of hell, while the other longs for the harmonious light of heaven. The devil appears to be confused by the dualistic nature of good and evil and is at a loss when it comes to choosing between the two. Ultimately, he is cursed by his own decadent nature, one which seeks to soil the purity that he so admires, and he can see no reconciliation between the two parts of his being. The story ends on a distressing note, as Akutagawa pleads for his own soul which is like that of the devil's, hopelessly attracted to the filth and darkness of human existence.

In 1918, the year following his publication of "The Devil," Akutagawa reworked the same story in a radical new form and titled it "Lucifer." The new story follows the same narrative route as its predecessor, but aesthetically it diverges greatly. Akutagawa begins his new version of the story with a quotation in Chinese, which stands as a visual marker of the intellectual nature of the work, as well as of the potentially difficult content that follows. As Nanette Twine notes, Chinese in the post-Meiji period was a marker of an "upper-class education" and a "formal and erudite" style.<sup>152</sup> In Chinese, the text begins,

In the beginning, God created the world. Thereafter, he created the thirty-six gods, the greatest of which was Lucifer. Lucifer believed himself to be as wise as God, and so God in his anger sentenced Lucifer to hell. Though Lucifer suffered greatly in hell, one half of the heavenly host

---

<sup>152</sup> Nanette Twine, "The Genbun Itchi Movement: It's Origin, Development, and Conclusion," *Monumenta Nipponica* 33 (1978): 335.

followed him in procession to the netherworld, where they too were turned into devils who discourage men from righteousness.<sup>153</sup>

The passage is a quotation from an actual philosophical work, and Akutagawa references the original source following the selection, but he does so in an unorthodox manner that potentially leaves some confusion as to where the quote is coming from. His words cite the reference as, Zuopi, The Third Refutation, on the Rupturing of Gender Roles, the Response of Ai Rulüe in the Words of Xu Dashou.<sup>154</sup> The quotation in fact comes from Xu Dashou's *Shengchao zuopi* (*Guide to Confutation of the Holy Dynasty*), a 17<sup>th</sup> century anti-Jesuit Chinese text, but rather than mention the work and the author in a coherent manner, Akutagawa uses his own convoluted format that makes the work seem even more obscure than it might be. To begin, Akutagawa mentions only half of the title of his source, *Zuopi* instead of *Shengchao zuopi*, and as the text is not well known, his reference is not obvious. To make matters worse, his reference to the title begins with the wrong logograph, one which means "left" instead of "to assist" or "to help." This might be a choice of Akutagawa's, or the mistake of a transcriber, a printer, or any number of persons, but in any case, it makes the source more difficult to track. Thereafter, he refers to the "third refutation" or the "third argument," which might have been more easily understood as a reference to a chapter or a page number instead. Finally, he does not clarify that the work he is referencing is a text authored by Xu Dashou, but instead presents the words as though they were recorded during a debate between the otherwise unknown figures of Xu Dashou and Ai Rulüe. Ai Rulüe is in fact a sinicization of the

---

<sup>153</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 362.

<sup>154</sup> *Zuopi di san pi lie xing zhong ai ru lüe da xu dashou yu.*

name of the Jesuit missionary Giulio Aleni, and Xu Dashou is the name of a relatively obscure author who wrote a refutation of the Jesuit's Christian message in China. Due to Akutagawa's messy quotation, the reader is left with little hope of tracing the original work, which would require reading the Chinese in the first place. Right from the beginning, Akutagawa establishes "Lucifer" as a distinctly anti-popular story, and one which he reserves for the intellectual mind and cultivated reader.

In referencing the *Shengchao zuopi* at the beginning of this story, Akutagawa traces the path of Jesuit missionary work through China before its arrival in Japan, in a similar manner to "Tobacco and the Devil" where the devil comes to Japan via Macau. He also sets an Asian precedent for the anti-Christian ideology that he presents in "Lucifer." The *Shengchao zuopi* was one of the earliest and fiercest anti-Jesuit works written in response to the spread of Christianity in northeast Asia during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. It was written by Xu Dashou in 1623 in response to Giulio Aleni's missionizing work among the Fujianese.<sup>155</sup> It is comprised of a number of arguments that demonstrate why Christianity is heretical and contrary to traditional moral and social values in China. The argument that Akutagawa references is one in where Xu Dashou claims that Christianity is destroying gender roles as they have been traditionally imagined. According to Eugenio Menegon, Xu argued that Aleni's heterodox association advocated the intermingling of sexes and the ability of women to ascend directly to heaven.<sup>156</sup> Akutagawa quotes from the argument on the sexes, but he is more interested in the words of Giulio Aleni in which the history of the devil is recounted, which could have only

---

<sup>155</sup> Eugenio Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 309.

<sup>156</sup> Menegon, *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars*, 309.

come across as more heretical nonsense to the Buddhists, Daoists, and Confucianists who first confronted the Jesuits. By recalling a Chinese source of anti-Jesuit sentiment, and one which refuted Christianity on the basis of its heterodoxy, Akutagawa creates a first line of defense against the expansion of the Jesuits, which he quickly follows forward to Japan.

As he moves into the body of the text of “Lucifer,” Akutagawa claims that he has acquired an alternate manuscript of the *Hadeusu (Destroying God)*, an anti-Christian polemic written by a Japanese Christian apostate known as Fabian Fukansai in 1620, around the same time as the *Shengchao zuopi*.<sup>157</sup> He claims that his version is almost identical to the popular version, one held by the Kachōsan book collection of the head Shin Buddhist temple of Chion-in. The popular version features an introduction by Ugai Tetsujō, a Buddhist monk who was an ardent critic of Christianity and promoter of Buddhism as Japan’s native faith, but this preface is not present in Akutagawa’s version. Once again, he is distorting the intersection of fact and fiction. The popular version that he mentions is a real text, and his detailed bibliographic knowledge leads the reader to envision the narrator as a trustworthy scholar, but the alternate version that he claims to have acquired is purely fictional. Akutagawa goes on to relate the alternate passage found in his version of the *Hadeusu*, and he both begins and ends the text by directly quoting the actual copy, but in the middle of the text the reader finds his imagined addition to the original.

The segment where Akutagawa is actually quoting the original source is written, naturally enough, in classical Japanese. Whereas Akutagawa often writes the *kirishitanmono* in a fantasized classical language, his direct quotations exhibit 17<sup>th</sup>

---

<sup>157</sup> ARZ, Vol 2, 362-363.

century Japanese as it is expected to sound. The classical language here is coupled with theological concepts that result in a brazenly dense reading for a work of fiction. The opening contains Fabian's theological argument against the existence of the Christian God as a formless and shapeless body of *suhiritsuarusu sutanshia* (presumably from Latin spiritualis sustancia) as a hopelessly ignorant misconception of the Tathātā, or the true nature of all things according to Mahayana Buddhism. He argues that if God really is *sahien'chiishimo* (from Portuguese sapientíssimo, all-wise or all-knowing), that he should have foreseen the fall of the angels and their transformation into devils.<sup>158</sup> The Buddhas, on the other hand, are truly aware of the Traikālya, the three worlds of the past, the present, and the future, and they would have never made such a mistake. With the introduction of these passages, it's possible to detect Akutagawa's intellectual muscle flexing as he shows disdain for his unprepared readers and challenges them to learn while they are being (possibly) entertained.

Next comes the fictive segment of the story, and this part is almost exactly the same as the story in "The Devil," though with more difficult language and fleshed out to a handful of pages. An exasperated woman meets a monk in a monastery garden and tells him that some creature has been whispering in her ear, urging her to cheat on her coarse husband and seek the love of a more affectionate body. She is ashamed to admit that the words cause her great arousal, even ecstasy, and she is afraid of what she might do. The priest admonishes her, lectures her on the seven deadly sins and the perils of *inheruno* (*inferno*), and bids her be on her way. As he continues to stroll around the garden, he is startled to see a man that looks like a Kunlun slave (*konrondo*), wearing an *abito* (habit), and a gold chain.<sup>159</sup> This is most

---

<sup>158</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 363-364.

<sup>159</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 366.

certainly Akutagawa's most interesting devil so far, and it is also his most original depiction of the fiend.

First of all, his reference to a Kunlun slave is intriguing. There is some dispute as to the origin and full meaning of the term, but generally a Kunlun slave refers to a dark-skinned slave from Song period China.<sup>160</sup> The term Kunlun originated as a geographical reference for a mountain range in the extreme northern fringes of Tibet where the Queen Mother of the West, Xiwangmu, was purported to have lived. This mythical goddess is assumed by scholars to have some connection to an ancient Anatolian deity that was imported into ancient China. At various points in history, it is thought that the term Kunlun referred to the "Nam-Viet peoples of Champa, the Khmers, Malaysians, and Malaccans, the Sri Lankans, Malabars, and Bengalis, and the people of the Andaman Islands."<sup>161</sup> As can be seen, the word Kunlun is heavily loaded with the idea of the exotic and the foreign, as it potentially designates everything that lies beyond China. Akutagawa is once again siding with China as a defense against all outside, barbarous peoples, and this time he is defending against even those other Asians who have not been blessed with an equal level of civilization. That his Kunlun slave devil wears a monk's habit and a chain of gold only furthers the image of an especially original and exotic demon, one with a colored face, European clothes, and the gaudy sensibilities of a foreigner.

The dark devil proceeds to argue with the monk and lays his case out in almost the exact same manner as the demon in "The Devil". The monk first accuses the devil of having the seven sins in his heart, to which the devil replies that the seven sins truly lie in the heart of man. The devil accuses the monk and his kin of being sinful hypocrites,

---

<sup>160</sup> Don J. Wyatts, *Blacks of Premodern China*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.), 20.

<sup>161</sup> Wyatts, *Blacks in China*, 16.



though he strangely refers to the monks as Śramana, using the Sanskrit term for a group of ascetic practitioners. He claims that it is only natural that there is a world of dark and a world of light and that devils rule along with God, God ruling the day and devils the night. His depiction of the natural order of the world is more in line with the yin-yang structure or traditional Chinese religion than the theology of Christianity.

The devil then argues that demons are not purely evil and that while they look at hell with their right eyes they also look at the beauty of heaven with their left. He claims that he appreciates the lady who was the target of his temptations like an incomparably beautiful work of art, with her rosary and ivory-like wrists, and he laments that he is too weak-hearted to keep from whispering lewdness into her ears. He says that he prevented the lady from being dragged down to hell and experiencing the full results of her karma, another Buddhist term that he throws into his soliloquy, because he was unable to push his evil scheme through to the end. When the devil sees how pure, noble, and beautiful the woman is he wants nothing more than to make her filthy, but when he thinks of making her filthy he wants nothing more than for her to remain pure and lovely. Thus “Lucifer” ends in much the same way as “The Devil,” with the narrator affirming that the devil is right and that it is truly impossible to separate the dark part of our souls from the light.

It could be argued that these devil stories present a pro-Buddhist argument and an absolute critique of Christianity, and yet this would hardly be a satisfactory explanation on its own. Akutagawa never expressed strong religious views in any tradition and was hardly known to be a promoter of spiritual agendas. In many of his other works he used

Buddhism in much the same way as he did Christianity, as a vehicle for symbolic and aesthetic effects, and his Buddhist figures were not spared any of the criticism that he directed towards all of his subjects. However, it would be reasonable to assert that in defending Buddhist theology and symbolism, Akutagawa is in turn defending the native ideologies and intellectual inheritances of the East. He shows that not all Western ideas are superior to Eastern ones and that there is always the possibility that the Japanese have better understood nature and reality than the Europeans. In “Tobacco and the Devil” he ridicules the desire to appear European and to acquire European goods, and in “The Devil” and “Lucifer” he satirizes the Christian conception of the devil as a simplistic construction of a probably simplistic people.

A political message can be read into these three stories, but another important element found within them is the ultimate triumph of the dark half of life over the light. These stories display an irresistible obsession with the devil, sin, and the destruction of religious order. Even if they are examined in a more Buddhist or Eastern philosophical view, they are still morally problematic in their assertion that lust and the desire for filth are impossible to overcome. On each of these three occasions, good intentions and moral inclinations succumb to the darkness of temptation, whether material or spiritual, and evil is shown to be more seductive, more exotic, and more desirable than good. These stories display a decadent side of Akutagawa that was ultimately distrustful of institutions of progress and rationality.

Akutagawa wrote in an early correspondence that he was particularly attracted to the “mysterious” element that he found in European literature, writing the word

“mysterious” in English.<sup>162</sup> His interest in the dark side of life extended to his own personal identity; he referred to his study room as the *gakikitsu*, or demon’s lair, and when penning haiku, he went by the alias *gaki*, a reference to the hungry demons of Buddhist cosmology.<sup>163</sup> In “The Devil,” Akutagawa’s depiction of Brother Urugan’s dialogue with the demonic spirit takes on a dark tone as it echoes the horrific and decadent sensibilities of Western literature ranging from Poe to Maupassant and Ambrose Bierce to Baudelaire. All of these authors are frequently cited by both critics of Akutagawa and by the author himself as important influences on his style, and their presence is felt most strongly when Akutagawa confronts sinful excess in his art. The devil’s plight in these stories is an aesthetic one, in which the pleasures of damnation and the sensory experience of filth are at odds with his aspirations to purity.

The Christian, and specifically Jesuit, religious settings of these stories and the delighted exploration of sin and damnation also suggest a connection to the gothic subgenre of the Romantic literature of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. By this comparison I do not mean the light-hearted frights of Ann Radcliffe or Horace Walpole, a more commercial variety of gothic literature, but rather the pervasive atmospheres of sin and rebellion of Matthew Gregory Lewis, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and other similar writers who strayed from mainstream moral conventions. Matthew Gregory Lewis, for instance, ties a half-hearted didactic message to the end of *The Monk*, as might be expected by the European moral standards of his day, but only after hundreds of pages of rape, incest, demonic sex, and blasphemy. Shelley, on the other hand, goes even further and presents Satan as a majestic leader of earth and a glorious angel of sin in the poems “Satan at Large” and

---

<sup>162</sup> Hibbett, “Negative Ideal,” 434.

<sup>163</sup> Hibbett, “Negative Ideal,” 439.

