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Grand Demons and Little Devils: Akutagawa's *Kirishitan mono* as a Mirror of Modernity

Abstract: Like many Japanese intellectuals, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke had a deep interest in European traditions, including Christianity. Scholars have often looked at Akutagawa's representations of religion to shed light on the author's personal beliefs: in this article I focus on the writer's portrayal of the *Kirishitan* of the seventeenth century as a metaphor for the ideological and cultural transformations of modern Japan. Through a close reading of three short stories, I investigate the interplay of perceptions and representations of national past and foreign culture in Taisho Japan and the role that Akutagawa's "rediscovery" of early *Kirishitan* culture played within this context.

Akutagawa Ryūnosuke (1892–1927), like many intellectuals of his time, had a profound interest in European cultural traditions, including the Christian religion. Whether they consider it a juvenile, exoticizing fad or part of a deep spiritual quest, scholars have generally looked at Akutagawa's representations of Christianity in order to shed light on the author's personal beliefs and to better understand how those are expressed in his fiction. In my work, I wish to focus instead on the writer's use of Christianity as a tool to reflect on issues of national and individual identity through the framework of his intertextual, self-reflexive, and multicultural vision of modernity.

In this article, I concentrate on a close reading of a few early stories in Akutagawa's production, written between 1916 and 1918. Most critics, following the author's own account in "Saihō no hito" (The man of the West, 1927), consider Akutagawa's concern with Christianity during these years to be purely aesthetic, focusing on artistic production and material objects rather than the spiritual or philosophical dimension. Cho Sa-ok has questioned this vision and pointed out several important ethical issues raised by the stories.[1] In fact, scholarly interpretations of Akutagawa's view of

1. Cho Sa-ok, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō* (Tokyo: Kanrin Shobō, 1995).

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religion as "purely aesthetic," at least in the English-language context, are based on a partial mistranslation of Akutagawa's account in "Saihō no hito," where he describes his love of Christianity as *geijutsuteki*, that is to say, "artistic," not "aesthetic."[2] The difference is subtle but significant, especially in the case of Akutagawa, for whom the connection between art and ethics was intricate and profound. In this perspective, I examine the first three of Akutagawa's so-called *Kirishitan mono* (a collection of stories dating to 1916–27) to illuminate the complex interplay of perceptions and representations of national past and foreign culture in Taisho Japan, and the role that Akutagawa's interest in *Kirishitan* culture played in this context.

I have chosen to examine the first three stories for two reasons. First, very little has been written about them. The vast majority of scholarship on Akutagawa and Christianity concentrates on his last two works, "Saihō no hito" and "Zoku saihō no hito" (The man of the West—continued, 1927); some scholars discuss texts from the early 1920s such as "Ogin" (1922), "Kamigami no bishō" (The faint smiles of the gods, 1922), and "Oshino" (1923). Almost no one focuses specifically on the earlier stories. My work proposes to fill this gap, to show how Akutagawa's fascination with Christianity was from the beginning deeply related to his vision of literature, history, and ideology. Second, and more important, the stories display a number of intertextual and metanarrative strategies that are central to Akutagawa's vision of the social and political functions of literature. Analyzing these elements and their connection to Christianity allows me to draw broader conclusions on the controversial topic of the escapist or committed nature of Akutagawa's literature.

Before I delve into the case studies, I provide a short overview of significant scholarly interpretations of the ideological uses of Christianity in Japan in the Tokugawa and Meiji periods to shed light on the operations enacted by Akutagawa in the stories. A middle section is devoted to a summary of major critical approaches to Akutagawa's *Kirishitan mono* and an explanation of how I wish to situate my work in relation to them. In the second half of the article, I analyze three stories, "Samayoeru Yudayajin" (The Wandering Jew, 1917), "Rushiheru" (Lucifer, 1918), and "Tabako to akuma" (Tobacco and the devil, 1916), with specific focus on the way in which they reflect both Tokugawa-period and contemporaneous mechanisms of subject formation and cultural negotiation.

The Japanization of Christianity

The history of Japan's relationship with Christianity is rife with examples of creative appropriation, from the adaptations of Jesuit missionar-

2. See, for example, Seiji Lippit, "Introduction," *The Essential Akutagawa: Rashomon, Hell Screen, Cogwheels, A Fool's Life and Other Short Fiction* (New York: Marsilio, 1999).

ies and early converts in the sixteenth century to the anti-Christian propaganda of the so-called *Kirishitan monogatari* genre of the seventeenth, and from the "Japanization" of Western religion enacted by the so-called *kakure Kirishitan* (hidden Christians) on the Amakusa and Gotō Islands during centuries of persecution to Uchimura Kanzō's *mukyōkai* (nonchurch movement) of the Meiji period, to name only a few. Arguably the most interesting scholarly approaches to Japanese discourse on Western religion are those of George Elison (1973) and, more recently, Kiri Paramore (2009), both of whom examine the role played by the rejection of Christianity in the establishment of a modern Japanese state.

In *Deus Destroyed*, Elison investigates the connection between Christian missionary activity and the establishment of the "closed country" system of the Tokugawa period. He concludes that, although the causes of the *sakoku* were multifarious, "a nurtured stage of alarm at Christianity as the external threat was prime matter in the policy's justification."[3] Furthermore, Elison claims that anti-Christian discourse provided the ideological structure for the unification of the Japanese nation under one state apparatus. The book analyzes in detail both the initial reaction to Christianity during the *sengoku* period and the anti-Christian propaganda of the Tokugawa period, including the works of leading thinkers such as Hayashi Razan and Arai Hakuseki as well as the genre of the so-called *Kirishitan monogatari*, a series of works of popular narrative demonizing the foreign religion. Elison sees all these texts—philosophical and literary, high and low—as part of a broader discourse that projected an image of absolute evil:

> The Kirishitan Bateren [padre, or priest] with his flapping bat wings, cunning red eyes, and grasping bear claws became the principal scare symbol of Sakoku. Close behind him was the seduced Christian believer, who lashed himself in his religious blindness and besmirched himself with blood. Blood, brocade, and gold are the constant images of the popular anti-Christian literature. The Bateren dazzle with their exotic finery, and they buy allegiance. But the end result is death.[4]

The ultimate goal of this demonization for Elison is to support state power. In this perspective, Elison investigates the function of anti-Christian ideology within the development of premodern Japanese nationalism. The policies implemented in order to eradicate Christianity were based on the enforcement of Buddhism as state religion through a system of temple registers. Anti-Christian discourse, however, also contained a strong nativist component, and references to Shintō as Japan's "natural" faith were a staple of the *Kirishitan monogatari* genre. As Elison points out, "There is hardly

3. George Elison, *Deus Destroyed: The Image of Christianity in Early Modern Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), p. 3.

4. Ibid., p. 213.

one anti-Christian statement which fails to include the sentence, 'Japan is the Land of Gods.'"[5] Thus, according to Elison, in the Tokugawa period, anti-Christian discourse provided the basis for the institution of modern systems of state control as well as a sense of national unity in Japan.

In *Ideology and Christianity in Japan* (2009), Kiri Paramore reassesses Elison's interpretation of the role of Christian and anti-Christian ideologies within Japan, in two ways. First, in light of the broader reconsideration of the nature of *sakoku* by scholars such as Arano Yasunori, Asao Naohiro, and Ronald Toby, Paramore argues that the purpose of the closed-country system was not to close off international relations per se but to reinforce monopolistic state control over borders and trade; he therefore analyzes the role of anti-Christian propaganda in this context.[6] Second, Paramore questions the idea that the Meiji Restoration constituted a moment of radical break within Japanese history and looks instead at a series of continuities between pre- and post-Meiji ideological frameworks, particularly in the field of anti-Christian discourse.