“Prologue to Hellas.” Akutagawa’s Devil takes on the same Romantic qualities of these British writers, and considering his lifelong familiarity with English literature, as well as mentions of *The Monk* and other gothic writings in “The Wandering Jew,” it is possible that he found inspiration for his devil stories in these same Romantic celebrations of sin.

Tracy B. Ann’s definition of the gothic novel is one in which, “Tempters, natural and supernatural, assault in impenetrable disguises, precipitating ruin and damnation... The Gothic world is quintessentially the fallen world, the vision of fallen man, living in fear and alienation...”<sup>164</sup> Akutagawa’s early *kirishitanmono* depict human beings as hopelessly lost in their attachment to sin and worldly pleasures, and in that sense they echo Ann’s definition of the European gothic novel. Robert Princeton Reno frames the main question in gothic literature by asking, “How will the struggle between good and evil be resolved in this world when the forces of evil are more powerful, more ingenious, and in every way more effective than those of good?”<sup>165</sup> This question is answered in these stories by the resounding defeat of virtue in the face of desire. Lust and greed are too close to peoples’ souls to be dispensed with through religion. Perhaps even more pertinent in these pieces, however, is their display of the universally requisite gothic themes of “transgression and perversion...coupled with religion.”<sup>166</sup> The Christian world in these stories is a world of superficial symbols and an ever-present, underlying desire to sin, transgress, and revel in lust. The prayers to the *Virgem Maria*, the monks’ habits, technical religious terms in Latin and Portuguese, and statues of Christ are all stylistic

---

<sup>164</sup> Ann B Tracy, *The Gothic Novel 1790-1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1981), 3.

<sup>165</sup> Robert Princeton Reno, *The Gothic Visions of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew G. Lewis* (New York: Arno Press, 1980), 7.

<sup>166</sup> Reno, *Gothic Visions*, 33-34.

gloss on stories that are more concerned with sin than redemption. Their aesthetic value is apparent, as they create the image of an alluring world of mystical Christianity, but it is not central to the narratives. Central here is excess, decadence, and a *fin de siècle* disavowal of all that is sacred, especially in a European sense.

Although Buddhism is pitted against Christianity in a moral challenge in these stories, ultimately neither religion wins as desire trumps all. Christianity may have the absolutist view of sin and evil, but even Buddhism posits a certain sinfulness in the act of desiring as it obstructs the practitioner from realizing the true emptiness of all things. Akutagawa's *kirishitanmono* take on a fatalistic tone by demonstrating that the world will eventually be consumed by desire, in the form of lust, tobacco, or any other manifestation. He champions Buddhism and the philosophical traditions of the East, and he seems genuinely concerned with their relevance in the global world, yet he pushes a pessimistic view of human desire which erodes the traditional past.

Akutagawa's devil stories present some of the author's most critical views of Christian theology and appear to end with a defeat for Christianity in Japan. Devils remain devils as their desire for filth and excess overrides any possibility of ever encountering salvation and escaping the hell of Christian cosmology. Akutagawa suggests Buddhism as a reasonable alternative to Christianity, one whose temple bells can melt away dualistic illusions and whose ideology grants the possibility to live in both the world of light and dark without internal conflict. He also offers the traditional beliefs of East Asia as a means to protect Japan against an increasingly aggressive West that is constantly attempting to introduce new products and ideas to its cultural subjects. Yet, Akutagawa's satirical voice trumps his suggestion of hope as he positions the devil and

his commodities as the ultimate power on earth. Tobacco invades Japan permanently, lust overrides desires for purity, and the devil convinces all that there is no possibility for redemption. Japan loses ground in its cultural struggle against the West just as humanity cedes its belief in purity. Akutagawa's theme of spiritual and cultural conflict continues to build from this point as he enters into the mid-career phase of his *kirishitanmono*, in which he depicts a modern world that is not bettered by the exchange of culture and ideas, but only harmed by an erosion of the certainty of tradition.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE GODS LAUGH AS THE PEOPLE FAIL TO UNDERSTAND: “KAMIGAMI NO BISHŌ” AND “OSHINO”

“Is anyone here a good singer or dancer?” cried an old priest. “If so, now’s the time to show off your art!”

Middle Captain Morimichi came forward and sang a *kagura* song, the kind so often offered to the gods. The reliquary doors opened immediately. It was so like the time when the Sun Goddess pushed open the door of her Heavenly Rock Cave, and light again burst upon the world!

- *Japanese Tales*, Translated by Royall  
Tyler<sup>167</sup>

Akutagawa’s mid-to-late career *kirishitanmono* depict the failure of the Christian mission in the face of an uncompromising rise of Japanese nativism. Having criticized the philosophy of Christianity from a Buddhist, and thus a pan-Asian, perspective in earlier stories, Akutagawa satirizes the mission of the Jesuits from a native viewpoint, figuratively employing Shinto, *bushidō*, and the Japanese language as cultural weapons against the intrusion of the foreign religion. Two stories which especially exemplify this critical perspective are “The Subtle Smile of the Gods” (“Kamigami no Bishō,” 1922), and “Oshino” (1923), both of which depict Jesuit priests struggling to convert the

---

<sup>167</sup> Royall Tyler, *Japanese Tales*, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 60.

Japanese and ending in failure. However, in accordance with the larger themes of the *kirishitanmono*, these works are not black and white condemnations of Christianity, but rather satirical treatments of the act of inter-cultural communication.

In these *kirishitanmono*, Akutagawa ridicules the Jesuits for their refusal to familiarize themselves with the culture of their target audience, yet he also parodies Japanese nativists who distort their own cultural history in order to purify their land of all foreign influences. Both Jesuits and Japanese use circular logic and racist assumptions as the basis for their arguments and are unable to escape the cultural frameworks which inform their preconceptions. Neither side can effectively communicate with the other because their cultural vocabularies are not in sync, and as they increasingly rely on folk ideologies and mythology in their logic, their debates become parodies of reason. Thus, in these latter *kirishitanmono*, Akutagawa satirizes the meeting between foreign cultures and shows that true intercultural communication is impossible. His is a view expressed by later Christian writer Endō Shūsaku who writes that, because of a lack in understanding of the fundamental differences between our cultures, “we shall never be able to achieve a true dialogue of East and West, a genuine harmony between Eastern wisdom and western ideas.”<sup>168</sup>

Stories like “The Subtle Smile of the Gods” and “Oshino” may initially appear to confirm the opinions of critics who framed Akutagawa’s *kirishitanmono* as subversions of Christianity in favor of native ideologies. These would include, for example, Andrew and Yoko Dykstra who write that such stories display Akutagawa “rejecting the

---

<sup>168</sup> Mase-Hasegawa, *Christ in Japanese Culture*, 70. Quotes Endō Shūsaku, *Ryūgaku* (Bungei Shunjū Shinsha, 1965), 6. For English see Endō Shūsaku, *Foreign Studies*, trans. Mark Williams (New York: Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1990).



wholesale importation of foreign ethics” by “modifying foreign ethics and religion” to suit the “taste and life style” of the Japanese.<sup>169</sup> Indeed, these are the stories that most explicitly deal with the “conflict and confrontation” between Japanese and Western religion that Yu Beongcheon found in the later *kirishitanmono*, in contrast to the “pervasive spiritual intensity” that he posited in the earlier stories.<sup>170</sup> However, despite their more central use of criticism directed towards the Jesuits, these stories are not particularly flattering towards any religion and can more accurately be described as parodying the entire act of cross-cultural debate. As translator John McVittie posits, Akutagawa “seemed convinced that religion as religion is unrealistic”; he had no particular enmity towards religion, Western or Eastern, but he was suspicious of the supernatural elements of spiritual traditions.<sup>171</sup> Even Akutagawa’s most critical *kirishitanmono* are ultimately ambivalent in their final say on the value of religion.

The first of the stories discussed in this chapter is “The Subtle Smile of the Gods,” one of the most accessible and linguistically straightforward *kirishitanmono*, but also one of the most complicated. On its surface, “The Subtle Smile of the Gods” reads as a complete rejection of Christianity in favor of the monumental traditions of the Japanese. It once again features Organtino (Brother Urugan) as a main character, but this time the Jesuit priest holds a dialogue with a *kami* (Japanese deity) rather than with the devil. Through the course of the story, Organtino loses all of his arguments with the *kami* as he becomes increasingly aware of the impossibility of spreading Christianity to the Japanese. The *kami* shows to Organtino the spiritual history of the Japanese people, through which

---

<sup>169</sup> Dykstra, “Kirishitanmono,” 25.

<sup>170</sup> Yu, *Introduction*, 32, 216-217.

<sup>171</sup> John McVittie, *Exotic Japanese Stories*, 35-37.

the priest finally comes to understand that the Japanese are simply too traditional to ever be converted. At first, it might seem obvious that “The Subtle Smile of the Gods” is a story about the supremacy of Japanese tradition in the face of Western expansion, and yet it is far more complex than that, as a more careful reading demonstrates that the Japanese god uses glaringly suspect logic in his arguments, and in the end both the Christian priest and the native deity are pictured as being foolish entities. Overall, it would be difficult to read any story of Akutagawa’s as a wholesale embrace of the traditional “Orient” in the face of Western philosophy, and to do so here would miss the more complex factors at play. Akutagawa does satirize and subvert Christianity, and he does not always treat it kindly, but he is not in the business of selling religious ideology. His critiques return time and again to the social dimensions of cultural exchange, and a close reading of “The Subtle Smile of the Gods” reveals him deconstructing this exchange once again.

“The Subtle Smile of the Gods” begins by framing Organtino as a homesick and hopeless outsider in Japan.<sup>172</sup> He wanders through the gardens of the *Nanban-ji* in Kyoto where European rose, olive, and bay laurel are planted among the Japanese cypress and pine.<sup>173</sup> He is sick with longing for home; he dreams of St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome, the ports of *Lisboa*,<sup>174</sup> the sound of the *rebec*, the taste of almonds, and the song “Oh Lord, Mirror of my Soul.” His very being is steeped in the imagery of European culture and Catholicism and in Japan he is hopelessly transplanted, as out of place as the foreign

---

<sup>172</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 173.

<sup>173</sup> Akutagawa labels the olive *kanran*, a misnomer for the European olive (*olea europaea*) which actually refers to the Chinese white olive (*canarium album*), a completely unrelated plant. His mention of a bay laurel, *gekkei(ju)*, is anachronistic, as this plant is first recorded in Japan in the middle Meiji period. Both of these words effectively stand in as general terms for European plants. Kanda, *Hōkyōnin*, 209.

<sup>174</sup> Akutagawa writes the Portuguese-derived *risuboa* rather than the modern Japanese *risubon* to refer to Lisbon, Portugal.

plants in his garden. The use of exotic symbols to represent the foreign Other appears at the beginning of this story as with many of the other *kirishitanmono*, but this time, Akutagawa does not stop there. Not only is the Jesuit priest an embodiment of the Other, but he is also racist and bears deep enmity towards the native people. As he wanders through the garden he remarks, “The scenery in this country is beautiful, and the climate is pleasant, but even Negroes are preferable to these yellow-faced, midget natives.”<sup>175</sup> He becomes depressed by the obstinate and foolish nature that he perceives in the Japanese and says that even China, even Siam, and even India would be better than this wretched country that he has found himself in.

Organtino’s diatribe is startling when compared to the Christian missionaries in Akutagawa’s other *kirishitanmono*. Akutagawa frequently portrays the missionaries as aloof, misdirected, and hopelessly foreign, but the Organtino of “The Subtle Smile of the Gods” has grown tired of simply reflecting on the differences of the Other and has instead grown to hate them. In his depiction of Organtino, Akutagawa goes beyond the exotic playfulness he usually employs to depict the European and decides to show him instead as a completely odious presence in his country. There is no more tiptoeing around the subject of differences between cultures, but rather a full confrontation between races. As Derrida writes, racism perverts the human and finds the racist “talking animal,” attacking the very blood, color, and birth of the foreign subject and positing inferiority in the very physicality of his or her nature.<sup>176</sup> Whereas other missionaries in the *kirishitanmono* are Orientalists, fascinated by a culture which they can understand only

---

<sup>175</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 174.

<sup>176</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007), 379.

through their own exoticizing discourse, in this story the missionary is an outright racist, attacking the Japanese based on their physical traits.

As Organtino walks through the garden meditating on his hate for the Japanese, he spots a weeping cherry tree from which a strange wisp of smoke appears to rise. Akutagawa writes, “In that very instant, to his eyes, the weeping cherry tree looked strangely ominous as it flowered in the twilight. Or perhaps, rather than ominous, it made him feel anxious, as it looked exactly like the very spirit of Japan.”<sup>177</sup> The most essential of Japanese symbols, the cherry tree, frightens the priest and he crosses himself in order to ward off its evil influence. It is significant here that Akutagawa equates the cherry tree with “the very spirit of Japan,” employing the most orthodox image of a culture in order to represent its monumental spirit. As a writer, Akutagawa is usually more hesitant to call upon such stereotypes, but in “The Subtle Smile of the Gods,” he evokes Japanese nativism by giving spiritual power to this most standard of symbols.

After Organtino is terrified by the Japanese spirit of the cherry tree he rushes into his temple to pray to God and find solace in his religion. Once inside the temple, he utters a highly syncretistic line of praise, singing “*Namu daiji daihi no Deusu-nyorai*,” or “Praise to the all-compassionate, all-merciful *Deus*-come thus.”<sup>178</sup> *Namu* can be taken to mean “praise” or “hail,” *daiji daihi* means greatly compassionate and merciful and is an attribute usually ascribed to a Buddha or bodhisattva, and *Deusu-nyorai* is a combination of the Portuguese term for the Christian God and the Buddhist term for an enlightened one, as was discussed previously. Brother Urugan’s invocation to the Christian God is modeled on the well-known Buddhist mantra “*Namu amida butsu*,” or “Praise Amitābha

---

<sup>177</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 175.

<sup>178</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 175.

Buddha,” which is in turn a transliteration of the Sanskrit “*Namo Amitābhāya.*”

Realistically, there is no conceivable reason as to why the Italian Jesuit priest would chant such a phrase. The priest’s use of a Buddhist Japanese form to pray to his own God suggests a blurring of the strict cultural delineation that Akutagawa has built up until this point. It is only a small point of slippage for now, but Akutagawa’s deconstructive tendency returns with greater force towards the end of the story.

Despite the strange form of his prayer, Organtino soon makes it known that he is praying to the European God for protection against the Japanese when he asks to be granted the same power that was given to Moses to sink the Egyptians under the Red Sea. He prays:

In this country, in the mountains and in the woods, even in the rows of houses in the villages, some strange power is lurking. Within the darkness, some power is obstructing my mission... What that power could be, I do not know. Somehow or other, that power is like a fountain beneath the earth that crisscrosses the entirety of this land...<sup>179</sup>

He is terrified by a phantom of Japanese tradition that imbues every aspect of the landscape. In the Jesuit’s imagination, Japan becomes more than a physical locality, but rather like the “Land of the Chrysanthemum” described by Oscar Wilde, a fanciful Orientalist world that exists only in the woodblock paintings of Hokusai and Hokkei and

---

<sup>179</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 176.

nowhere in reality.<sup>180</sup> The Jesuit's idea of Japan is an essentialized image of a country where trees, mountains, and villages are all somehow inextricably Japanese. He is incensed by this heathen land that he imagines, a place somehow fundamentally separate from the Christian nations of Europe, and he calls upon God to help him destroy it.

The Japanese gods are no longer able to sit by idly as Organtino curses their land and its people; therefore they send a terrifying vision to torment the hot-tempered priest. The church suddenly fills with cawing roosters, a vision which frightens Organtino, and when he tries to cross himself for divine protection he finds that he has been frozen in place. Mysterious human figures swarm the church, cocks scream bloodcurdling battle cries, and night swallows the building. Japanese people clad in traditional garments form a circle around a fire and drink *sake* as they chat excitedly. Then appears the goddess Amaterasu, the mythical mother of the Japanese imperial line and the legendary source of traditional arts such as *waka* poetry, *nō* theater, and *kagura* religious performances.<sup>181</sup>

Amaterasu has been associated with the Emperor of Japan since the Nara period when official court chronicles such as the *Kojiki* and the *Nihon Shoki* depicted her offspring as the ancestors of the imperial line.<sup>182</sup> During the Meiji period, however, she became a powerful political symbol of patriotism and the national identity of the Japanese people and was officially sanctioned as the historical ancestor of the emperor, and thus the Japanese people as well.<sup>183</sup> Nationalistic overtones would have been

---

<sup>180</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Intentions* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishers, 2004), 23.

<sup>181</sup> John Breen and Mark Teeuwen, *A New History of Shinto* (Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 23.

<sup>182</sup> Breen and Teeuwen, *Shinto*, 133-134.

<sup>183</sup> Breen and Teeuwen, *Shinto*, 165.

especially apparent in the myth during Akutagawa's lifetime, the late Meiji and Taishō periods, when Japan was making increasingly aggressive military maneuvers in the Pacific region in the name of divine destiny. By presenting the myth of Amaterasu in "The Subtle Smile of the Gods," Akutagawa offers the essential image of Japanese uniqueness and racial power as a counter to Christianity. It is an image which had acquired explicitly nationalistic connotations in Akutagawa's day and thus introduces a politically charged element to the *kami*'s battle against the foreign religion.

Akutagawa proceeds to describe a scene in which Amaterasu, the sun goddess, has hidden herself away in a cave due to her anger at the violent antics of her sibling, the storm god Susanoo. A minor goddess, Uzume, mounts an overturned washtub and dances lewdly in order to provoke the other gods' laughter, and thus to attract Amaterasu's curiosity and bring her out of the cave. Akutagawa writes:

The woman climbed on top of the bucket and danced ceaselessly as the hours passed. The locks of hair that curled about her temples whipped and waved in the air. The beads that hung about her neck crashed like hail. The small bamboo branch in her hand whipped wildly to and fro at the air. And oh, her bare breasts! From within the flames of a red fire, her two bright nipples jutted out, and to the eyes of Organtino, they looked like the very essence of lust itself.<sup>184</sup>

---

<sup>184</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 178.

The gods are whipped into a frenzy by her performance and they grow loud in their excitement. Amaterasu emerges curiously from the cave and asks what the matter is. Instantly, her light floods the earth and the gods all vigorously sing her praises, chanting “Ōhirumemuchi! Ōhirumemuchi!” using an archaic name for the goddess of the sun. They assure her that all of Japan belongs to her, the mountains, rivers, forests, seas, and cities, and that they are all her servants. They proclaim that all who oppose Amaterasu shall be vanquished in a scene that reinforces the nationalistic dimension of the myth.

Akutagawa’s transmittal of the Japanese origin myth is not, however, presented in a solemn and courtly manner but rather focuses on the sexual implications of the Amaterasu story and the eroticized image of a national past. Tansman writes that, “At the very heart of the fascist aesthetic... lies a lyrical incantation that, like a hailing, summons the return of its feminine love object.”<sup>185</sup> In Akutagawa’s portrayal of Amaterasu, the native past is symbolized by a primitive sexual power. The nude goddess who confronts Organtino embodies the spirit of a seductive East that lies at the roots of Japanese history. The Japanese gods become an image of both enlightenment, in the light of Amaterasu, and primitive power, in the fierce dance of Uzume, and in combination these forces overwhelm the religious certainty of the Western priest.

As Akutagawa’s nativist imagery builds in intensity, it appears as though he might actually be exalting the essential nature of Japanese tradition. Akutagawa did, after all, promote traditional Japanese literary forms such as *setsuwa* (Buddhistic folk tales)<sup>186</sup>

---

<sup>185</sup> Tansman, *Aesthetics of Fascism*, 42.

<sup>186</sup> Seiji Lippit, “Disintegrating Machine,” 22.



and native poetic forms such as *waka*, *hokku*, and *sedōka*<sup>187</sup>, so it is possible that in the myth of Amaterasu he had actually found the source of a uniquely Japanese creativity. Considering his lifelong interest in Japanese tradition, it would seem rash to immediately dismiss any association between Akutagawa and nativism, despite his more widely regarded stature as a cosmopolitan intellectual. Nagano Jōchi, for one, has attempted to trace the Japanese artistic influence on Akutagawa and to question his relation to the native past, rather than to position him only as a modern stylist writing within Western traditions. He writes, “Formerly, people have said that Akutagawa really had no longing for the past and that he used it as a medium in which to express the lives of modern people... yet by writing about the past, does he not bring some of it with him to the present day?”<sup>188</sup> He goes on to call Akutagawa a romanticist and a man who longed for the primitive life.<sup>189</sup>

In his essays and correspondences, Akutagawa often applauds a kind of primitive vitality in the Japanese arts, but one which is also increasingly rare in modern Japan. In a letter written in 1916, he praises friend and contemporary writer Matsuoka Yuzuru for the “physical strength” (*rikiryō*) of his style which produces a “frightening” effect.<sup>190</sup> In his debates with Tanizaki Junichirō, “Literary, All Too Literary,” he praises Shiga Naoya, Bashō, and the *Konjaku Monogatari* for their “call to the wild,” that is, their sheer animality and unrestrained sexual potency.<sup>191</sup> Through these instances, it appears that

---

<sup>187</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 567.

<sup>188</sup> Nagano Jōchi, *Koten to kindai sakka: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke* (Yūhōdō, 1967), 21.

<sup>189</sup> Nagano, *Koten to kindai*, 283, 203.

<sup>190</sup> Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, *Akutagawa no Tegami* (Tokyo: Daishūkan Shoten, 1992), 86.

<sup>191</sup> Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, 124.

Akutagawa most values those Japanese arts that represent a past of primitive strength. Yet, Akutagawa's valuation of the primitive does not end with Japan, but rather extends to all humanity. For example, in "Literary, all Too Literary," he writes that the spirit of the native voice is one "belonging to our ancestors—not only to Japan's, but to all ancestors,"<sup>192</sup> contradicting the essentialist Japanese identity that might be apparent in the first half of "The Subtle Smile of the Gods." Also, there is little evidence of nationalistic sentiment in the majority of Akutagawa's writings. In fact, Akutagawa is more likely to depict national figures cynically, such as in his satirical representation of the quintessential Japanese patriot General Nogi, than to blindly praise imperial ideology.<sup>193</sup>

In the latter part of "The Subtle Smile of the Gods," the nationalistic tone of the first half of the story begins to crumble as Akutagawa's satirical voice returns. In the scene following the hallucinatory night, Organtino is found peacefully strolling through his Western gardens. As he walks he praises God for helping him newly convert thirty-four samurai and he reasons that the holy light of the cross shall defeat the unclean spirits of Japan after all. Just as he is thinking such thoughts, he is confronted by a new spirit in the guise of an old man. He attempts to ward off the spirit with the sign of the cross, but the old man heeds him to stop trying to use such silly magic and warns him that God shall ultimately lose in Japan. The spirit goes on to relate stories of the great cultural integrity of the Japanese people and their resilience in the face of intruding ideologies. His speech initially appears to drive Akutagawa's nationalistic rhetoric to new heights of essentialism, and yet, as shall be demonstrated shortly, the spirit's arguments can hardly

---

<sup>192</sup> Tansman, *Aesthetics of Fascism*, 41.

<sup>193</sup> Nagano, *Koten to kindai*, 283.

be taken at face value. Just beneath the surface of his austere recollection of Japan's glorious history of fending off invaders lies a network of ironies, half-truths, and comical arguments.

The *kami* informs Organtino that the Jesuits were not the first foreigners to arrive on the shores of Japan, but that centuries before the Jesuits came the Chinese were already courting the Japanese government.<sup>194</sup> The state of Wu (11<sup>th</sup> century – 473 BC) brought silk to Japan and the Qin dynasty (221-207 BC) brought jewels, establishing an ambassadorial relationship with the archipelago. The theories of the great philosophers Confucius, Mencius, and Zhuang Zi all came to Japan long ago, and they were great teachings to be certain, but the Japanese took from them only the ideas that they naturally agreed with.

The spirit argues that the most important thing Japan ever imported from China was writing, but that this importation could not be considered a defeat for the Japanese, because in the end, the Japanese perfected and conquered the art of writing. He asks the priest to consider Kakinomoto no Hitomaro, a poet whose work was featured extensively in the *Manyōshū* and also one of the thirty-six Poetry Immortals of Japan. He once wrote a poem about the Tanabata festival<sup>195</sup> that remains famous in Japan to this day. In writing about Tanabata, Hitomaro inevitably drew on the original Chinese legend which the festival celebrates, but he showed mastery over language by changing all of the legendary

---

<sup>194</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 183-187.

<sup>195</sup> *Tanabata* is a Japanese festival based on the Chinese *Qi Xi Jie*. The festival celebrates the uniting of two heavenly lovers, the cowherd and the weaver girl, who can meet only once a year, on the seventh day of the seventh month. They are symbolized by the stars Altair and Vega who are separated by the Milky Way in the sky. The festival is celebrated in slightly different manners in both China and Japan, but the legendary basis remains the same.

figures' names into Japanese forms. That is, *Kengyū* and *Shokujo*<sup>196</sup> became *Hikoboshi* and *Tanabata-tsume*. That being said, the god's proof that Japan has conquered writing is strangely superfluous. Akutagawa certainly could have provided any number of other examples that would have been at least slightly more pertinent, but he instead chooses a random instance of translational minutiae. He goes on to disparage the Chinese by claiming that in the Japanese story, one can hear the pure, heavenly sound of a gently flowing river in the heavens rather than the sound of the raging waves of the Yellow or Yangtze rivers in China. The *kami* seems to be implying that the Japanese have more finesse or elegance than the uncouth Chinese, which is not out of line with his boastful and prejudiced character.

The spirit's next example of the Japanese perfection of a Chinese art is even less relevant than the first. He states that Hitomaro was a genius for using Chinese logographs for their phonetic rather than symbolic properties, and he makes an example of the Chinese character *zhou* being pronounced as *fune* in Japanese. He claims that the transformation of this sound was done through the power of the Japanese spirits. Akutagawa thus echoes a real nativist argument that the very sound of the Japanese language is imbued with a uniquely Japanese soul, a concept known as *kotodama*, or literally word spirit.<sup>197</sup> Yet, his comment is suspect on at least two levels, the first being that using a character for phonetic value does nothing to effectively prove genius, and the second being that there are many words in Japanese that use this same logograph with a

---

<sup>196</sup> This statement is ironic because even *Kengyū* and *Shokujo* are not the original Chinese names of the lovers. They are *Niu Lang* and *Zhi Nü*.

<sup>197</sup> Roy Andrew Miller, *Japan's Modern Myth: The Language and Beyond* (New York and Tokyo: Weather Hill, 1982), 128.

Chinese-derived pronunciation, namely *shū*. Take, for example, *shūtei* (vessel, boat), *shūun* (to transport by boat), or *shūkō* (boating or sailing). The character can also be read with a Chinese pronunciation when used in Japanese names, as in the name of famous Muromachi-period ink painter Sesshū Tōyō. The spirit then refers to calligraphy, in which the native Japanese Kūkai, Dōfū, Sari, and Kōzei<sup>198</sup> have perfected and elevated the art originated by the Chinese Ōgishi and Chosuiryō.<sup>199</sup> These famous Japanese calligraphers are attributed with greater artistry than their famous Chinese predecessors as the *kami*'s rhetoric becomes increasingly uncompromising.

The *kami* informs Organtino that the Chinese were not the only ones who tried to conquer Japan, but that before them came the prince Siddhartha from India. He argues that even the Buddhas lost in Japan, which he explains through the theory of *honjisuijaku*, a phrase that means that the Shinto gods are really just native forms of the Buddhas. He argues that even if people one day forgot the almighty Amaterasu (which of course they would not!), she would still live on as manifested in Dainichi Nyorai, or the Cosmic Buddha of the Sun. When people see Dainichi in their dreams, they are really communing with the Japanese goddess Amaterasu and not the Indian prince Siddhartha. He even goes so far as to say that Nichiren and Shinran are not such great fools as to worship dark-skinned and haloed Buddhas from India, but that they rather worshipped the fair-skinned and elegant prince Shōtoku, the original champion of Buddhism in Japan. This segment on Buddhism, at last, does much to prove that the god's entire argument has been a farce from the beginning. To begin, he makes an original but misguided interpretation of the

---

<sup>198</sup> More commonly known as Ono no Michikaze, Fujiwara no Sukemasa, and Fujiwara no Yukinagi. They are also referred to as the *sanpitsu* (Three traces), the originators of a *wayō* (Japanese style) of calligraphy.