Unlike Elison, Paramore wishes to undermine the myth that anti-Christian discourse was inherently anti-Western or based on an East-versus-West dichotomy. He refers to Maruyama Masao's famous challenge in the late 1960s to the idea that the foreignness of Christianity was the reason for its rejection in Japan, and he agrees with Maruyama that "the large-scale suppression of the power of organized Buddhist religious and lay people by war lord leaders in the second half of the sixteenth century was closely related to the later suppression of Christianity, and was part of the birth of 'early-modern systems of control.'"[7] Therefore, in Paramore's view, Japanese anti-Christian discourse is "a predominantly political rhetoric that constructs a relationship between certain religious traditions, concepts of the past, custom and tradition on the one hand, and the maintenance of the current political order on the other. The defining characteristic is not cultural xenophobia but political conservatism."[8] With this proviso, Paramore agrees with Elison that anti-Christian discourse, in both the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, had very little to do with Christianity and all to do with building a sense of national unity and creating tools for the ideological control of both the elite and the masses.

5. Ibid., p. 7.

6. See Arano Yasunori, *Kinsei Nihon to higashi Ajia* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1988); Asao Naohiro, *Sengo Nihonshigaku no tenkai* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1977); and Ronald Toby, *State and Diplomacy in Early Modern Japan: Asia in the Development of the Tokugawa Bakufu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

7. Kiri Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 4; Maruyama Masao, *Maruyama Masao kōgiroku,* vol. 6 (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 2000), pp. 119–20.

8. Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity*, p. 66.

While Paramore stresses the centrality of anti-Christian discourse in Tokugawa mechanisms of control of the population, Nam-lin Hur has shown the importance of the institution of the system of Buddhist temple affiliation known as *danka seido* as an instrument of state surveillance, implemented through the diffusion of Buddhist funerary rituals among the lay population. Hur notes that in this process Buddhism was set up against a range of other religious and ideological systems, including the foreign religion of Christianity but also the native practice of ancestor worship, Shintō, *kokugaku* (National Learning), and Neo-Confucianism. He points out, however, that Christianity was particularly significant as the "evil Other" because of the historical development of the relationship between the unification of Japan after the *sengoku* period and the use of religion as a political tool. Although Oda Nobunaga had supported the Jesuits as part of his attempt to eradicate Buddhism, Hideyoshi initially advocated conversion to Christianity on similar grounds but later turned to Buddhism in search of legitimation, consistent with his broader attempt to disguise his humble origins by associating himself with the elite. Finally, Tokugawa Ieyasu, after rising to power in 1600, decided to rely on Buddhist temples as the main tool in his campaign for the eradication of foreign influence. The *danka* system thus ostensibly premised loyalty to the state on both Buddhist affiliation and the elimination of Christianity.[9]

Hur's study of the importance of funeral rituals in disseminating Buddhism highlights another shortcoming of Elison's and Paramore's analyses: both interpret the Tokugawa ideological apparatus as a Foucauldian technology of power that forged loyal citizens by subjecting them to a dominant discourse involving the projection of an absolute and evil Other. However, unlike the modern European states analyzed by Michel Foucault, the *bakufu* enforced power through rituals, processions, and material displays of authority more than through an official discourse disseminated as oral or written text. As Watanabe Hiroshi has demonstrated, the main instrument of governance for the Tokugawa was not state-sponsored ideology but what he terms *goikō*—the kind of authority that relies on display instead of discourse.[10] A prime example of such a mechanism was the renowned *sankin kōtai* (alternate attendance) system, according to which local lords were required to leave their domains and serve the *shōgun* in the capital city of Edo for half of the year and to travel back and forth from the provinces with a following that often numbered in the thousands. As Constantine Vaporis

9. Nam-lin Hur, *Death and Social Order in Tokugawa Japan: Buddhism, Anti-Christianity, and the Danka System* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

10. Watanabe Hiroshi, "Goikō to shōchō: Tokugawa seiji taisei no ichi sokumen," *Shisō*, No. 740 (1985), pp. 132–54, and id., *Higashi Ajia no ōken to shisō* (Tokyo: Tōkyō Daigaku Shuppankai, 1997).

notes in his study of the symbolic and political functions of the alternate attendance system, the movement of the processions "demonstrated and was symbolic of the Tokugawa unification of power; it served as confirmation of the centrality of the shogunate's seat of power in the realm."[11] At the same time, processions were also an occasion for a display of wealth and power on the part of the various *daimyō* and by extension a way to showcase their own political power in front of their subjects as well as people from other domains. In this respect, Vaporis concludes that "the daimyo parades were a reflection of both domainal status and Tokugawa authority."[12] In other words, *sankin kōtai* was simultaneously a display of centralized authority and a testament to the decentralization of the system.

A similar phenomenon is evident in the realm of political thought. Rather than a coherent, authoritative state ideology, what we find in the Tokugawa period are a number of individual ideologues trying to influence state and nonstate politics according to their agendas. As Mark McNally has argued in his analysis of the kokugaku movement, these ideologies were largely built on nonphilosophical considerations and were a tool for intellectuals to establish themselves as political thinkers.[13] Relying on Pierre Bourdieu's idea that "the creation of opposing poles is a necessary first step in the formation of an autonomous field of cultural production,"[14] McNally analyzes the formation of rival schools and the popularity of public debates between intellectuals, demonstrating that they used such disputes to establish themselves in an emerging field, that of political philosophy, and to make a living out of their scholarship through patronage and publishing.

Anti-Christian rhetoric should be understood against the backdrop of such a culture of public debate. Interestingly, the mechanism was exploited by missionaries in their propaganda as well: disputations between Catholic priests and renowned Buddhist monks were a significant component of the Jesuits' own endeavor to gain legitimacy both in Japan and on the home front, and they are a staple of official histories of the missions in Japan. Akutagawa's fiction, as we will see, underlines this element and uses it as a cognitive tool to reassess the relationship between national tradition, foreign culture, ideology, and subject formation in his own time.

While Elison had dealt mainly with the periods of missionary activity and of the early persecutions, Paramore extends his study to the *bakumatsu* and early Meiji years. Alongside several elements of continuity with Toku-

11. Constantine Vaporis, *Tour of Duty: Samurai, Military Service in Edo, and the Culture of Early Modern Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), p. 7.

12. Ibid., p. 71.

13. Mark McNally, *Proving the Way: Conflict and Practice in the History of Japanese Nativism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005), pp. 254–55.

14. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 193, cited in McNally, *Proving the Way*, p. 12.

gawa discourse, he notes one significant novelty. Starting with the Mito school, early modern Japanese intellectuals saw Christianity not only as a threat but also as a model to emulate to induce loyalty from the masses. Building on Bob Wakabayashi's analysis of Aizawa Seishisai's *Shinron* (New theses) of 1825 and their influence on the formation of the Meiji state, Paramore argues that the notion of *tennōsei* (Emperor system) was formed in reaction to, and imitation of, "a perceived model of the ideological role of Christianity in Europe."[15]

Paramore's work has been the object of criticism since its publication. In particular, William Farge, SJ, has challenged Paramore's statement that Christianity had been effectively wiped out during the Tokugawa period.[16] Paramore uses this to strengthen his argument that anti-Christian narratives, which flourished when the religion no longer constituted a real threat, had more to do with state control on the social level than on the religious one. This is a fair point, as it is a known fact that Christianity continued to be practiced in secret throughout the Tokugawa period. I address the issue of the so-called hidden Christians and their cultural negotiations in the last part of this section.

Farge also criticizes Paramore for applying modern categories of thought to Tokugawa intellectual history, for instance describing the Jesuits' ideological stance as "conservative." Farge notes that representing the Christians of this period as "liberal" or "conservative" is arguably anachronistic because at the time "Catholics viewed Church teachings and doctrines more simply as either orthodox or heterodox, giving little room for interpretation of the faith. One was either Catholic or not Catholic, not conservative or liberal."[17] Assessing the legitimacy of Paramore's use of these categories is well beyond the scope of this essay, yet Farge's criticism raises an important point. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, as we will see, adopted a similar kind of willful anachronism in a creative and productive way, using the *Kirishitan* as a metaphor for the ideological formations of modern Japan.

The idea of a foreign origin of Japanese nationalism is important background to Akutagawa's use of the *Kirishitan* as a mirror to reflect on the cultural transformations of the Taisho era. Wakabayashi's interpretation of Aizawa's work is thus useful to illuminate Akutagawa's strategies in the *Kirishitan mono* and to complicate our understanding of the relationship between centrifugal and centripetal, nationalistic and cosmopolitan tenden-

15. Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity*, p. 131. See Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, *Anti-foreignism and Western Learning in Early-Modern Japan: The New Theses of 1825* (Cambridge, Mass.: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1986).