<sup>199</sup> Chinese Wang Xizhi and Chu Suiliang. Two of the most famous and important calligraphers in East Asian history.

doctrine of *honjisuijaku*, which actually posits the native deities as inferior and the Buddhas as the ultimate manifestations of truth. Thereafter, his disparaging remarks directed towards the dark-skinned Indians, following his earlier insinuations that the Chinese are uncouth, creates the image of a racist god who is unwilling to accept these other civilizations' profound impacts on his own culture.

The *kami* warns Organtino that God will surely die in Japan, as have all other foreign gods who have attempted to invade his land, and that his best recourse is to give up now. He refers to the Greek gods, informing Organtino that Pan has died but that the Japanese spirits will surely live forever. He ends with one more nonsensical slip by adding as proof that the Greek hero Ulysses made his final residence in Japan.

Apparently, according to the spirit, Ulysses arrived in Japan after his voyages around the Mediterranean and he changed his name to Yuriwaka Daijin, or Yuriwaka the young minister. The god is referring to a folk etymology that claims that Ulysses is the same as a Japanese legendary character called Yuri, for one because their names sound somewhat similar when pronounced in Japanese, and also because their stories bear some similarities. In the Japanese legend, Yuriwaka leaves to a foreign country to quell a demonic force and spends years on his voyage home while his wife is pursued by an insistent suitor, in a similar manner to Homer's Ulysses. Needless to say, there is no proof besides the circumstantial for this folk etymology, and thus these final words take on air of provincialism.<sup>200</sup>

After carefully examining the *kami*'s statements, it is difficult to assume that they truly represent a nationalistic worldview. As an exceedingly well-read intellectual and

---

<sup>200</sup> See Donald Keene, *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers* (New York: Grove Press, 1955), 88-89, for both sides of the debate.

modern thinker, Akutagawa surely could have presented more relevant evidence in an attempt to prove the absolute uniqueness of Japan's traditional heritage, but instead he produces a series of illogical statements and folk theories that hardly sustain an argument. The *kami* argues that Japan has never accepted foreign influences and then presents the examples of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Chinese writing, art, and calligraphy. The *kami* then argues that the native deities have always been superior to the Buddhas and submits the theory of *honjisuijaku* as evidence, a theory that in fact proves the exact opposite of his argument. Thus, the image of an exclusively and eternally Japanese culture as presented in the first half of the story is eroded by a series of illogical assertions by the Japanese deity. Akutagawa reverses course from the nationalistic rhetoric he began with and shows that, in fact, both the Jesuit and the *kami* are simply parroting the slogans of their cultural and political environments without making any terribly convincing intellectual contributions.

If in "The Subtle Smile of the Gods" Akutagawa stirs Romantic, pro-Japanese sentiments, he does so while also questioning a nationalist rhetoric that distorts history for its own purposes. He might be truly drawn to the primitive power of the Japanese origin myth and the legacy of an ancient Japanese culture, but he exploits the myth for its aesthetic power and not for literal truth, and by the end of the story he makes a mockery of both the foreign priest and the native god. He might agree with Freud in believing that, fundamentally, religion is too "patently infantile" and "foreign to reality" to even be tenable.<sup>201</sup> Both religious authorities in this story are out of touch with reality and make ignorant statements as they battle for ideological supremacy. Just as the Jesuit complains

---

<sup>201</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), 21.

about yellow-faced midgets, the *kami* speaks disparagingly of dark-skinned mystics from India and the crudeness of Chinese culture. “The Subtle Smile of the Gods” may appear to be a serious exercise in the promotion of traditional Japanese values, but Akutagawa’s portrayal is wrought with irony and in the end accuses both foreigners and Japanese of cultural ignorance. There is a point during his retelling of the Amaterasu myth where it appears that he really does take pleasure in the feral beauty of the mythologized Japanese past, but by the end of the tale he resumes his usual satirical voice.

One of the final *kirishitanmono*, “Oshino,” continues with the apparently condemnatory view of Christianity seen in “The Subtle Smile of the Gods,” but this story, too, can be critically read as a parody of cultural exchange. In the opening scene of “Oshino,” a solitary Jesuit priest stands inside the *Nanban-ji* with his head lowered in prayer.<sup>202</sup> The interior of the church which he occupies is richly described in a hybrid Catholic/Buddhist language of exoticisms. No light shines through the stained glass windows, but the tall gothic pillars shine a mysterious glow of their own as they stand guard before the *lectorium*. Within the sanctuary flicker the *jōtōmyō*, or continuously burning lights normally placed before Buddhist altars, and statues of the Christian saints shine from within the *gan*, or niches for religious figurines, normally of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Suddenly, an old woman in tattered clothes rushes into the sanctuary. The priest assumes that she is just another curious Japanese person come to see the mysterious *harikibotoke*, or crucified Buddha, another allusion to a syncretistic Buddha-God, or in this case a Buddha-Jesus. Yet, the woman looks nervous, as though she is eager to talk with the priest, and so he beckons her forth and asks her to speak her mind. The woman relates that her son is sick and in critical condition and that she heard that the priest of the

---

<sup>202</sup> ARZ, Vol. 6, 79.



*Nanban-ji* had the power to cure all sicknesses, even leprosy. She relates that the priest is known to have a special *ihō*, using a word which literally means method of healing, but which recalls other terms such as the *koihō*, or the old arts of healing from ancient China, and the *ihōmyō*<sup>203</sup>, or one of the five ancient bodies of wisdom of India. The priest is slightly disappointed that the woman has come for physical and not spiritual healing, but he agrees to help her in hopes that she will be convinced of the power of the Christian God.

The priest begins to relate to the woman the history of the Immaculate Conception. He expects that the woman will be amazed, but she shows little interest. She seems to be primarily concerned with her son's health, and so the priest informs her that he will do all he can, with the help of God, to heal her son. Yet, she tells the priest not to worry, for she is not relying entirely on his magic; she will later visit the bodhisatva Kannon-sama at Kiyomizudera and ask for help there as well. The priest is enraged by this and he informs the worshipper that Kannon, Shaka, Hachiman, and Tenjin are all idols made of wood and stone and that they are powerless to help her. His reaction reveals the mindset of the original Jesuits in Japan who wholeheartedly believed that "Satan in Japan had managed to ape the externals of True Religion for the express purpose of deceiving the ignorant Japanese."<sup>204</sup> He tells her that there is only one true God, Jesus Christ of Judea, whose history he relates. His account of the life of Christ is nearly impossible for the woman to follow as he speaks of Mary, the Messiah, King Herod, John the Baptist, Mary

---

<sup>203</sup> Sanskrit: *cikitsāvidyā*.

<sup>204</sup> Miller, *Japan's Modern Myth*, 65.

Magdalene, Lazarus, and Jerusalem.<sup>205</sup> In the end, he tells her of how Christ spoke the words *Eli, Eli, Sabachtani* when his enemies put him to the cross. His words were a cry to his father, asking why it was that he had been forsaken, as his enemies ridiculed him and put him to death.

After his long-winded account of the life of Christ and the crucifixion, the woman is in turn enraged that this foreign priest would worship such a weak and dispirited deity. She tells the priest that she is from a samurai family and that she could never bear the shame of bowing down before such a figure. She relates that her husband once lost his armor and weapons gambling before a final battle, and yet he resolved to enter into the fight anyway, bearing nothing more than a paper *haori* coat with the words “*Namu Amida Butsu*” inscribed in large letters, a branch of bamboo, and a red paper fan. He screamed that he was ready to die as he ran into battle, and surely enough, he lost his life. The woman remarks that it would be unconscionable for the widow of such a brave, Buddhist samurai to petition the weakling foreign God for help. The priest is shocked as the enraged Japanese woman leaves his church.

Once again, the message of “Oshino” initially appears to be a clear rejection of Christianity in favor of East Asian philosophies, in this case Buddhism and *bushidō*, yet there are a number of conspicuous elements that bring such a reading into question. First, there is the unrestrained hybridization of Buddhist and Catholic terminology, a technique which suggests that on some level, the two religions are not being understood on their own terms but rather through cultural filters that distort their intended meanings. Second, the Jesuit and the Japanese woman do not share a cultural vocabulary by which to make their arguments, but instead espouse predictable preconceptions based on their cultural

---

<sup>205</sup> ARZ, Vol. 6, 83-84.

backgrounds. Neither side is capable of thoughtfully addressing the other's concerns and instead present views that are heavily dependent on native words and philosophical concepts. Finally, Oshino makes an illogical assertion by claiming that the God of Christianity is pitiful for sacrificing himself for his beliefs but then praises her husband for the exact same thing, that is, sacrificing himself for his beliefs. While the Jesuit priest is unable to accept the Japanese cosmology, where spiritual power is available in a range of sources and not in one concentrated entity, Oshino also makes no attempt to understand the Christian point of view. By paying no attention to what the other is trying to say, both parties destroy the possibility of fruitful, intercultural communication.

The marked criticism of Western religion in "Oshino" is not unique to Akutagawa's imagination, but is almost identical to a short story by Anatole France titled "Laeta Acilia."<sup>206</sup> In France's short story, which similarly to "Oshino" bears the name of the female protagonist as its title, Laeta Acilia is a pagan woman who lives in Marseilles during the reign of Emperor Tiberius. Laeta notices that a new religious group known as the Christians have been steadily arriving in France from Judea. She encounters a Christian who claims to have the ability to see demons, in a similar manner to Akutagawa's Brother Urugan, and then meets Mary Magdalene herself. Mary preaches on the streets of her unconditional love for God in a manner that appalls Laeta. To her ears, this Mary woman is obsessed with the new god and has resolved to submit her entire being to him. She cannot imagine anything more ignoble and wonders how disgusted her husband, the noble Helvius, would be by such a shamelessly submissive religion.

---

<sup>206</sup> France, *Balthasar*, 81-93.

Considering that we know that Akutagawa was intimately familiar with *Balthasar*, and also considering the remarkable parallels between “Oshino” and “Laeta Acilia,” it becomes likely that “Oshino” is at least in part Akutagawa’s interpretation of France’s work in a Japanese setting. Akutagawa was attracted to European skepticism throughout his life and regularly mentioned figures like Anatole France, William Morris, Jonathan Swift, Voltaire, and other satirists as important sources of literary influence. Shibata Takaji, in *Akutagawa to eibungaku*, presents an entire chapter comparing Akutagawa to his British satirist idols, and comes away with the conclusion that the author’s art was intimately linked with theirs.<sup>207</sup>

In “Oshino,” Akutagawa employs a Western mode of satire as a tool by which to examine the encroaching dominance of Western thought. He lived during a time when many others called upon anti-modern European writers, figures such as Nietzsche and Ruskin, as their own allies in the battle against Western hegemonic thinking.<sup>208</sup> As Indra Levy argues, Meiji-period Japanese writers consciously inverted the West by using its own devices to expose the inner paradoxes of European modernity,<sup>209</sup> a task which Akutagawa appears to be engaged in here. By using Anatole France’s stories in order to reflect Japanese concerns, Akutagawa connects to a larger anti-modern sentiment that existed across the globe. In both “Oshino” and “The Subtle Smile of the Gods,” Akutagawa dismisses the promise of a rational modernity where different cultures compromise and embrace one another and finds that there is no reasonable way to

---

<sup>207</sup> Shibata, *Eibungaku*, 3-59.

<sup>208</sup> Michael K. Bourdaghs, *The Dawn That Never Comes: Shimazaki Tōson and the Japanese Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 4.

<sup>209</sup> Levy, *Westernesque Sirens*, 3.

understand differences in tradition. He instead champions an archaic world that supersedes both imperial Japan and modern Europe and exists only in a pre-rational and primitive past. He mirrors the pagan Roman in the pagan Japanese and elevates the bare-breasted, dancing goddess Uzume as symbols of a more liberal point in the history of humanity's cultural evolution.

In these latter *kirishitanmono*, Akutagawa presents Christianity and Japan as being incompatible. In both stories, he criticizes the Jesuit mission for being ignorant of its audience, yet he also ridicules Japanese figures who present Japan as a pure monoculture which fails to acknowledge or understand outside influences. It is ultimately a pessimistic view of the modern world which leaves one yearning for a past when such cultural differences did not exist among a universally primitive people. In Akutagawa's portrayal of the clash of Eastern and Western culture, one's own cultural upbringing is shown to infinitely impede him or her from ever truly understanding another point of view by constantly reasserting time-tested biases and illogical arguments. The modern world is cynically cast as a place perpetually divided by cultural barriers and grossly inferior to a pre-rational world where humanity was free from ideology.

## CHAPTER V

### AKUTAGAWA AS A MAN OF FAITH: MARTYR STORIES

And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief:  
for verily I say unto you, If ye have faith as a grain of  
mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove  
hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing  
shall be impossible unto you.

- Matthew 17:20

“Just like the travelers at Emmaus, we must make our hearts burn for Christ,” Akutagawa wrote in “The Man from the West Continued” in 1927.<sup>210</sup> It was one of the last sentences he would ever write before putting an end to his life. This sentence, the closing line in his second essay on the passion of Christ, references an incident told in Luke 24:13-35. In the biblical account, two travelers are heading from Jerusalem to the city of Emmaus shortly following the crucifixion of Jesus. As they travel along the road they encounter a stranger who appears to be oblivious of the prophet’s execution in Jerusalem. As fervent followers of Christ, they are in anguish over his recent death and respond in disbelief to this stranger’s aloofness. The stranger in turn rebukes them for their own lack of understanding and then explains to them the scriptural prophecies in which the resurrection of the Son of God is foretold. The travelers are touched and invite the man to dinner, during which he reveals to them he was in fact Jesus Christ all along.

---

<sup>210</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 257.

Luke 24:32 reads: “They said to one another, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?’”

Akutagawa’s reference to this incident, and to the specific description of the burning hearts of the travelers to Emmaus, indicates the degree to which he had become familiar with the Bible towards the end of his life. Akutagawa’s final Christian writings display a surprising turn towards a positive evaluation of the Christian message and a concentrated effort to discern the finer points of the religion. At the same time, they often delve into wildly unorthodox territory and end in such a puzzling manner that the true nature of Akutagawa’s relationship to Christianity has been debated ever since. In the same essay in which Akutagawa remarks that we must make our hearts burn for Christ, he calls Christ a communist, a laborer, a fool, a poetic soul, a journalist, a short-story writer, and a bohemian. Akutagawa displayed a lifelong interest in matters of faith and religious imagery, but his engagement with Christianity remained ambivalent to the end.