16. William J. Farge, SJ, review of Kiri Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity in Japan*, in *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2010), pp. 210–14.

17. Ibid., p. 211.

cies in the Taisho intellectual milieu. According to Wakabayashi, Aizawa realized that the secret of Western strength rested on Christianity, a state cult that Western leaders propagated to cultivate voluntary allegiance both in their own peoples and in those they colonized. His concern with the persuasive power of Christianity led him to advocate a similar state religion for Japan, based on Shintō and emperor worship.[18] The need to fend off the threat posed by Christian propaganda and the desire to emulate its control over the masses converged in Seishisai's notion of *kokutai*, "an ideology that emphasized loyalty to the nation through the politico-religious symbol of the emperor, but also included the masses as objects to be acted upon by that ideology."[19]

Leading intellectuals, both in the Tokugawa period and in the early Meiji years, relied on anti-Christian rhetoric for a variety of purposes, yet the same periods also witnessed the emergence of a number of counterhegemonic subcultural appropriations of the religion. As Ebisawa Arimichi has demonstrated, the Jesuits were successful in converting important daimyō, such as Takayama Ukon, Konishi Yukinaga, and Hosokawa Tama Garasha (daughter of Akechi Mitsuhide and wife of Hosokawa Tadaoki), and samurai such as Gotō Juan, Kumakawa Buzen no kami, and Hara Mondō, but converts were much more numerous in the nōmin (peasant) and chōmin (merchant) classes.[20] Ebisawa interprets this as a sign that the Kirishitan religion was a movement that brought enlightenment to the masses. In more recent years, scholars such as Kanda Chisato and Ōhashi Yukihiro have reassessed his analysis, investigating the practice of forced conversion of the so-called *tachikaeri Kirishitan* (returned Christians) and demonstrating that their mechanisms of conversion and reconversion involved oppression and violence on the part of both Japanese converts and foreign missionaries.[21] Despite this fact, or perhaps precisely because of it, it is within the peasant and merchant classes that we find some of the most interesting cultural practices associated with the "Japanization of Christianity."

In his study of the reception of Christianity in popular culture, Ikuo Hi-

18. "[I]n *New Theses* [Aizawa's] use of *kokutai* also connoted 'the unity of religion and government' (*saisei itchi*) used by a ruler to create spiritual unity and integration among his subjects. Only in this manner would a people be made into a nation. In antiquity, the emperor was both a spiritual and a secular sovereign who conducted religious rituals as part of governments. Though Aizawa claimed that this form of rule was purely Japanese and made Japan superior to foreign lands, actually he derived this idea of *kokutai* in large part from knowledge of Christianity and the West." Wakabayashi, *Anti-foreignism and Western Learning*, p. 13.

19. Paramore, *Ideology and Christianity*, p. 119.

20. Ebisawa Arimichi, *Kirishitan nanban bungaku nyūmon* (Tokyo: Kyōbundō, 1991), pp. 40–41.

21. See Kanda Chisato, *Shimabara no ran* (Tokyo: Chōō Kōron Shinsha, 2005), in particular pp. 3–17. See also Ōhashi Yukihiro, *Kenshō shimabara amakusa ikki* (Tokyo: Yoshikawa Kōbunkan, 2008).

gashibaba examines various forms of creative adaptation that foreground a resistant use of Christianity on the part of the Japanese people. Higashibaba investigates the beliefs and practices of the Japanese converts during the so-called Christian century of Japan, from the arrival of the first missionaries in 1549 to the suppression of the last Christian revolt in Shimabara in 1638. His aim is to fill a gap in the existing historiography on the topic, which has focused either on the economic and political aspects of the Christian mission (in works by Japanese secular historians) or on individual and collective biographical histories of the missionaries (in works by Jesuit church historians). Higashibaba wishes to perform an "exploration into the popular religious life and culture of ordinary Japanese followers."[22]

Higashibaba argues that the cultural practices he investigates constitute a form of Japanese religion, which he chooses to refer to as "Kirishitan" to highlight its separation from the "Christianity" of the Western tradition. In his own words, "what developed on the popular level was in fact a Japanese Christianity that incorporated traits of the popular religious culture of Japan and came to constitute a segment of Japanese religion."[23] Higashibaba traces the origins of this creative approach back to the religious context that had formed in Japan as a consequence of centuries of localization of Buddhist doctrines and rituals, which had rendered Japanese religious culture inherently syncretistic.[24]

As we have seen, in the *Kirishitan monogatari* and in the works of Tokugawa and *bakumatsu* ideologues, Christianity was used to project the figure of an absolute Other, epitomized by the long-nosed, bat-winged, red-haired *bateren*, against which to construct an idea of national identity. At the popular level, according to Higashibaba, the dominant mode was not that of exclusion but that of hybridity. Cultural adaptation had been a feature of *Kirishitan* practices and beliefs from their inception, and it escalated in the period of the persecutions. One of the effects of the edicts banning Christianity, promulgated by Toyotomi Hideyoshi in 1587, by Tokugawa Ieyasu in 1612, and by Tokugawa Hidetada in 1614, was to detach Japanese Christianity from its Western counterpart and further "Japanize" it.

The first edicts were barely enforced, but once real persecution began under Tokugawa Iemitsu in the 1620s, *Kirishitan* believers were confronted with two choices: martyrdom or apostasy. As missionaries pushed them to become martyrs, circulating pamphlets glorifying martyrdom like *Maruchiriyo no susume* (An invitation to martyrdom) and even manuals on how to perform it correctly such as *Maruchiriyo no shiori* (The martyrdom

22. Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), p. xiv.

23. Ibid., p. xvi.

24. Ibid., p. xxiv.

guidebook), and government officials demanded that they abandon their barbarian beliefs and pledge allegiance to the shogunate, some *Kirishitan* chose a third way: formally recanting and going underground. There were a high number of martyrs (Higashibaba estimates around five thousand between 1614 and 1639), but the *Kirishitan* who continued to practice in secret were even more numerous.[25] Their underground practices resulted in a series of cross-cultural strategies that escaped the intentions of both Christian missionaries and anti-Christian *bakufu*.

The underground community of the Tokugawa period developed a series of devices to continue to practice under the religious prohibitions. They disguised Christian rituals and sacred objects as Buddhist ones, such as the so-called Maria-Kannon and Maria-Hotoke statues, Buddhist sculptures that were meant to symbolize the Virgin Mary. While the effectiveness of these disguises in protecting from persecution may be questionable, these practices show a high degree of creativity, which resulted in a plethora of appropriations of Western culture. One of the most fascinating examples of the latter is the *Tenchi no hajimari no koto* (The beginning of heaven and earth), a *kakure* sacred text that Christal Whelan describes as "a compilation of Christian legends, a fusion of Buddhist and Christian cosmology and theology, as well as myths explaining the origins of many Japanese customs interpreted in light of a divine plan allegedly held to be Christian by the Kakure Kirishitan."[26] The *Tenchi* combines elements from the Old Testament, particularly the Book of Genesis; the New Testament, particularly the life of Mary and the childhood and adolescence of Jesus; and Buddhist and Shintō cosmology. The result is an imaginative and intriguing intertextual and multicultural narrative.

In 1865, when so-called "hidden Christians" came into contact with missionaries from Europe after the opening of the ports, a significant portion of them decided to be reunited with the Catholic Church, but others chose to remain faithful to their version of the religion and were called *hanare* (separated). The newly reintroduced mainstream Christianity, particularly Protestantism, caught the attention of the emerging mass media and was the subject of much public debate. However, the *hanare* religion was arguably not under the spotlight and remained a minor and localized phenomenon that attracted the attention of only a small group of intellectuals. In this respect, Akutagawa's choice to look back to the "Christian century" rather than focus on contemporary mainstream Christianity acquires further relevance as part of his broader use of historiographic metafiction as a hermeneutic tool to reflect on the cultural dynamics of his time from the vantage point of an estranged perspective.

25. Ibid., p. 156.

26. Christal Whelan, *The Beginning of Heaven and Earth: The Sacred Book of Japan's Hidden Christians* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), p. 28.

From Kirishitan monogatari *to* Kirishitan mono

The late Meiji and Taisho periods, after Christianity was reintroduced in Japan—with a myriad of other Western cultural practices and ideas—saw a revival of interest in Japan's early Christians among a small group of Japanese intellectuals.[27] Both the idea of the Christian as the ultimate Other and the cultural negotiations of the *Kirishitan* and *kakure Kirishitan* presented striking parallels with the dynamics of subject formation and cultural hybridization Japanese thinkers were grappling with in the current age. One of the most intriguing examples of such use of the *Kirishitan* as a mirror of Taisho modernity can be found in Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's so-called *Kirishitan mono.*

Akutagawa was fascinated by *Kirishitan* culture throughout his adult life. He traveled to Nagasaki twice, in May-October 1921 and April-May 1922 to research *Nanban* ("Southern Barbarian") and *Kirishitan* documents and purchase several *Kirishitan* manufacts, including a Maria-Kannon statue. Such fascination found its way into his works of fiction and nonfiction as well as in his diaries and letters. The very last two pieces he wrote in his life, "Saihō no hito" and "Zoku saihō no hito," are a series of loosely connected, intense personal reflections on Christianity. The latter was finished only a few hours before the author took the lethal dose of Veronal that put an end to his life, on the morning of September 24, 1927. While I would beware of attributing too much significance to this deathbed scene, as other critics have done, it is undeniable that Christianity was a theme close to Akutagawa's heart.

There are 25 stories within Akutagawa's production that scholars conventionally refer to as *Kirishitan mono*, starting with "Tabako to akuma," published in November 1916 (not long after the author made his literary debut with "Hana" and "Rashōmon"), and ending with "Zoku saihō no hito." Most of these are set during the Christian century; some, like "Nankin no Kirisuto" (Christ in Nanking, 1920), depict modern Christians, and one, "Jashōmon" (Heresy, 1918) deals with events and characters dating from the thirteenth century and discusses, within a fantastical framework, the possible presence of Christians in Japan before the arrival of the missionaries in 1549. The stories also feature a variety of narrative points of view. Some are told from the perspective of the Japanese Christian converts or of the common people of the time, allowing the author to present Western religion from an estranged standpoint, with humorous and thought-provoking

27. One of the most renowned examples of such a wave of interest in the *Kirishitan* is the journey to Amakusa, the site of the last Christian rebellion in 1637, by Yosano Tekkan, Kitahara Hakushū, Kinoshita Mokutarō, Hirano Banri, and Yoshii Isamu in 1907, recorded in their collective travelogue, *Gosoku no kutsu*. For a discussion of the phenomenon, see *Gosoku no kutsu: nanban bungaku no tanjō to sono hirogari* (Nagasaki: Noda Utarō Bungaku Shiryōkan, 2007).

effects. In other stories, told by a third-person, extradiegetic narrator, the focalization is on the Portuguese Jesuits or on the Christian devil that in the texts comes to Japan with the missionaries. Overall, they are a fascinating collection of texts, replete with reflections on cultural hybridity, ethics, and politics.

Critics were relatively slow in noticing the importance of the theme within Akutagawa's oeuvre. Following the impressive amount of secondary literature on this author produced by Japanese writers and scholars since the 1920s, the first work to address Akutagawa's relationship with Christianity was Yoshida Seiichi's *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke*, published in 1942.[28] In his examination of the relationship between the author's life and his art, Yoshida sees Western religion as an important component of Akutagawa's personal spiritual quest. Since Yoshida first raised the issue, a number of scholars have offered interpretations of Akutagawa's use of Christianity through a similar biographical approach, attempting to read into the works indications of the author's own beliefs. While a comprehensive survey of the scholarship on Akutagawa and its treatment of religious themes would be beyond the scope of this article, I outline here a few significant developments in the assessment of this central literary figure of Japan that emerged from the analysis of his treatment of religion.

Particularly influential among the works that take a biographical approach was Suzuki Hideko's essay "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō" (Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Christianity, 1967). Suzuki considers Akutagawa's early *Kirishitan mono* to be mainly driven by a taste for exoticism yet argues that the author developed a deeper engagement with the spiritual dimension of the religion over the years, culminating with a "discovery of Jesus" just before his death. This is expressed, in her opinion, in his last two works, "Saihō no hito" and "Zoku saihō no hito." Suzuki's biographical approach is similar to Yoshida's; for example, she interprets Akutagawa's interest in the figure of the Virgin Mary as a sign of his obsession with his own mother and sees his fascination with martyrs as an indication of his own psychological suffering.[29]

A more recent, important work in the biographic vein is Sako Jun'ichirō's *Akutagawa ronkyū* (Akutagawa studies, 1991). The author, a self-declared Christian himself, attributes great importance to Akutagawa's relationship with Christianity. This is evident throughout the monograph but particularly in section 3, "Akutagawa no Kirisutokan" (Akutagawa's vision of Christ), which analyzes the writer's take on the Western religion in his stories as

28. Yoshida Seiichi, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke* (Tokyo: Sanseidō, 1942).

29. Suzuki Hideko, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō," in *Nihon bungaku kenkyū shiryō sōsho* (Tokyo: Yūseidō, 1970), pp. 121–39, first published in *Seishin Joshi Daigaku ronsō*, Vol. 30 (December 1967).

well as in essays and letters. While he mentions the textual nature of Akutagawa's interest in religion, as evidenced by his description of Jesus as a "journalist," Sako concludes that the author turned to Christianity in search of answers to his own existential crisis.[30]

Finally, of great significance in this current is Kawakami Mitsunori's *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō.*"[31] The book is the first comprehensive study of the *Kirishitan mono* and includes a detailed discussion of Akutagawa's relationship with the Christian religion based on biographical research. Kawakami gives a number of biographical details to prove the importance of religion in the author's life, such as the fact that when Akutagawa was ritually abandoned and found after his birth, to exorcise ill luck, he was left on the steps of a Christian church in the foreign settlement of Tsukiji and was "found" by an English priest (G. M. Williams), and the fact that he acquired several copies of the Bible over the years and died with one at his bedside. Kawakami also traces the appearance of biblical characters in Akutagawa's stories and uses those references to reconstruct the order in which Akutagawa read the various books of the Bible.

Kawakami then analyzes the individual stories, dividing them between pro-Christian and anti-Christian, with a further subdivision between those in which the Christians win or lose and those in which the non-Christians/anti-Christians (e.g., the devil, unbelievers, and, in one case, a devil-like Maria-Kannon) win or lose. Kawakami notes that the *Kirishitan mono* portray both believers and nonbelievers, and tend to cast them in some sort of direct confrontation, with a winner and a loser. His broader conclusion is that throughout his career Akutagawa both affirmed and negated the Western religion.

Some of the most interesting works on Akutagawa and Christianity deal with the vexing question of the author's ethical commitment or lack thereof. In the 1970s, Fukuda Tsuneari relied on an analysis of Akutagawa's use of Western religion in his literature to challenge the criticisms leveled against the writer by naturalists, I-novelists, and Marxists, who had portrayed him as disengaged and superficial. Investigating Akutagawa's attempt to tread the fine lines between good and evil and between idealism and realism in his treatment of religious themes, Fukuda shed light on the complexity of his moral stance, which was far from purely aestheticist.[32]

This set the ground for a number of studies debating the connection

30. Sako Jun'ichirō, *Akutagawa ronkyū* (Tokyo: Chōbunsha, 1991).

31. Kawakami Mitsunori, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō* (Kyoto: Hakuchisho, 2005).

32. See in particular Fukuda Tsuneari, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke," in *Sakka no taido* (Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1947); id., *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Dazai Osamu* (Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1977); and id., "kaisetsu" to the fourth volume of *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshō* (Tokyo: Sōgensha, 1977).

between Akutagawa's religiosity and his social commitment. Scholarship tended to fall within two camps. Critics such as Miyazaka Satoru, Sasabuchi Tomoichi, Miyoshi Yukio, and the aforementioned Yoshida Seiichi argued that Akutagawa's concern with Christianity belonged mostly to his youthful years, and the critics dismissed its importance in his more mature works.[33] Komashaku Kimi and Satō Yasumasa challenged this view and highlighted the presence of Christian notions in Akutagawa's later stories. Satō in particular argued that the idea of love as *agape*, first developed in a story about conversion and apostasy, "Ogin" (1922), laid the foundations of Akutagawa's ethics. Their analyses anticipated a more recent trend in the study of the Taisho intellectual milieu, started by Seiji Lippit in *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* and continued by James Dorsey in *Literary Aesthetics*.[34] Both Lippit and Dorsey have challenged the interpretation of Akutagawa as the epitome of a disengaged and aestheticized *haiboku no bungaku* (literature of defeat), prevalent in the scholarship since Miyamoto Kenji's famous essay of 1929 of the same title, that interpreted the author's suicide as an expression of his refusal of social commitment. Questioning this perspective, Lippit investigated Akutagawa's use of intertextuality, fantasy, and paradox to engage ethical and political issues. My analysis builds on his reassessment of Akutagawa's role as an intellectual in the Taisho period and looks at the author's critical reflections on Japanese modernity through the lens of his *Kirishitan mono*.