As has been shown thus far, Akutagawa frequently portrayed Christianity as being a fundamentally foreign and unintelligible religion in his *kirishitanmono*. However, at the same time that he criticized Christianity and imagined it as an exotic religion, he also created a parallel narrative of transcendent martyrdom and faith that spanned the entirety of the Christian stories. Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi notes that three of Akutagawa’s earliest surviving unpublished manuscripts are accounts of the lives of Christians, namely “Magudarena no Maria,” “Pièta,” and “Sauro.”<sup>211</sup> The choice of these figures is significant in that they are all examples of Christian leaders who were once lost to sin (by acceptance of demons, denial of Christ, and persecution of Christians respectively) but

---

<sup>211</sup> Sekiguchi, *Jitsuzō to kyozō*, 211. The figures are Mary Magdalene, Peter, and Saul of Tarsus (The pre-Christian name of Paul the apostle, later one of the founding fathers of the Christian church).

were redeemed due to their ultimate faith in God. Another of Akutagawa's early Christian stories cited by Sekiguchi is "Dawn" ("Akatsuki"), published in April, 1916 in a minor periodical called *Kyōdai* at the request of Akutagawa's lifelong friend, Matsuoka Yuzuru.<sup>212</sup> The magazine was circulated only in Nagaoka, Niigata prefecture, where Matsuoka taught as an elementary school teacher, and thus remains one of the least known *kirishitanmono*.<sup>213</sup> This early story, written around the same time as the likes of "Rashomon" and "The Nose," is a play centered on a group of demons who ridicule, abuse, and crown Christ with thorns at the crucifixion. However, at one point in the play, the demons are startled by a strange, beautiful light that emanates from Christ's body as he dies and his soul departs to heaven. Through these examples, it can be seen that Akutagawa's earliest *kirishitanmono* begin a narrative in which absolute faith overcomes a cruel and sinful world.

Despite his sometimes pervasive cynicism, Akutagawa's stories often positively depict martyr heroes who overcome the secular world through the strength of their beliefs. In some stories, he might ridicule religious hierarchies and leaders as being hypocritical, yet at other times he finds a space in which to elevate religious fools whose convictions give them the ability to transcend modernity. The martyr heroes in his stories are always at odds with an intellectual world that refuses to accept their illogical convictions, and in the end they are forced to choose death over submission to an overly calculating society. Through their deaths, they disprove the value of rationality and exalt the anti-social power of the individual and the possibility of the supernatural. In this way, Akutagawa's positive appraisals of religion come only in the context of struggle and single-minded

---

<sup>212</sup> Sekiguchi, *Jitsuzō to kyozō*, 205.

<sup>213</sup> ARZ, Vol. 12, 103-106.



devotion in opposition to outside social forces. There were others who wrote stories in the late Meiji and Taishō periods who were able to freely combine religion and secular philosophy without this same element of conflict as seen in Akutagawa's stories, including figures such as Kōda Rohan and Kenji Miyazawa. Rohan, for one, was a Nichiren Buddhist who attended church lectures and Bible reading classes and seamlessly combined such disparate elements as Platonic philosophy, humanism, Daoism, Buddhism, and Christianity in his works.<sup>214</sup> Miyazawa, a dedicated adherent of the Hokke sect of Nichiren Buddhism, freely mixed Buddhism, Christianity, Marxism, and theoretical science in his writings,<sup>215</sup> all without displaying any of the cultural conflict that is so prominent in Akutagawa's works. Unlike these writers, Akutagawa's image of religion is one in which the believer is confronted with the contradictions of faith and science, East and West, and tradition and modernity, and is perpetually unable to harmonize these elements. The martyr chooses death over compromise and is exalted for the tenacity of his or her convictions.

In his evaluation of believers, Akutagawa created a series of martyr heroes of various faiths who defy the triumph of reason through the power of their religious convictions. His martyrs are not exclusively Christian, but include Daoists, Buddhists, and mythological protagonists from multiple traditions. They are all characters who push their beliefs to the point of death, either just before or beyond the final moment, but in the end achieve miraculous salvation that becomes the envy of those who had originally doubted them. Across religious traditions, the martyr stories are tied together by a

---

<sup>214</sup> Chieko Irie Mulhern, introduction in *Pagoda, Skull, & Samurai: 3 Stories by Rohan Koda*, (Rutland, Vermont; Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1985), 10, 14.

<sup>215</sup> Napier, *Fantastic in Japanese Literature*, 150.

unifying theme of rejection of the modern world and acceptance of a mythical reality. They exemplify a type of stubbornly resolute character that Akutagawa positioned as the hero of a modern ideological struggle.

One of Akutagawa's earliest martyr characters appears in "The Death of a Believer" ("Hōkyōnin no Shi," 1918), an early example of his *kirishitanmono*.<sup>216</sup> The story opens with a quote from Fray Luis de Granada's *Guía de Pecadores* (1555)<sup>217</sup> that reads, "Even if you were to live for three hundred years in a body overflowing with pleasure, it would never compare to an eternal future and would be nothing more than a passing dream."<sup>218</sup> Akutagawa quotes from the Japanese edition, widely printed in Japan in 1599 and read by both the intelligentsia and Christian converts of the age.<sup>219</sup> This quote sets a tone for all of the subsequent martyr stories, that is, one in which the current world is only a distraction and true fulfillment is reached only after death. As an opening to "The Death of a Believer," a specifically Christian story, it is a quote that even sounds vaguely Buddhist in its equation of life with a passing dream, a common motif in Asian religious literature.

After presenting the excerpt from *Guía de Pecadores*, Akutagawa then provides another quote, this time from *De Imitatione Christi* (1418-1427), a text widely attributed to Thomas á Kempis.<sup>220</sup> The second quote reads, "Those who wish to embark upon the path of righteousness would do well to remember the sweetness of the mysteries which

---

<sup>216</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 266-280.

<sup>217</sup> Luis de Granada, *Guía de Pecadores* (Madrid: Ediciones de "La Lectura," 1929).

<sup>218</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 266.

<sup>219</sup> Kanda Yumiko, *Hōkyōnin no shi*, 195.

<sup>220</sup> Thomas á Kempis, *De Imitatione Christi* (Paris: Typis Alberti Tallone), 1955.

imbue the holy teachings.”<sup>221</sup> Once again, he draws from an edition that was available in medieval Japan, printed in both 1596 in *romaji*<sup>222</sup> and in 1610 in Japanese script by a Japanese convert to Christianity, Harada Antonio.<sup>223</sup> Also, he again chooses a quote that does not strike the reader as being immediately Christian in nature. In fact, the original Japanese uses the word *dō* (equivalent to the Chinese *dao* of Daoism) to describe a religious practice and thus use a term which resonates more with the traditional Asian idea of a gradual devotional path (*dao*) rather than the cathartic moment of conversion as seen in Christianity. This begins Akutagawa’s universal narrative of death and salvation, one that is most commonly told through Christian form but which incorporates Asian religious elements as well.

Following the set of quotes, the first of Akutagawa’s martyrs is introduced, an orphan named Lorenzo. The orphan appears at the steps of St. Lucia church in Nagasaki. When the congregation asks him where he is from, he only replies that his father is *Deus* and he has come from *paraiso*. He quickly befriends a tall and broad-shouldered Christian named Simeon, and their friendship is described as being “like grape vines with blooming flowers wrapped around a cypress tree on Mount Lebanon.”<sup>224</sup> Obviously, exotic imagery is still very much a part of Akutagawa’s Christian stories, even when he engages with the religion on a more philosophical level. Yet, this story also presents Christian characters who are more human and relatable than many of the other figures presented thus far.

---

<sup>221</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 266.

<sup>222</sup> Roman letters used to represent Japanese phonetically.

<sup>223</sup> Kanda Yumiko, *Hōkyōnin no shi*, 195-196.

<sup>224</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 267.

As the story continues, a girl who is part of the St. Lucia congregation becomes infatuated with Lorenzo and begins to leave him love letters. Simeon finds a letter and accuses Lorenzo of impious behavior, but Lorenzo denies any wrongdoing and insists that he has not responded to the girl's advances. Eventually, the girl becomes pregnant and accuses Lorenzo of being the father. The church wastes no time in condemning Lorenzo and expels him from their congregation, even though he has no place to go. At first, he is made to live in a *hinin*<sup>225</sup> hut and beg for a living.<sup>226</sup> He is ridiculed by the pagans who treat him like an *etori*<sup>227</sup> and despise his belief in the religion of *Tenju*, or the heavenly lord, a reference to Catholicism. He is jeered at by heartless children and beaten with swords, staffs, tiles, and stones. He catches a horrendous disease that was spreading through Nagasaki at the time and lies fallen by the roadside writhing in pain and agony for seven days and seven nights. Yet, all the while, even though he has not a grain of rice or a single coin to his name, he is blessed by God's mercy with fruits from the trees, fish from the sea, and other food from nature.

In the final climactic scene of "The Death of a Believer," Nagasaki is struck by a raging fire. The house of the girl who had accused Lorenzo is burning down and yet her child is still trapped inside the building. Suddenly, Lorenzo appears, rushes into the burning building, and manages to rescue the child, though he is severely burned. At first, the church elders remark that there is no love like that of a father for his child and they take the incident as proof of Lorenzo's affair. However, as they look closely at Lorenzo's

---

<sup>225</sup> One of various levels of outcastes in medieval Japanese society. The term literally means "non-person."

<sup>226</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 271.

<sup>227</sup> Another level of outcaste, equated with the later *eta* caste that was believed to be impure for working as butchers and tanners, and thus with animal carcasses.

body, whose clothes have been burned off by the flames, they notice a pair of breasts and discover that Lorenzo was a girl all along. They are amazed by the heavenly appearance of the girl who looks upwards towards the glory of paradise and expires with a peaceful smile on her lips.<sup>228</sup>

In the context of the *kirishitanmono*, Lorenzo is a perfect fool and a perfect martyr. There is no reason for her to undergo the suffering that she chooses and a simple revelation of her true sex would avoid the agony and the humiliation to which she is subjected. However, through her quiet foolishness and her rejection of the common sense of the world, she is sustained through her misery, she saves the life of a child, and the final look on her face indicates that she has earned a place in eternal paradise. In this story, the path to transcendence is established as being one of foolishness and rejection of worldly wisdom.

The next martyr story is that of “Juliano Kichisuke,” (“Juriano Kichisuke,” 1919),<sup>229</sup> a story that Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra chose to title “The Life of a Holy Fool” in their translation in reference to the nature of the protagonist.<sup>230</sup> This time, the foolish martyr is explicitly noted as being of inferior intelligence in the body of the text. At the outset of the story, Akutagawa introduces Juliano Kichisuke, a stupid boy from Hizen prefecture who works menial jobs as the servant of a local landowner. He is constantly ridiculed by his companions, and when he falls in love with the landowner’s daughter, they discover his feelings and scorn him so greatly that he decides to run away from his hometown. He returns three years later in the guise of a beggar and asks for

---

<sup>228</sup> ARZ, Vol. 2, 278-279.

<sup>229</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 202-205.

<sup>230</sup> Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra, “Kirishitanmono,” 34.

employment. He continues to pine after the daughter of his master and is more loyal to her than a pet dog, but she marries another man and lives happily with him. Despite his life of disappointment and endless toil, Kichisuke works without complaining. His fellow servants soon discover that he might be a Christian when they spy him crossing himself and praying. Since a ban on Christianity had recently been enacted in Kyushu, the other servants worry about being associated with Kichisuke and so they hand him over to the local governor.

Even though he has suffered throughout his life and is being held in a prison for his beliefs, the fool Kichisuke bravely withstands the tortures of prison. In fact, his countenance almost appears to be lit up by the light of heaven. When the governor questions his beliefs, he claims to worship the lord from Bethlehem, the son of *Santa Maria*, who understands and suffers the same pain as his disciples. The governor asks him the source of his religion, and he says that he was preached to and baptized by a mysterious red-headed foreigner by the ocean and that this foreigner mysteriously walked away into the waves after anointing him. The governor suspects him of lying, but Kichisuke insists on the truth of his story regardless of the number of times that he is interrogated. In the end, Kichisuke is crucified for his illegal beliefs and a *hinin* drives the killing spear into his side as he hangs from a wooden cross. After his death, a mysteriously sweet fragrance spreads around his body and a lily flower blooms from his mouth. It appears that Kichisuke has transcended his earthly woes and passed on into eternal paradise.<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>231</sup> ARZ. Vol. 3, 205.

Another early story pictures a foolish believer as the recipient of God's grace, although it is of a much different vein than the first two *kirishitanmono* presented thus far. That story is "The Christ of Nanking" ("Nankin no Kirisuto," 1920)<sup>232</sup>, one of the most vivid and jolting of Akutagawa's *kirishitanmono*, if not of his whole oeuvre. It is the story of a fifteen-year-old prostitute, Song Jinhua<sup>233</sup>, who lives in the brothel district of Qin Huai, Nanjing.<sup>234</sup> Her mother passed away some time before the opening of the story and her father is confined to bed due to sickness. Through her trade, Song Jinhua supports her father and herself, and when she makes a little extra money she even gives her father the surplus so that he can drink and be happy. The reader also learns that Song Jinhua is a devout Christian, having learned the faith from her mother, and that she regularly prays towards a small statue of the crucified Christ that hangs on her wall.

As the story progresses, a Japanese tourist stops in Qin Huai and spends a night with Song Jinhua. He is surprised by the figure of Christ on her wall and asks how she can possibly be both a Christian and a prostitute. The girl laughs at the absurdity of his question and remarks that she is a good person and Jesus understands the troubles that have forced her into her position. The Japanese tourist becomes the voice of reason, the symptom of a modern world that does not tolerate such contradictions, and he scorns the girl for her incompatible identities. The girl exemplifies the holy foolishness that is found in all of Akutagawa's martyr-like characters, and because of her simple-minded belief, she is not bothered by any accusations brought against her.

---

<sup>232</sup> ARZ, Vol. 4, 133-149.

<sup>233</sup> Sōkinkwa. I have chosen to represent the names in this story in their Chinese pronunciations in order to emphasize the setting of the narrative in China. They are glossed in Japanese in the original.

<sup>234</sup> Shinwai, Nankin.

One day, Song Jinhua contracts a horrible case of syphilis because of her profession. Her coworker, Chen Shancha<sup>235</sup>, recommends that she drink a solution of opium to ease the pain while another girl of the trade, Mao Yingchen<sup>236</sup>, offers her a portion of her own prescription of blue mercury chloride pills and calomel. Once again, Akutagawa indulges in his penchant for obscurity in this scene by offering a series of Chinese characters to describe two medicines that are not to be found in any standard reference source, neither Japanese nor Chinese. The words are glossed in Japanese as *kōrangwan* and *karomai* from the Chinese *gonglanwan* and *jialumi*.<sup>237</sup> These are exceptionally rare terms referring to “blue mass” pills, a blue-colored medicine comprised of mercury chloride and other ingredients, and also calomel, another name for mercury chloride. To the best of my knowledge, the only known reference to these medicines by these names is by John Glasgow Kerr, a medical missionary also known by his Chinese name Jia Yuehan, in an 1872 pamphlet on treatments for sexually transmitted diseases, *Hualiu zhimi*, or *Treatise on Syphilis*.<sup>238</sup> Akutagawa’s direct source is not readily identifiable, but his attraction to obscure words is reaffirmed.

After these treatments fail to work, Chen Shancha tells Song Jinhua that there is a secret cure for syphilis, that is, to pass it on to an unsuspecting customer. Song Jinhua wants sincerely to rid herself of her disease, but she is unable to harm another in order to cure herself. She bows before the figure of Christ and confesses her desire to pass the disease on, but also announces her resolution to abstain from such an unpardonable act.

---

<sup>235</sup> Chinsansa.

<sup>236</sup> Mōgeishun.

<sup>237</sup> ARZ, Vol. 4, 136.

<sup>238</sup> Jia Yuehan, *Hualiu zhimi* (Huhehaote: Yuanfang chubanshe), 2001.



In a manner, she becomes a martyr by offering her own life rather than taking that of another to heal herself. Following her prayers, a strange customer comes to visit Song Jinhua, a man who mysteriously appears to be neither an Easterner nor a Westerner. He exudes a peculiar aura that enraptures the girl and he convinces her to sleep with him, despite her repeated attempts to warn him away. The girl then falls asleep and dreams that she is in a beautiful house and sitting before a rich banquet of swallows' nests, shark fin, steamed eggs, smoked carp, a pig boiled whole, and a broth made of sea cucumber, all in fine plates and bowls. Jesus appears behind her and tells her to eat without constraint, for, he informs her, this banquet will heal her and she will awake free from her disease. The girl asks Jesus to share in her meal, and in a comic injection into an otherwise dark story, Jesus answers, "Me? I hate Chinese food."<sup>239</sup>

The girl awakes. The stranger has disappeared, and miraculously, her syphilis is cured. Overjoyed, she kneels before the relief of Christ and thanks him for his mercies and then reaffirms her commitment to his word. At this point, it appears that the story will end with the girl cured thanks to her faith in Christ, but Akutagawa dispenses with the uncharacteristic cheer of this scenario and instead leaves the reader with a more cynical conclusion. A few years following Song Jinhua's cure, the Japanese tourist returns to visit her and listens to her story of meeting with Jesus and the miraculous cure that followed. He scoffs at the childishness of her belief and conjures a more probable situation in his mind. He recalls a half-Japanese, half-American tourist (and thus a man who appears neither Eastern nor Western) who stayed in his same hotel a few years prior when he first met the young prostitute. The man frequented the brothels around Nanjing and contracted a horrendous case of syphilis that eventually ravaged his body and mind,

---

<sup>239</sup> ARZ, Vol. 4, 145.

and the tourist figures that this man is the same mysterious “Christ” that Song Jinhua imagines to have met. He wonders if he should keep his information to himself or “enlighten” the girl, but instead he simply asks, “So you haven’t been sick ever since?” to which the girl responds “no” as her face radiates light.<sup>240</sup>

The immediate conclusion of the reader might be that Akutagawa is ridiculing Christianity and the simple-minded superstition of his protagonist. Certainly, his implication that a fifteen-year-old prostitute spent a sensual night with Jesus and was cured of syphilis would be nothing short of blasphemous in an orthodox Christian context. Yet, there are indications that the story is more complex than such a reading would allow. The first is that, regardless of the Japanese tourist’s conclusion, the girl was cured of her syphilis immediately following the encounter. This development could either be credited to the power of Christ or the power of Chan Shenchu’s secret cure, and yet, neither explanation is any more scientifically viable than the other. Also, Song Jinhua is ultimately cured because of her resolute faith in Christ which supersedes her reliance on modern medication or folkloric magic. Finally, the story ends by describing the girl’s face as radiating a clear light, which coincides with descriptions of other religious martyrs in Akutagawa’s stories. Once again, the hero of Akutagawa’s story triumphs over death because of resolute faith, no matter how improbable it appears to the modern observer, or in this case, the secular Japanese tourist.

Through these first three stories, Akutagawa constructs an image of the foolish martyr that reappears in his other religiously-themed works, both Christian and otherwise. It becomes quickly apparent that the martyr/fool of these stories is one of Akutagawa’s most consistently positive characters. Most character types in his stories are uniformly

---

<sup>240</sup> ARZ, Vol. 4, 149.

criticized, including Christian missionaries, Buddhist monks, enlightened intellectuals, samurai, generals, communists, pacifists, and so on. The martyr, however, always meets with a happy fate and succeeds in transcending the pettiness of reality. Through his or her stubborn adherence to the rules of a pre-rational past, the martyr is no longer bound by an oppressive modernity. As Donald Keene says of Akutagawa, “He found something especially appealing in beliefs that transcended the realm of ordinary human virtue, about which he had grave doubts, and envied people of the Middle Ages whose religion enabled them to make sense of the seemingly irreconcilable elements in ordinary daily life.”<sup>241</sup>

Following his Christian martyr stories, Akutagawa wrote a number of Buddhist, Daoist, and other religious stories that incorporated similar themes of self-denial and transcendence through belief. One of these is the brief “The Faith of Wei Sheng” (“Bisei no Shin,” 1920), a story only three pages long. Although not a martyr story in the same manner as the other pieces presented here, it contains a number of corresponding elements that make it relevant. The episode, set in ancient China, tells of a man who waits steadfastly by a river for a goddess to appear. As he waits, the tide of the river rises until it overtakes him and he drowns. The corpse of the man glows in the river with a sad heavenly light as his soul separates from its body and begins its ascent into the sky. At the end of the story, Akutagawa writes:

After many thousands of years had passed and Wei Sheng’s soul had undergone a countless number of transmigrations, there once again come a time for it to entrust its life force to another human being. That

---

<sup>241</sup> Keene, *Dawn to the West*, 569.

soul is now resting within myself, and thus, even though I was born into the modern world, I cannot accomplish one meaningful task. All day and all night, while I live a life of desultory dreams, I await some mysterious arrival. Just like Wei Sheng standing beneath the bridge at twilight, I live awaiting my lover into eternity.<sup>242</sup>

It is immediately clear that “The Faith of Wei Sheng” contains none of the triumphant hope of the other martyr stories, but there are elements in the character of Wei Sheng that indicate that he is in some ways a similar martyr character. For example, his corpse is enveloped in rays of light before the conclusion of the story, as happens in most of the other examples presented here. Also, Wei Sheng’s beliefs are shown to be in conflict with a sensible and modern reality, one in which a man would not stand in place until a river overtakes and drowns him. Moreover, there are other elements that help clarify Akutagawa’s personal relationship to the martyr characters. Specifically, in “The Faith of Wei Sheng,” Akutagawa ultimately identifies himself as the protagonist, or the hopelessly foolish martyr. He claims a poetic soul that is tragically misplaced in a sensible modernity, but also one which is beautiful in its convictions and eternal longing. In this story, Akutagawa expresses the incompatibility of spirituality with the modern world and suggests that there is no way to reconcile the two, and yet he romanticizes the tragedy of the poetic soul who stands firm in his or her convictions nonetheless.

Although “The Faith of Wei Sheng” is a melancholy tale of a martyr, other Buddhist and Daoist stories end on the same triumphant note as the Christian stories presented previously. The first of these is “The Rebirth Picture Scroll” (“*Ōjō emaki*,”

---

<sup>242</sup> ARZ, Vol. 3, 369.

1921),<sup>243</sup> a *Konjaku monogatari*-inspired piece about a recently-converted monk who travels towards the sea in search of the Pure Land. In this story, the monk was previously a bloodthirsty hunter who thought little of animal or human life and killed with reckless abandon. While hunting in the forest, the man heard a priest exclaim that the Buddha will accept all followers into his Pure Land, regardless of their past sins. The hunter suddenly decided to lay down his weapons and to leave his wife and children in order to pursue the path of the Buddha. As a monk, he wanders towards the sea chanting the well-known mantra of the Shin Jōdō Buddhist sect, *Namu Amida Butsu*, or Hail Amitabha Buddha. A senior priest stops him on his way and asks him what his intentions are. When he directly claims that he is traveling towards the West in order to meet Amitabha Buddha in the Pure Land, the priest chides him for being so simple-minded as to confuse a religious metaphor for reality. The monk ignores the advice of the senior priest and continues on his way towards the sea. When he finally reaches the seashore, he climbs into a tall pine tree where he sits chanting *Namu Amida Butsu* and awaiting his acceptance into the Pure Land. A week later, the senior priest wanders to the spot where the chanting monk was last seen. He discovers a corpse in the treetop, but surrounding the corpse is an otherworldly fragrance, and out of his mouth has sprouted a lotus flower. The senior priest is astonished to recognize his own lack of belief and quickly begins pleading for the compassion of the Buddha.

The conclusion of the story may seem to be a repetition of the final scene of “Juliano Kichisuke,” in which a flower blooms in the mouth of a martyr, but in fact, both endings were drawn from the original tale of a wandering monk in *Konjaku*

---

<sup>243</sup> ARZ, Vol. 4, 452-458.

*monogatari*.<sup>244</sup> In the source, just as in Akutagawa's stories, a monk achieves transcendence due to his resolve to strive for the Pure Land despite the sound advice of those around him. Nagano Jōchi writes that "The Rebirth Picture Scroll" displays a time in which people were capable of holding unwavering convictions, unlike the modern person who is constantly torn between good and evil.<sup>245</sup> Jōchi also refers to Yoshida Seiichi who evaluates the story as a display of great admiration by Akutagawa for the foolish believer who does not worry about particulars but follows ahead with conviction, a man that he himself wished to become.<sup>246</sup>

A final example of Akutagawa's non-Christian martyrs is the protagonist of "The Immortal" ("Sennin," 1922).<sup>247</sup> In this children's story, a man from the country travels to Osaka in search of a job. He stops at an employment agency and indicates that wants to become a *sennin*, a wise man from the Daoist tradition who lives in the mountains, has the ability to fly, and never dies. The recruiter laughs but then realizes that he is obligated by his advertising to find his clients any job they may be searching for. He forwards the client to a rich couple who fools him into believing that they will train him to be a *sennin* as long as he works for them for twenty years, performing any task that they ask of him without monetary compensation. The man agrees and works for them for twenty years, but when his period of indenture expires, the couple quickly tries to devise a way to continue his contract. The old woman gives him an impossible task, which if he does not

---

<sup>244</sup> *Konjaku monogatari*, ed. Yamada Yoshio, Yamada Tadao, (Tokyo:Iwanami, 1961-1963). For English, see Royall Tyler, *Japanese Tales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 165-168.

<sup>245</sup> Nagano, *Koten to kindai*, 278.

<sup>246</sup> Nagano, *Koten to kindai*, 275 - 276. See Yoshida, Seiichi, ed., "Kaisetsu," *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke shū*, (Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 1970), 138.

<sup>247</sup> ARZ, Vol. 5, 377-383.

complete, will require him to work for another twenty years without pay. She orders him to climb to the top of a massive pine tree in her garden and to completely let go of his hold. The fool follows her orders exactly, but instead of falling to his death, he flies off into the sky, his goal of becoming a *sennin* accomplished after all.

This final example contributes to the formation of specific set of motifs that mark the martyr stories. One of these motifs is that of climbing a tall tree, specifically a pine tree, and gazing into the heavens right before the moment of transcendence. Another is that of a brilliant light that surrounds the soon-to-be martyred, or the transcending believer. There is also the spreading of a wonderful fragrance and the blossoming of a sacred flower in the mouth of the martyr. In summation, all of the martyrs display a heavenward motion, either through an ascending motion of the eyes or the spirit, or by physically climbing to a place of higher altitude. The idea emerges that heaven is somewhere “up” and above the profanity of the earth. The martyrs seem eager to escape the ground, and through their undying belief in a heavenly paradise, a Pure Land, or otherwise immortality, they all manage to leave the earth behind.

Following this exposition of martyr stories, it may appear that the answer to Akutagawa’s relationship with Christianity was solved towards the end of his life. He believed in heaven and wished to escape the profane modern world into which he had been born. Of course, suicide is not generally a condoned method of leaving this world in a Christian worldview, but in his suicide note Akutagawa contradicted the view that suicide is a sin.<sup>248</sup> Yet, when Akutagawa’s final writings on Christianity are taken into consideration, his relationship to the religion becomes increasingly hard to pin down.

---

<sup>248</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 277.

After criticizing and then praising Christianity, Akutagawa finally decides to exclaim his love for the faith, but only in the most unorthodox and puzzling manner possible.

Akutagawa temporarily stopped writing *kirishitanmono* towards the latter part of his career, up until 1926 when he wrote “Temptation” (“Yūwaku”),<sup>249</sup> a mock film script that seems to encapsulate the decaying mind of a brilliant artist. It is completely unlike any of the early *kirishitanmono*, having more in common with the late schizoid ramblings of “Cogwheels” rather than the exotic martyr stories. The film script is one of the most avant-garde pieces in Akutagawa’s oeuvre, depicting a series of outlandish images with little narrative thread. In one typical example of a surrealist scene, a sea captain takes a star from the sky into his hand, which then turns, in sequence, into a pebble, a potato, a butterfly, and finally a miniature Napoleon in military uniform who turns around and urinates off the edge of his captain’s hand.<sup>250</sup> Loosely, the script appears to be a tale of a Japanese Christian, Sebastian, who hides in a cave praying fervently before a cross. A foreign ship captain emerges from his shadow and invites him to look through a telescope towards the future, through which he sees a series of startling images. Interspersed in the narrative are a number of troubling scenes, of foreigners stabbing each other over card games, monkeys playing with a cross, beards growing on corpses, and a host of other oddities.