In the remaining part of the essay, I analyze three texts, "Samayoeru Yudayajin," "Rushiheru," and "Tabako to akuma," that share similar themes and formal features, particularly a consideration of the role of the "internal Others" of Christianity (devils and Jews) and an intertextual and metatextual framework.

The Wandering Jew and Internalized Responsibility

"Samayoeru Yudayajin" appeared in the journal *Shinchō* in June 1917, six months after Akutagawa's very first published *Kirishitan mono*, "Tabako to akuma" (which I discuss at the end of the article). The story has a complex, multilayered narrative structure. In his study of the *Kirishitan*

33. See in particular Sasabuchi Tomoichi, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no Kirisutokyō shisō," *Kaishaku to kanshō*, Vol. 23, No. 8 (August 1958); Miyoshi Yukio, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke ron* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1976); Miyazaka Satoru, "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke no sakka zenshi shiron—seinenki ni okeru Kirisutokyō," *Jōchi Daigaku kokubungaku ronshō* (February 1970), and id., "Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Muroga Fumitake—'Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō' ron e no isshiten," *Jōchi Daigaku kokubungaku ronshō,* Vol. 5 (December 1971).

34. Seiji Lippit, *Topographies of Japanese Modernism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), pp. 37–71; James Dorsey, *Critical Aesthetics: Kobayashi Hideo, Modernity, and Wartime Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2009), pp. 42–43.

mono, Kawakami includes it within the category of "stories about the defeat of nonbelievers," stressing the Wandering Jew's failure and the ensuing sense of regret.[35] This is a questionable conclusion because, as we will see, the story is as much about agency as it is about failure, and the Wandering Jew is presented as a complex figure who cannot be easily classified as a believer or a nonbeliever.

The story opens with a third-person narrator commenting on the omnipresence of the legend of the Wandering Jew in Christian countries. As supporting evidence, the narrator presents us with a summary of the existing literature on the topic. He begins with references to the legend in modern literature and arts, from Gustave Doré's illustrations to prose fiction by Eugène Sue and "doctor Croly."[36] He then quotes Monk Lewis's *The Monk* and William Sharp's novels written under the pseudonym of Fiona McLeod. Interestingly, the narrator lists the authors but not the titles of the works that mention the legend, implicitly assuming that readers share his cultural capital and understand the references. He similarly takes it for granted that his audience is familiar with the legend, since he does not tell the story itself, referring to it only indirectly.[37] I offer my interpretation of this element and the way it plays into the broader narrative strategies displayed in the text at the end of this section.

Next, the narrator traces the travels of the Wandering Jew around the world, citing historical records. The most recent appearance was in Munich on June 22, 1721, as reported in Joseph Von Hornayr's diary (called "Taschenbuch" in the text); the earliest appearance was in Armenia around the thirteenth century, according to the Benedictine monk Matthew Paris. The *samayoeru Yudayajin* was spotted in Bohemia in 1505, in Hamburg in 1547, in Madrid in 1575, in Vienna in 1599; he traveled to Lübeck and Krakow in the 1600s, then to Paris, Naumburg, Brussels, and Leipzig; he conducted debates with local academics in Stamford, Cambridge, and Oxford; he went to Denmark and Sweden. It is worthy of note that the story focuses on the Jew's "wandering" and not on his "immortality," following the romance tradition (*juif errant, ebreo errante*, Wandering Jew) instead of

35. Kawakami, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō*, pp. 51–52.

36. The reference is to George Croly, author of *Salathiel: Story of the Past, the Present, and the Future* (London: Henry Colburn, 1828).

37. Not wanting to make assumptions of my own readers' cultural capital in one sense or another, let me briefly summarize the legend. It tells the story of a Jew who insulted and hit Jesus as he was walking to his crucifixion, prompting Christ to curse him to continue wandering the earth until his Second Coming. According to some sources, the legend was based on a verse in Matthew's Gospel, which recites: "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" (Matthew 16:28).

the German one (*Der Ewige Jude*). More than an immortal, the *samayoeru Yudayajin* is a traveler, and therein rests his plight but also his connection with the author and the reader. By listing a plethora of textual references and outlining the character's extensive travels, the narrator presents the *samayoeru Yudayajin* as a transnational intellectual, inducing a sense of sympathy and identification in his intended audience. The display of erudition gives the text a scholarly tone and at the same time offers a paramount example of the sense of "Taisho cosmopolitanism" acquired through literature that Lippit sees as central to Akutagawa's literary sensibility and by extension to the intellectual milieu he represents.[38]

At the same time, the framing of the narrative also problematizes the relationship between reality and fiction on the ontological level. While the narrator takes a philological approach and traces all the existing versions of the legend, supposedly grounding his argument in real sources, he also conflates them, presenting them not as alternative stories but as one single narrative that traces the actual movements of the Wandering Jew. The text thus portrays the *samayoeru Yudayajin* simultaneously within an intertextual framework, as a recurring character in a series of stories, and within a fantastical context, as a supernaturally long-lived person who traveled for centuries all over the world.

With this background, the narrator moves on to explain the purpose of his essay: it is not to trace the movements of the Wandering Jew himself but to answer two doubts he has held for a long time. The first is a factual one, namely, whether the Wandering Jew ever went to Japan; after all, he explains, the legend tells us that he traveled all over Christian countries, and Japan can be categorized as one since the fourteenth century.[39] His reasoning was reinforced by the knowledge that the Wandering Jew traveled at least as far as the Middle East, as testified by Barthelémy d'Herbelot's *Bibliothèque Orientale*, which reports that an Arab knight in the service of Princess Fadila encountered the Wandering Jew near the city of Elven at the beginning of the fifteenth century and shouted to him "Allah akubar" (*sic*: in Roman characters in the text). The narrator had always wondered if the Wandering Jew had come to Japan, given the Wandering Jew's interest in Asia as well as Christian countries and given other Western cultural artifacts and practices in Japan such as the habit of wearing *kurusu* (crosses,

38. "For Akutagawa, the concept and practice of literature had been the basis of a consciousness of modernity defined as 'universal': i.e., a world in which the distance between Japanese and Western cultures was largely eliminated." Lippit, *Topographies*, p. 41.

39. While the Iwanami Shōten annotated edition dismisses this as "likely a mistake by the author" ("Akutagawa no kioku chigai ka," p. 383), another possible interpretation is supported by the short story "Jashūmon" (Heresy, 1918), which features a priest of what he calls the "Mary religion" in medieval Japan. In that text, Akutagawa relies on accounts of the presence of Orthodox Christians in Japan before the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries in 1549.

from the Portuguese *cruz*), reciting the *Patere Nosuteru* (paternoster), wearing pearl rosaries, kneeling before the *Biruzen Maria* (*Virgem Maria*, the Virgin Mary), and nonreligious products such as the *giyaman* (diamond) and the *raibeka* (*ribeca*, a type of lute used in Portugal and Spain). The second doubt is more philosophical in nature and pertains to why the Wandering Jew was singled out to be punished when several other people had harassed Jesus at Calvary as much as he did.

Troubled by these doubts for many years, the narrator has recently uncovered a series of manuscripts (referred to as "MSS," in roman letters, in the text) that have clarified both matters. These are annals from the Bunroku (1592–96) era that the narrator found during a research trip to Hirado in the Amakusa Islands. They contain the memoir of an *Iruman* (Christian "Brother," from the Portuguese *Irmão*) of the time, a certain Simeon, who accompanied Francisco Xavier on a boat trip from Hirado to Kyushu and witnessed Xavier's dialogue with a strange traveler who could be identified as the Wandering Jew. The dialogue, as we will see, also addresses the second doubt, the ultimate reason for the Wandering Jew's damnation. While the other sources quoted are real, this manuscript is an invention.

Akutagawa uses this strategy often in his stories, where the narrator ostensibly reveals an unknown truth about a famous character or event with the help of secret documents in his possession. The event itself is real, but the documents that supposedly offer a more authentic version of the facts are often fictional. The metatextual game is further complicated by the fact that the "discovery of an old manuscript" is a staple of the European novel that had strongly influenced the development of modern Japanese literature. In mainstream fiction it was a means of enhancing the realism effect: Akutagawa uses it parodically to foreground the fictional and textual nature of the story.

In the second part of the text, the extradiegetic narrator performs a close reading of the manuscript, quoting excerpts from it, integrating it with other sources, and summarizing the rest. Included is a long dialogue between the *samayoeru Yudayajin* and Xavier. This offers the Wandering Jew the opportunity to present his own version of the event that doomed him to eternal wandering, namely, his harassing Jesus on his way to Calvary. The "excerpts" from the "MS" mimic the language of sixteenth-century Japan, which Akutagawa derived from texts such as the *Feique monogatari* and *Isoppo monogatari*, romanized versions of Japanese (the *Heike monogatari*) and Western (Aesop's fables) classics used to instruct the missionaries in the Japanese language. Combined with the metatextual, multivocal structure of the text, this use of different linguistic registers underlines the fact that, far from being a transparent medium, language adds another layer of complexity to an already hybrid and mediated reality.

By combining historical and legendary figures, the text highlights the

textual nature of historiography and challenges the idea that we can access the past in a straightforward, unmediated way. However, at the same time, through this mechanism Akutagawa foregrounds the historical nature of the text and reinstates the importance of looking at the past as a platform for reflection on the present. This tension between textual relativism and historicism is reproduced at the level of culture through the "Japanization" of the Christian legend that Akutagawa performs in the story. The invented "true story" of the Wandering Jew sees him go to Japan and meet Xavier there, uncovering the fact that Japan is as much of a "Christian country" as France or England. More important, it is in Japan that the real nature of the Wandering Jew's dilemma is revealed. The combination of a Japanese setting and a fantastical recreation of Christianity reveals itself to be a powerful hermeneutic tool, an element that recurs in the other stories.

Within this multilayered framework, a dramatic tale unfolds. The last part of the text is a monologue by the Wandering Jew describing the moments that led to his being cursed. He is himself unsure of the reason why he harassed Jesus, he says. In fact, he felt strangely moved when looking at him because Christ's eyes reminded him of those of his own dead brother. Yet in the end he insulted him and hit him, earning Jesus's curse. As soon as he heard Jesus's words, he realized the importance of his act and was overcome by a wave of regret. And this is what damned him. Because he was the only one among the people harassing Jesus at Calvary to realize his wrongdoing, the punishment was effective for him alone:

> Jerusalem is a very big city, yet among all those people, I was the only one to understand the extent of my sin. It is because I was aware of it that the curse had and effect on me. For those who do not realize they are sinners, the punishment of God cannot descend on them. So I alone had to be punished for nailing our Lord to the Cross. But only if you are punished can you be forgiven, and only forgiveness brings salvation. And so I will also be the only to be saved.[40]

These are the final words of the "MS." The story then returns to the first narrator, who comments that this provided him with a final answer to the dilemma of why the Wandering Jew was singled out among the crowd. It was his awareness of sin that constituted it as such and became its own punishment. What starts as a metatextual game and a display of erudition thus turns into a reflection on the nature of subjectivity and individual responsibility, and the Wandering Jew becomes a metaphor for the modern individual. Much like modern state ideology, Christian morality functions by

40. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, "Samayoeru Yudayajin," in *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1977), Vol. 1, p. 454.

interpellating the individual as a specific kind of subject, thus making the individual into that subject. Only if we are aware of sin can we be punished; like the Wandering Jew, modern subjects internalize the discipline to the point that the awareness of breaking the norm constitutes a punishment in itself. The issue was dear to Akutagawa: in his novel *Kappa* (*kappa*, a river spirit from Japanese folklore, 1927) we find a very similar treatment of the issue of sin and punishment, not from a Christian but from a legal perspective. Since the *kappa* are highly sensitive and deeply moral creatures, their legal apparatus does not necessitate formal penalties such as imprisonment, forced labor, or physical punishment. Instead, when a *kappa* is caught committing a crime, the police simply accuse him or her in a loud voice. The shame involved in hearing one's misdeeds stated openly is enough for the *kappa* to suffer terribly and sometimes even die on the spot.[41]

Importantly, however, the *samayoeru Yudayajin* also believes that only where there is awareness of sin can there be salvation. The ideological mechanism he highlights is not one of overdetermination but of hegemonic struggle. Subjective awareness leads to subjection but also entails a degree of agency; the possibility of redemption, on the spiritual level; and the possibility of critical distance, on the philosophical and political level. In typical Akutagawa fashion, the text concludes on a self-reflexive and noncommittal note with a final address to the reader by the first narrator, who states that he does not wish to prove anything with this story and that if anyone found other sources that further clarified the question, he would be delighted to know about them. For the time being, however, he has limited himself to publishing his findings as they are. While the author refuses to help us clarify the ultimate meaning of the story, reading it against other texts from the same period can help us shed further light into its broader significance. This is what I do in the next section, comparing it with another *Kirishitan mono* that deals with a similar moral paradox, "Rushiheru."

Habian and the Sensitive Devil

"Rushiheru" was published 18 months after "Samayoeru Yudayajin," in November 1918.[42] Similar to its antecedent, it begins with an extradiegetic narrator announcing his discovery of an alternative version of the renowned seventeenth-century manuscript *Hadaiusu* (Deus destroyed), a refutation of the Christian religion by the Japanese apostate Habian, also known as "Fabian Fucan" and "Fukansai Habian." The narrative voice then shifts to Habian himself, and the following section of the story is a faithful quote

41. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, "Kappa," *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*, Vol. 8, pp. 347–49.

42. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, "Rushiheru," *Yūben*, Vol. 9, No. 12 (1918), reprinted in *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*, Vol. 2, pp. 362–68.

from book 1, part 3 of the original *Hadaiusu*, intended to prove the author's accuracy and establish the legitimacy of his version. The section itself is a critique of the intellectual justification of the existence of the devil in Christian doctrine and more broadly of the ostensible reason why the Christian God created evil, which Habian denounces as one of the greatest contradictions of the religion. The second part of this section, which the first narrator tells us is missing in the official versions of the text, contains another embedded narrative, a monologue by Lucifer that gives the character of the devil a voice and a degree of narrative authority. Kawakami, who classifies this as one of the "stories that negate Christianity and center on the devil," sees this as one of the few instances where the distinction between Christian and anti-Christian sentiment is blurred, as the text shows equal sympathy toward the devil and toward the Japanese Jesuit.[43]

In this story too, the third-person narrator assumes that his readers share his cultural capital and are familiar with the original text, namely, *Hadaiusu*. He also points out that although the *Hadaiusu* currently circulating, published by Kachōsan Bunko in the first year of Meiji with an introduction by Kiyū Dōjin, is the most accredited one, there are other versions. Akutagawa thus once again underscores the textual and mediated nature of the story and the possibility of multiple versions that textuality implies, denying the existence of a single, authoritative version. Predictably, the narrator then informs us that he is in the possession of an "old manuscript" that departs from the official version in a number of instances. The differences are particularly significant in the third section, in which Habian describes his encounter with the devil. According to the narrator, Habian had purposefully inserted this dialogue between his sharp polemics; it was probably omitted from the official version because it was too fantastical to be in accord with the nature of a text advocating the doctrine of *hajakenshō* (crush evil and spread good).[44]

The structure is therefore strikingly like that of "Samayoeru": a contemporary extradiegetic narrator, which the reader is drawn to conflate with the author himself; a secondary homodiegetic narrator, taking over after a few paragraphs; and a third character who is granted significant narrative autonomy at a crucial point in the diegesis and who also coincides with the "absolute Other" of Christianity (the Wandering Jew in the first case, the devil in the latter). Also, as in the previous story, the text brings together in the same narrative space imaginary and historical figures (the Wandering Jew and Xavier in one case, the devil and Habian in the other). However, this story does not revert to the first narrative frame in the ending but reaches its

43. Kawakami, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō*, p. 49.
44. Akutagawa, "Rushiheru," p. 363.

conclusion in the second narrative, letting Habian have the final word. And Habian offers the reader more daring reflections than the noncommittal extradiegetic narrator of the previous tale.