According to Akutagawa’s own postscript, “Temptation” was inspired by the life of a real Japanese Christian martyr, known only by his Christianized name of Sebastian,

---

<sup>249</sup> ARZ, Vol. 8, 401-419.

<sup>250</sup> ARZ, Vol. 8, 411.



as drawn from a work by scholar Urakawa Wasaburo.<sup>251</sup> Akutagawa quotes from an actual liturgical calendar attributed to the martyr for his opening scene, although he does so in typically obscure fashion, for example, by leaving the unknown word *domiigo*<sup>252</sup> unexplained. Otherwise, the only other facts that he draws from history are that Sebastian is a Christian and that he hides for years from the anti-Christian authorities.

In Akutagawa's story of the martyr, Sebastian is tempted by Buddhas and sinister monkeys as he attempts to pray within his cave. When he finally steps outside, his shadow splits into two forms, one of which becomes a bearded foreigner and ship captain that directs him to look through a spying glass. As he looks, he sees scenes of foreigners acting violently, a woman at a typewriter, test tubes and chemicals, an exploding machine, and other strange images. After looking away from the telescope, a series of modern cafes full of dancing couples sprout from the ground, the dancers' feet turn into hooves and paws, and a black man appears playing a giant drum, shortly before turning into a camphor tree.<sup>253</sup>

Some elements of "Temptation" appear to be more readily interpretable than others. The large amount of random images and transformations of objects provide for endless combinations of meaning. Aaron Gerow interprets the film as a statement of the self becoming the Other, where a simple East-West binary collapses and the protagonist loses subjectivity.<sup>254</sup> In his words, the story displays a self that is "...increasingly

---

<sup>251</sup> Urakawa Wasaburo, *Nihon ni okeru kōkyōkai no fukkatsu* (Nihon Tosho Sentā: 2003).

<sup>252</sup> A corruption of the Portuguese *Domingo*, or Sunday, found in the original manuscript.

<sup>253</sup> ARZ, Vol. 8, 412-413.

<sup>254</sup> Aaron Gerow, "The Other Seen as Self: Akutagawa and Film," *Literature Film Quarterly*, 23 (1995): 198.

technologized, split, and unknown to itself.”<sup>255</sup> I agree with Gerow’s assessment and also interpret “Temptation” as being, in part, an expression of the collapse of self that results in a confusion of perspective. However, other meanings also appear when the story is examined specifically as a *kirishitanmono* piece. One important feature of the story is that the foreigners, those who bring Christianity to Japan, are constantly stabbing each other, gambling, drinking, smoking, and otherwise displaying wicked grins (*reishō*). Even the practice of Christianity itself is tinged with darkness, as the prayerful Sebastian is assaulted by images of his own crucifixion and the corpse of Judas. At the end of the story, the ship captain sits at a table, playing cards, liquor and tobacco laying before him, and he yawns broadly. In “Temptation,” the Japanese Christian is endlessly tormented by the foreigners and images of their religion. Christianity becomes a nightmarish faith crowned by insurmountable images of the cross and practiced by barbaric, bearded men. This story displays the full terror of the Other as it invades the self and creates a dangerously insecure mental state.

After taking a few years off from the *kirishitanmono*, it appears that Akutagawa finally decided to condemn Christianity as a foreign, barbarian religion with no merit for the Japanese people, but the following year he completely reversed his direction with “The Man from the West” (“Saihō no hito,” 1927) and the “The Man From the West Continued” (“Zoku saihō no hito,” 1927), two of his most emphatic appraisals of Christianity. In “The Man from the West” he writes:

As I became a biographer of the Westerner and his religion, I soon found myself falling love with Christ. I cannot observe Christ today as

---

<sup>255</sup> Gerow, “Other as Self,” 199.

though I am a passive onlooker standing by the wayside. Of course, the youth of today can't help but laugh at the foreign missionaries of long ago, but I, who was born at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have grown weary of seeing things in this way—the cross that they do not hesitate to topple has filled my eyes.<sup>256</sup>

Then, in the “The Man from the West Continued” he exclaims:

Christ is the mirror of the myriad people. This does not mean that the myriad people imitate Christ, but rather that within Christ one can discover the myriad people... The shape of Christ from within the four gospels is calling vividly to me. It is not within my power to resist writing about Christ.<sup>257</sup>

Expressing statements such as these, it appears as if Akutagawa has finally converted and given himself over completely to the teachings of Christianity. Yet, as can be expected, these essays are more complex than they initially appear. Through the course of two essays, Akutagawa makes a number of unorthodox and potentially sacrilegious assertions. He notes that Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso saw the Holy Spirit in the minds of the insane and that the Holy Spirit is neither good nor evil. He claims that the reincarnated Christ can be found in a duck on a lake, in a lotus flower, and in a *daimyō*, and moreover, that every single one of us is a Christ. In a similar statement,

---

<sup>256</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 230.-231.

<sup>257</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 257.

he claims that Mary is the mother of all people and that she can be found in fired pottery, earthenware, the fire in the hearth, and the vegetables in the field. He demonstrates his great love for Christ by calling him the greatest journalist who ever lived, a bohemian who loved freedom, and a poetic soul who reached ecstasy over the beauty of a single lily. Certainly, Akutagawa's Christ and Christianesque religion would not be recognized by almost any mainstream Christian in the Western world. His ideas might have resonated with early Christian Gnostics had they heard them, and likely with Daoists and Buddhists if only with a slight modification of religious terminology.

Through these essays, Akutagawa might appear to be something of a Christian dilettante, only moderately aware of the religion's scriptural basis. Yet, this is not the case, as he easily compares Old Testament and New Testament verses and even carefully evaluates the writing styles of each of the authors of the gospels. Any alteration of the original message is done entirely of his own will. Having cited dozens of incidents of Christian literature throughout the *kirishitanmono*, it is difficult to imagine that Akutagawa was not aware of what other Christians thought of their religion. In fact, in "The Man from the West Continued," he laments that Christians have distorted the message of Christ and built a religion in his honor that has nothing to do with his teachings. Thus, Akutagawa appropriates Christ as his own personal religious figure, and, utterly disregarding the conventional religion, completely recreates Christianity.

Despite his potentially blasphemous comments, Akutagawa reserves his highest praise for the Christ that he claims to love, directing criticisms at those that stand in his way. For instance, he remarks that the Pharisees and Sadducees are representative of a soulless evolutionary model that ignores the deep wisdom of Christ. On numerous

occasions, he disparages the Buddha as a vain and boastful prince who lacks the compassionate understanding of the common man that Christ has. Strangely enough, after exoticizing and criticizing Christianity throughout his life, Akutagawa calls upon Christ as a spiritual ally in his final days. As Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi writes, “He reached a genuine understanding of religion. The seeds that had been scattered began to blossom and the fruit was stored within him.”<sup>258</sup>

Akutagawa’s Christ is the ultimate expression of the martyr and the tragic hero that he so often exemplified in his writings. He is a poet who stubbornly dies for his beliefs and thus succeeds in transcending the small-mindedness of modern man. In “The Man from the West” and “The Man from the West Continued,” Akutagawa disregards flying immortals or flowering bodies of enlightenment and instead pours all of his praise into the figure of a crucified poet. He praises Christ most of all for his belief in heaven and an existence beyond the profanity of earth, even when those around him did not. Whether or not Akutagawa himself came to believe in an afterlife before his death is impossible to say, but he did express great admiration for Christ’s belief in a world beyond this one. Most of all, he admiringly portrayed the unshakeable convictions of Christ that were most absolute and completely in contradiction to the society in which he lived.

---

<sup>258</sup> Sekiguchi, *Jitsuzō to kyojō*, 219.

## CHAPTER VI

### CONCLUSION: THE DEATH OF A RATIONAL MAN

Scholars in the decades following Akutagawa's suicide in 1927 have variously interpreted his *kirishitanmono* as exotic fantasies, religious criticisms, and positive appraisals of Christianity. Perhaps the most common assessment of the *kirishitanmono* is that they utilize the Christianized world of medieval Japan as an exotic setting for fantastical stories. Such a view is expressed by the most prolific of Akutagawa scholars, Sekiguchi Yasuyoshi, and is perhaps best summarized by Hisaaki Yamanouchi, who writes, "Christianity merely provided Akutagawa with a narrative framework within which he spun out some interesting tales."<sup>259</sup> Other scholars, such as Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra, have inferred that these stories are more satirical in nature and that they appropriate Christianity according to Japanese sensibilities while discarding what is of no use. Still others, such as Beongcheon Yu and Donald Keene, have suggested that these stories reveal a deeper spiritual struggle within Akutagawa's intellect and a desire to genuinely experience Christianity. As has been demonstrated through the course of this paper, all three of these elements, exoticism, criticism, and praise, are essential when describing the *kirishitanmono*, though they interact on different levels within individual stories and fluctuate in their relevance over time.

The first element presented in this paper, exoticism, is found in every one of Akutagawa's Christian stories, in some cases creating a stubbornly dense read and in other cases accentuating the fantastical element of otherwise accessible stories. "The Wandering Jew" and "The Legend of Saint Christopher" were presented earlier as pieces

---

<sup>259</sup> Yamanouchi, *Authenticity*, 94-5.

with especially prominent exotic elements. Both works employ archaic language, including foreign loanwords and corrupted classical Japanese, with the effect of distancing the reader from the subject and casting Christianity as an essentially alien religion. Through its impenetrability, Akutagawa's linguistic experimentation in these works suggests that Christianity is a rather strange and difficult concept to comprehend for the modern Japanese person. These are not the only stories in which such exoticism is present, however, and of all of the elements I have attributed to the *kirishitanmono*, exoticism is the most pervasive and easily identifiable. There is not a single Christian story by Akutagawa that does not contain some complicating linguistic factor and, indeed, some of the *kirishitanmono* are among the author's most obscure and inaccessible pieces. The exotic nature of the language used in these works continuously emphasizes the basic reality that Christianity is a *foreign* religion, and without this essential fact in mind, there is no way of comprehending how the religion interacts with native Japanese ideologies.

The exoticization of Christianity in these stories leads directly to the second major aspect of these works, and that is criticism. Many of the *kirishitanmono* appear overtly negative, at least on a surface level, by describing Christianity as a primitive religion that is unsuitable for Japanese people. Criticism of this barbaric religion is performed on two levels, spiritual and cultural, both of which are intertwined in the major idea that Christianity is simply not tenable when removed from its native context and applied to Japan. On the spiritual level, Akutagawa compares Christianity to Buddhism and finds that Buddhism is more enlightened in its dismissal of dualism and its embrace of emptiness. In "Tobacco and the Devil," the archfiend of Christianity is convinced of the emptiness of evil by the tolling of a Buddhist bell, and in "The Devil" and "Lucifer," the

devil asserts that there is no possibility to completely embrace good as Christianity would suggest. In later stories, Akutagawa's cultural criticisms come to the forefront. For example, in "The Subtle Smile of the Gods," a Japanese *kami* argues from a nationalistic viewpoint that Japan will never accept foreign influences in place of its native culture, and in "Oshino" a Japanese woman asserts that Christ is an unsuitable patron for the brave-hearted Japanese samurai. These stories cast Christianity as the essential religion of the foreigner, including the *nanbanjin* (Southern Barbarians) and the *kōmōjin* (red-heads), and not as something which will ever interest the traditional people of Japan.

In the criticism of these latter stories, however, emerges an overlooked area of the *kirishitanmono*, and that is a criticism not only of Christianity, but rather of the absurdity of the very acts of interreligious dialogue and intercultural exchange. Akutagawa does not spare Buddhists or the *kami* in his satirical treatments, as is clearly seen in the *kami* in "The Subtle Smile of the Gods" who suggests that Japan has always been and will always be purely Japanese; Akutagawa rather suggests that neither Japanese natives nor European foreigners are able to critically engage in dialogue across cultural barriers. The characters in the *kirishitanmono* never listen to those who disagree with them and are incapable of venturing outside of their predefined interpretations of reality. The modern world, a place in where ideas are meant to be cordially exchanged and cultures are supposedly meant to progress towards ultimate enlightenment, is ridiculed as an impossibility. Rather, Akutagawa demonstrates that the new world is a place of misunderstanding, such as in the case of the Jesuit priest and the Japanese woman Oshino who never realize that they are arguing the exact same point, and even as a place of force



and domination, as seen in the case of the tobacco plant which conquers Japan without regards to native sentiment.

The pessimistic view of modernity that grows throughout these stories leads to the final defining characteristic of the *kirishitanmono*, and that is the rejection of intellect in favor of the primitive mind of the religious martyrs. Akutagawa originally casts the Christians as primitives for believing steadfastly in ideas that are no longer tenable in a modern world, but as his evaluation of modernity deteriorates over the course of his works, the Christian martyr suddenly emerges as one of the only admirable characters in his oeuvre. It is not only the Christian martyr that he positively evaluates, but also the Daoist, Buddhist, and mythological hero who forsakes society and proceeds steadfastly towards a preordained destiny, in spite of all bodily or psychological danger, and achieves greatness by defying modernity. John McVittie says that Akutagawa tolerated religion best at its most uncompromising,<sup>260</sup> and when the *kirishitanmono* are examined in totality, this statement appears to encapsulate the meaning of his religious depictions. It is not the complacent Buddhist priest of “The Rebirth Picture Scrolls,” the comfortable church elders of “The Death of a Believer,” or the self-satisfied Jesuit priest of “Lucifer,” who emerge victorious in any of these stories, but rather the drowning man in “The Faith of Wei Sheng,” the provincial idiot and martyr in “Juliano Kichisuke,” and the crucified poet Jesus Christ of “The Man from the West” who defeat society in the quest for self-realization. After painting Christianity as a distant and irrelevant religion, Akutagawa adopts the martyr as a symbol of social transcendence in his final Christian stories. While Christianity’s exotic presentation originally serves to criticize the barbaric religion, in the

---

<sup>260</sup> McVittie, *Exotic Japanese Stories*, 39.

end the very barbarism and anti-social nature of this imagined Christianity emerges as a positive force with the ability to oppose a soft-hearted modernity.