Habian is a fascinating and much-discussed figure in the history of Japanese Christianity. Born around 1565 in the Hokuriku region, he was originally trained as a Zen Buddhist but converted to Christianity during his adolescence and became an *Iruman* and *dōjuku* (catechist) in Nagasaki in 1586. Versed in the Buddhist as well as the Christian tradition, fluent in Latin and classical Japanese, he participated in the Jesuit publishing activities initiated by Alessandro Valignano in Amakusa and in the compilation of the aforementioned textbooks for the language instruction of the missionaries, the *Feique monogatari* and the *Isoppo monogatari*. In the following years, he performed in a series of public disputes with Buddhist monks, most notably with Hayashi Razan in 1606. In 1605 he wrote a famous treatise, titled *Myōtei mondō* (Myōtei dialogue), a refutation of Buddhism and an apology for Christianity. Not long after, probably in 1608, he recanted his Christian faith; records are unclear as to his movements in the following years, though he is reported to have helped government forces persecute the Christians in Nagasaki.

One year before his death, he wrote another treatise, *Hadaiusu* (1620), which rebutted Christianity and declared it inferior to Buddhism. Ebisawa Arimichi and other scholars have argued that Habian wrote the *Hadaiusu*, either at the explicit request of Tokugawa Hidetada or spontaneously, in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the *bakufu* after recanting his Christian faith.[45] Monika Schrimpf has made exactly the same argument about *Myōei mondō*, which in her opinion stemmed from Habian's desire to prove to his Jesuit audience his orthodoxy and his loyalty.[46] Elison notes that the two essays bear striking structural similarities: "in some cases, classical quotations applied in the Myōtei mondō by way of an apologia for the Christian posture in Japan were utilized in *Hadaiusu* in discussions of the same points, to reinforce the current aspersions. The tracks of Fabian the Christian were covered by Fabian's *Doppelgänger*."[47] While Ebisawa saw this as proof of the insincerity of the second recanting, Yamamoto Shichihei and Sakamoto Masayoshi interpreted the identical structure of the two works as the expression of Habian's individuality and intellectual independence,

45. See Ebisawa Arimichi, *Kirishitansho haiyasho* (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1970), pp. 604–5, and Shaku Tesshū, ed., *Fukan Habian: kami mo hotoke mo suteta shūkyōsha* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2009), p. 180.

46. Monika Schrimpf, "The Pro- and Anti-Christian Writings of Fukan Fabian (1565–1621)," *Japanese Religions*, Vol. 33, Nos. 1 and 2 (2008), pp. 35–54.

47. Elison, *Deus Destroyed*, p. 143.

which led him to pursue his philosophical position in a way that transcended his contingent religious affiliations.[48]

With his history of double conversion, Habian became a symbol of apostasy in the Japanese popular imagination. In this respect, he is reminiscent of the Lucifer of the Christian tradition and even more of the Lucifer of Akutagawa's literary world. Both are examples of a radical shift of values that highlights the relative nature of moral norms and the ambiguity of loyalty to authority, which was central to subject formation both in the Tokugawa period and in early twentieth-century Japan. As a double apostate, Habian is a particularly appropriate symbol of the arbitrary nature of religious belief and political ideology.

Further, Habian, a renowned master of polemics, epitomizes the debate culture of the Tokugawa period and its implications for a conceptualization of individual identity. Like the *kokugaku* scholars examined by McNally, Habian was trying to establish himself as an intellectual by navigating conflicting ideological systems rather than subscribing to a single one. As both Ebisawa and Schrimpf point out, Habian's writings have the purpose of validating his own position in the eyes of power without pursuing one or another philosophical agenda. In a sense, we could see him as the embodiment of religious and political opportunism. But to Akutagawa, he becomes the symbol of a critical conscience, of a thinking mind.

It is significant that in Akutagawa's story Habian is not only an apostate but also a mediator between different worlds, whose awareness of different traditions and ability to combine them in new, hybrid forms transforms him into a culturally sensitive, open-minded, and tormented human being. As was the case for the Wandering Jew, for Habian subjective awareness is a source of angst and suffering. In this sense, too, he shares much in common with Lucifer. In Akutagawa's *Kirishitan mono*, the devils are invariably sensitive and humane. As Cho Sa-ok noted, Akutagawa does not portray "grand demons" like the Satan in Dante's or Milton's epics; instead, he favors comical, pathetic "little devils" who are ultimately no different from humans.[49] Both in external aspect and in personality, they defy all the stereotypes about demons: they dress normally and act like intelligent, sensitive persons. The Lucifer of this story is no exception.

According to Habian's account, he encountered the devil when he was still a Christian, living on the grounds of the Nanbanji (literally "Southern Barbarian temple," the term refers to a Catholic church built by the Jesuits in Kyoto). One autumn evening, as he is walking among the exotic

48. Sakamoto Masayoshi, "Yamamoto Shichihei: Nihonjinteki seishin kōzō no teishi," in id., *Nihon Kirishitan no sei to zoku* (Tokyo: Meichō Kangyōkai, 1981), pp. 120–29. See also Yamamoto Shichihei, *Nihon kyōto* (Tokyo: Bungei Shunjū, 1997).

49. Kawakami, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō*, p. 83.

(i.e., European) flowers in the garden of the church, a woman approaches him and asks him to hear her *konhisan* (confession, from the Portuguese *confisão*). The woman tells Habian she is haunted by a voice in her head that encourages her to be unfaithful to her husband. Habian warns her that it must be the devil's voice and describes the devil's wickedness in colorful terms, referring to iconic representations of its horns and hooves as well as to the doctrine of the seven deadly sins.

Having reassured the woman and resumed his wanderings, he spots a figure approaching him that looks like a *bateren*, although strangely dark-skinned and wearing a gold necklace on his *abito* (habit, from the Portuguese/Medieval Latin *habito*). The man asks him, "Do you recognize me?" and to Habian's great puzzlement introduces himself as Lucifer. The devil is nothing like the one he just described to the woman; in fact, he looks like any other foreign Catholic priest. When Habian notes that he does not look the part, Lucifer complains about the gross misrepresentation of demons in human literature: "Devils are no different from people. It's been the fault of artists to paint us as evil and unsightly. We devils originally were made like you, with no wings, hooves, or scales."[50] Habian retorts that no matter how similar to humans in his looks, he is fundamentally different from them since he holds the seven deadly sins in his soul. Without missing one beat, Lucifer responds that humans hold sins in their hearts as well, and if Habian thinks he is free from them, that only proves the devil's point, since his words are a clear sign of his pride, which is one of the seven deadly sins.

The devil is as much a master of debate as is the historical Habian and is particularly skilled at using paradox for its cognitive power. His awareness of the fundamental contradictions of human and demonic nature is also the source of his plight. After convincingly arguing that sin lies in the hearts of humans just as much as in that of the devil, Lucifer explains that like humans, he, too, has one eye to light and one to darkness and is tormented by this dilemma. He confesses to his own weakness in the face of virtue: he tried to tempt the woman Habian just saw, and to lead her to perdition, but his admiration for her beauty stopped him in his tracks. If it were not for this weakness, the woman would now be indulging in sinful pleasures instead of asking a priest to listen to her *konhisan*.[51] Lucifer's monologue ends with a moving cry of despair:

> Do you know that we devils are always trying to degrade people and at the same time trying not to? Don't you know that we are doomed? I failed to seduce the lady even though I tried. I appreciated her noble nature and

50. Akutagawa, "Rushiheru," p. 366. English translation by Yoshiko and Andrew Dykstra, "Kirishitan Stories by Akutagawa Ryūnosuke," *Japanese Religions*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (2006), p. 32.