Akutagawa has not often been heralded as an opponent of modernity, as I am framing him here, but rather as the ultimate symbol of the modern man and the cosmopolitan intellectual. In fact, in 1929, just two years after the author's death, Marxist critic Miyamoto Kenji pronounced Akutagawa's suicide a symbolic defeat for modernity, which he framed as an "age of excess" that resulted in spiritual exhaustion and anxiety.<sup>261</sup> Also following Akutagawa's death, various proletarian writers criticized the author for his lack of engaged social inquiry while naturalist writers rejected his coldly aesthetic style as they searched for the meaning of life in individualism.<sup>262</sup> Akutagawa's defeat as the quintessential modern man and intellectual was remarkably similar to the treatment directed towards his satirist hero Anatole France in Europe following a comparable decline in popularity. Critic Barry Cerf, for one, remarked in 1926 that France was too erudite and accused him "of having no purpose in life" while claiming that the literary trend of the future would be Marxism, echoing the exact charges brought against Akutagawa in Japan.<sup>263</sup> In the 1930s, as ideological conflicts emerged on an international scale and the world began a steady progression towards global warfare, there was no longer any room for Akutagawa's disengaged "modernity." All across the world, the wave of the future became political engagement and galvanized nationalism as the culture of modernity became the target of social critique.

---

<sup>261</sup> Tansman, *Aesthetics of Fascism*, 40.

<sup>262</sup> Hibbitt, *Rashōmon and Other Stories*, 13.

<sup>263</sup> Dushan Bresky, *Anatole France*, (The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1969), 12.

While Akutagawa's suicide was hailed on many sides as a defeat for modernity, it could also be interpreted as a self-conscious attack on modernity by the author himself. By taking his own life, Akutagawa admitted that there was nothing left to be found in the modern world as he begged the question of what could possibly take its place. In his suicide note, "A Letter to a Dear Friend," Akutagawa framed his suicide in spiritual terms, claiming that in the āgama, or early Buddhist scriptures, the Buddha permitted suicide for his disciples in extenuating circumstances.<sup>264</sup> He also said that while Christianity traditionally does not permit suicide for its adherents, Christ himself committed suicide and invited his followers to share in his death.<sup>265</sup> Ordinarily, these claims would certainly be unusual, but in the context of Akutagawa's note, they frame suicide as a testament of faith and the ultimate stand of a spiritual disciple against the emptiness of modernity. He explained his own death not as the reasonable decision of a cold intellectual, but rather as the desperate yearning of a man who had become obsessed with the religious symbolism of a pre-modern world.

Alan Tansman has redefined Akutagawa's role in modernity as that of a harbinger of fascism who created "a universal poetic spirit for the sake of the native voice."<sup>266</sup> Viewed through this lens, Akutagawa's suicide can be seen as a poetic summons to the primitive human being, a believer in spirits who rejects the high culture and intellectualism of modernity. Akutagawa's suicide may even be imagined as the martyring of an author who suddenly decided to switch sides at the end of his life, from the rational to the pre-rational, and to claim his faith in Romantic barbarism. It is as

---

<sup>264</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 277.

<sup>265</sup> ARZ, Vol. 9, 277.

<sup>266</sup> Tansman, *Aesthetics of Fascism*, 41.

though in his suicide, Akutagawa confessed the sin of modernity and decided to destroy his carefully crafted world of satire in one deft move. In his final moments, with his heart on fire, Akutagawa reasserted the importance of the martyr and gave his life as a symbolic offering to the world of the spirit.

While Akutagawa's *kirishitanmono* have not been previously valued as especially important or skillful examples of Akutagawa's works, and while they have been relegated to the periphery of his oeuvre in modern compilations and academic writings, it is possible now to say that they represent the very spirit of the author's life and works. In their inaccessibility, their obtuseness, and their uncompromising deviation from standard form, they represent the anti-rational tendencies of the disenchanted intellectual. Replete with images of martyrdom, they signal the impending demise of the author and predict his claim of affinity with the deaths of the disciples of Buddha and Christ. Whether his faith in these religious followers was serious or not, he lends them his sympathy and empowers them when he calls upon them as the final symbols of his life. In figures such as the martyred Christ, Akutagawa frames the one uncompromising decision he will ever make, and thus reasserts the primacy of the Christian stories in his oeuvre. While they might not be the most accessible works by the author, they are prime examples of a meticulously deconstructed view of modernity and a call to the primitive nature hibernating within humanity.

Many scholars have attempted to read the *kirishitanmono* for proof of either Akutagawa's genuine acceptance or denial of Christianity, but considering a dearth of more substantial evidence, it is impossible to say how far he really took his belief in Christ. The *kirishitanmono* alternately portray characters who are sympathetic of and

critical towards Christianity, but in the end, the overall image of the religion remains too ambivalent to draw any definitive conclusions. What can be asserted is that in Akutagawa's stories, Christianity variously symbolizes a primitive past, a clash between cultures, and at least the possibility of transcendence. Throughout his life, Akutagawa always portrayed Christianity as something alien, perhaps even barbaric, but his literary appraisal of this barbarism progressed towards a spiritual crescendo in the months before his suicide. When he claimed to have fallen in love with Jesus Christ shortly before his death, perhaps it was true, and perhaps it was in jest, but what is important is that he chose to associate his own demise with the ultimate symbol of Christianity: the martyrdom of the Christ. Whatever the significance of Akutagawa's engagement with Christianity, his final works signaled a strong rejection of modernity in favor of some vague hope of spiritual transcendence.

## REFERENCES CITED

- Anderson, Benedict. *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia, and the World*. London and New York: Verso, 2002.
- Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1978.
- Akutagawa Ryūnosuke. *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1996.
- Ariga, Chieko. "The Playful Gloss: Rubi in Japanese Translation." *Monumenta Nipponica* 44 (1988): 309-335.
- Baring-Gould, Sabine. *Curious Myths of the Middle Ages*. Boston: Roberts Brothers: Boston, 1882.
- Bourdagh, Michael K. *The Dawn That Never Comes: Shimazaki Tōson and the Japanese Nationalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003.
- Breen, John and Mark Teeuwen. *A New History of Shinto*. Chichester; Malden, MA: Wiley- Blackwell, 2010.
- Bresky, Dushan. *Anatole France*. The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1969.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- D'Herbelot, Berthélemy, *Bibliothèque Orientale*. (Paris: Moutard, M., 1781 – 1873).
- Derrida, Jacques. *Psyche: Inventions of the Other, Volume 1*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Dykstra, Yoshiko and Andrew. "Kirishitan stories by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke." *Japanese Religions*. 32 (2006): 23-65.
- Edelman, R. "Ahasuerus: The Wandering Jew: Origin and Background" in *The Wandering Jew: Essays in the Interpretation of a Christian Legend*. Edited by Galit Hasan-Rokem and Alan Dundes. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986.
- Elisonas, Jurgis S. A., "Acts, Legends, and Souther Barbarous Japanese." In *Portugal e a China: conferências nos Encontros de História Luso-Chinesa: Convento da Arrábida, Fevereiro- Dezembro 2000*. Edited by Alexandra Curvelo; Jorge Manuel dos Santos Alves; et al Lisboa : Fundação Oriente, 2001.
- Endō Shūsaku. *Ryūgaku*. Bungei Shunjū Shinsha, 1965.
- Endō Shūsaku. *Foreign Studies*. Translated by Mark Williams. New York: Linden Press/Simon and Schuster, 1990.

- Fanon, Frantz. *Wretched of the Earth*. London: Penguin Books, 1990.
- France, Anatole. *Balthasar*. Trans. Mrs. John Lane. London: John Lane, The Bodley Head; New York: John Lane Company, MCMIX.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents*. Translated by James Strachey. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961.
- Gandhi, Leela. *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1998.
- Gerow, Aaron. "The Other Seen as Self: Akutagawa and Film." *Literature Film Quarterly* 23 (1995): 197-203.
- Gonoi Takashi. *Nihon Kirisutokyō shi*. Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 1990.
- Granada, Luis de. *Guia de Pecadores*. Madrid: Ediciones de "La Lectura," 1929.
- Hall, John Whitney. "Terms and Concepts in Japanese Medieval History: An Inquiry into the Problems of Translation." *Journal of Japanese Studies* 9 (1983): 1-32.
- Hibbett, Howard S. Introduction to *Rashomon and Other Stories*, 11-15. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1952.
- Hibbett, Howard S. "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and the Negative Ideal." In *Personality in Japanese History*. Edited by Albert M. Craig and Donald H. Shively (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1970).
- Izumi, Kyōka. *Japanese Gothic Tales*. Translated by Charles Shirō Inoyue. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996.
- Iriye, Akira. "Kayahara Kazan and Japanese Cosmopolitanism." In *Personality in Japanese History*. Edited by Albert M. Craig and Donald H. Shively. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1970.
- Jia, Yuehan. *Hualiu zhimi*. Huhehaote: Yuanfang chubanshe, 2001.
- Kanda, Yumiko. Chūkai in *Hōkyōnin no shi*, 187-223. Shinchō bunko, 1968.
- Karatani, Kōjin. *Origins of Modern Japanese Literature*. Translated by Brett de Bary. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1993.
- Keene, Donald. *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1984.

- Keene, Donald. *Japanese Literature: An Introduction for Western Readers*. New York: Grove Press, 1955.
- Kempis, Thomas á. *De Imitatione Christi*. Parisiis: Typis Alberti Tallone. 1955.
- Kindai bungaku kenkyū kai. *Ningen: Akutagawa no kotoba: Akutagawa in okeru roman no seishin*. Tokyo: Shin Bungaku Shobō, 1969.
- Kitahara Hakushū. *Kitahara Hakushū zenshū*. Iwanami Shoten, 1984.
- Kobayashi, Hideo. *Literature of the Lost Home: Kobayashi Hideo--Literary Criticism, 1924-1939*. Translated by Paul Anderer. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Konjaku monogatari*. Edited by Yamada Yoshio, Yamada Tadao, et al. Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1961-1963.
- Kōda, Rohan. *Pagoda, Skull, & Samurai: 3 Stories by Rohan Koda*. Translated by Chieko Irie Mulhern. Rutland, Vermont and Tokyo, Japan: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1985.
- Levy, Indra. *Sirens of the Western Shore: The Westernesque Femme Fatale, Translation, and Vernacular Style in Modern Japanese Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2006.
- Lippit, Seiji M. "The Disintegrating Machine of the Modern: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's Late Writings." *The Journal of Asian Studies*. 58 (1999): 27-50.
- Marx, Karl. *Capital, Vol I*. Translated by Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling. New York: The Modern Library, 1906.
- Mase-Hasegawa, Emi. *Christ in Japanese Culture: Theological Themes in Shūsaku Endo's Literary Works*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2008).
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. *The Invention of World Religions, Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005.
- McCullough, Helen Craig, trans. *The Tale of the Heike*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1988.
- McVittie, John. "A Sprig of Wild Orange (Introduction)." In *Exotic Japanese Stories*. New York: Liveright Publishing Company, 1964.
- Menegon, Eugenio. *Ancestors, Virgins, and Friars: Christianity as a Local Religion in Late Imperial China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.



- Miller, Roy Andrew. *Japan's Modern Myth: The Language and Beyond*. New York and Tokyo: Weather Hill, 1982.
- Mori, Ōgai. *The Historical Fiction of Mori Ōgai*. Edited by David Dilworth and J. Thomas Rimer. Translated by Richard Bowring, Darcy Murray, et. al. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991.
- Murakami, Haruki. "Introduction: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: Downfall of the Chosen." In *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006. xix-xxxvii.
- Nagano, Jōchi. *Koten to kindai sakka: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke*. Tokyo: Yūhōdō, 1967.
- Napier, Susan J. *The Fantastic in Modern Japanese Literature: The Subversion of Modernity*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Peck, Francis. *Academia Tertia Anglicana; or, The Antiquarian Annals of Stanford in Lincoln, Rutland, and Northampton Shires*. London: James Bettenham, 1727.
- Reno, Robert Princeton. *The Gothic Visions of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew G. Lewis*. New York: Arno Press, 1980.
- Rubin, Jay. "Chronology" in *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories*, xi-xviii. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2006.
- Screech, Timon. "Tobacco in Edo Period Japan." In *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*. Edited by Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.
- Sekiguchi, Yasuyoshi. *Akutagawa no Tegami*. Tokyo: Daishūkan Shoten, 1992.
- Sekiguchi, Yasuyoshi. *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke: Jitsuzō to kyojō*. Tokyo: Yōyōsha, 1988.
- Seidensticker, E.G. Introduction to *Tu Tze-Chun*, 5-7. Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1964.
- Shaw, Glenn W. Introduction to *Tales Grotesque and Curious*. i-vii. Tokyo: Hokuseido Press, 1930.
- Shibata, Takaji. *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Eibungaku*. Tokyo: Yashio Shuppansha, 1993.
- Suzuki, Barnabas Tatsuya. "Tobacco Culture in Japan." In *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*. Edited by Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun. London: Reaktion Books, 2004.
- Suzuki, Tomi. *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996.

- Tansman, Alan. *The Aesthetics of Japanese Fascism*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 2009.
- Tracy, Ann B. *The Gothic Novel 1790-1830: Plot Summaries and Index to Motifs*. Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1981.
- Tyler, Royall. *Japanese Tales*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1987.
- Twine, Nanette. "The Genbun Itchi Movement: It's Origin, Development, and Conclusion." *Monumenta Nipponica* 33 (1978): 335.
- Ueda, Makoto. *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976.
- Urakawa, Wasaburo. *Nihon ni okeru kōkyōkai no fukkatsu*. Nihon Tosho Sentā: 2003.
- Wilde, Oscar. *Intentions*. Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishers, 2004.
- Wyatt, Don. J. *Blacks of Premodern China*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.
- Yamanouchi, Hisaaki. *The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature*. Cambridge, London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1978.
- Yoshida, Seiichi. "Kaisetsu." In *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke shū*. Tokyo: Kadokawa Bunko, 1970.
- Yu, Beongcheon. *Akutagawa: An Introduction*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1972.
- Wyatts, Don. J. *Blacks of Premodern China*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010.