51. Kawakami, *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke to Kirisutokyō*, pp. 76–78.

> didn't want to spoil her. The more I tried not to violate her pureness, the more I cherished the noble and pure. Just as you are avoiding the seven deadly sins, we are always aspiring to the seven heavenly virtues. Is it your God or a spirit above him who has been trying to tempt us to the good?[52]

The story takes us a step further in the consideration of the subjective and contradictory nature of human ethics than the previous one had. If the Wandering Jew was damned by his awareness of sin, Lucifer is similarly tormented, and perhaps redeemed, by his knowledge of virtue. Yet Habian, more outspoken than the nameless narrator of "Samayoeru," draws a clear conclusion from Lucifer's tale, namely, that the good/evil, God/devil binary is ultimately meaningless. Habian, and Akutagawa with him, here performs a form of deconstruction *avant la lettre*: by inverting the dichotomy, he reveals it to be groundless. The devil is not evil and is no different from humans. He is not the absolute Other, just as the Christians are not. They are both hybrid, and so are the Japanese; ultimately, there is no grand demon but only little devils, which function as mirrors that help us understand the plight of humankind.

In this respect, the dynamics of temptation that Lucifer outlines also read as a compelling metaphor for cultural hybridization. The devil's dilemma of loving purity and wanting to destroy it reminds us of the combination of anxiety and desire toward cultural hybridity that characterized the Taisho intellectual milieu. To illuminate this aspect, let me discuss one more story, Akutagawa's first published *Kirishitan mono*, "Tabako to akuma."

Tobacco as Cultural Contagion

"Tabako to akuma" was first published in November 1916 in the journal *Shinshichō* and republished in volume format by Shinchōsha in November 1917. Similar to the other two stories discussed here, it opens with an attempt to set the historical record straight on an instance of transnational circulation of cultural practices. This time, it is the introduction of tobacco in premodern Japan. The third-person narrator begins his account by informing us that the foreign plant of tobacco was imported into Japan sometime between the Keichō and Bunroku eras, that is, between 1532 and 1615, and that it became so popular that an anonymous comic ballad from the period cited the *bakufu*'s prohibition on tobacco (*tabako hatto*) at the top of a list of "things no one heeds."[53]

While the consensus among historians is that either the Portuguese or the Spanish introduced this plant into Japan, the narrator wishes to share an unusual piece of information on the topic. A reputable legend tells that

52. Akutagawa, "Rushiheru," p. 368. Dykstra, "Kirishitan Stories," p. 32.
53. Akutagawa, "Tabako to akuma," *Akutagawa Ryūnosuke zenshū*, Vol. 2, p. 275.

it was the devil who imported it, when he came to the country following a group of *bateren* possibly led by Xavier himself.[54] The narrative framework of "Tabako" is more linear than the other two texts I discussed; the whole story is told by an extradiegetic narrator, and there are neither embedded texts nor multiple diegetic and narrative levels. What it loses in metatextuality the text makes up for in intertextuality, with a plethora of direct and indirect allusions to Western literary sources, ranging from Anatole France to *Doktor Faustus* to the writings of Marco Polo and Lafcadio Hearn, as well as more veiled allusions such as the hint that "the devil had been scolded by Ivan's sister because he had no marks of work on his hands," an indirect reference to the *Brothers Karamazov*. Once again, the intertextual nature of the work highlights the mediated quality of historical knowledge and problematizes the story's attempt to "tell the truth" about this particular episode of Japanese history. Such hermeneutic relativism is mirrored by the cultural and moral dynamics displayed as the plot progresses.

According to the legend, the devil came to Japan in the eighteenth year of the Tenbun era (1549), disguised as an *Iruman*. Here the third-person narrator temporarily acquires the limited point of view of the devil and recounts his confusion at the discrepancy between his textual knowledge of Japan, derived mainly from Marco Polo's accounts, and the reality that he faces firsthand as he travels through the country. Besides the cultural clash, his other source of frustration is the sudden realization that there is little for him to do there: since very few people have converted, he is unable to lead them astray from Christianity. Furthermore, the devil begins to feel the lure of the "Japanese spirit." Whenever he hears the sound of bells from a nearby Buddhist temple, he desires to abandon his evil intentions and just live in peace in this new country.

To resist this temptation, the devil decides to devote his time to agriculture and begins to grow a mysterious plant. He takes great pleasure in the activity, and the crop seems to flourish on the foreign soil. Weeks go by, until finally one day a Japanese man, a recent Christian convert, walks by the devil's farm, and the demon with teasing and subtle logic convinces him to enter into a pact with him. If the man will guess the name of the exotic plant, the entire crop will be his; if he fails, the devil will own his soul. Ultimately, the Japanese merchant outwits the devil, tricking him into revealing the name of the crop. He thus wins the bet, saving his soul and acquiring the tobacco field. However, the narrator is convinced the legend has a deeper meaning:

54. The text refers to St. Francisc Xavier, SJ, as "Furanshisu seijin," i.e., St. Francis. While the text itself later clarifies that it is the Jesuit missionary, the reference retains a degree of ambiguity and leaves open the possibility of interpreting this as the better-known "Furanshisu shōnin," namely, St. Francis of Assisi.

> While there is no denying that the devil could not win the body and soul of the merchant, it is true also that in this way he was able to spread tobacco to all of Japan. So if you think about it, wasn't the salvation of the merchant also accompanied by corruption, and the devil's defeat also partly a success? Even if the devil falls, he does not simply get back on his feet. And when humans win over temptation, are they not also defeated?[55]

Thus, "Tabako" is a parody of the classic tale of a pact with the devil that questions the moral logic subtending the Christian narrative. Similar to "Samayoeru Yudayajin," Japan acts as a catalyst that highlights the contradictions of the Christian religion and, by extension, of Western culture. Furthermore, the intertextual and intercultural dimension of the story sets the ground for a broader reflection on agency and ideology, and on the dynamics of subject formation and cultural interaction. "Tabako" shares with "Samayoeru Yudayajin" and "Rushiheru" the theme of the subjective, and in this case also culturally grounded, nature of sin. We are told in the beginning that the devil can only tempt believers and that non-Christians are indifferent to his seduction. This would seem a straightforward metaphor for the process of ideological formation of the modern subject: ideology/discourse interpellates individuals as subjects, and by responding to that interpellation individuals subject themselves to it and internalize it. If there is no subjective response, no awareness, then temptation is ineffective and so is punishment. This somewhat Nietzschean overcoming of good and evil, this serenity in the face of ideological conditioning, is ultimately unavailable to Akutagawa's protagonists. Be they Jesuits, Jews, or devils, they become subject to guilt and temptation.

However, the text also points to an alternative paradigm and to a more complex vision of subjectivity. For the Wandering Jew, as we saw, awareness led to punishment but also to salvation; Lucifer was tempted by good as much as humans were tempted by evil. Both are two-way rather than top-down processes. Similarly, the Japanese merchant's victory over the European devil, as the narrator points out, is ultimately also a loss. By conquering foreign culture, he is corrupted by it. As is well known, tobacco would in fact prove harder to eradicate than Christianity in Tokugawa Japan: while Iemitsu's persecutions of the *Kirishitan*, if they did not eliminate the religion completely, did effectively force it to go underground, all attempts to ban tobacco consumption from Tokugawa Japan resulted in failure. The story also reads as a metaphor for the process of hybridization inherent in the encounter between cultures. Like the merchant of the story, Meiji Japan won its bet with the West and did not give up its soul, yet only at the price of assimilating European culture and losing its own "purity." Significantly, the

55. Akutagawa, "Tabako to akuma," p. 285.

text ends by expressing the narrator's curiosity about what happened "when the devil came back to Japan in the Meiji period."[56]

However, *pace* anti-Christian and antismoking campaigners, this cultural hybridization is not simply a loss but also a gain. If throughout the Tokugawa, *bakumatsu*, and early Meiji periods Christianity was presented as a threat to the intellectual integrity of Japan, in Akutagawa's work the loss of cultural identity brought by Westernization is both feared and embraced. The story ultimately leaves the tension unresolved and offers us both perspectives: cultural hybridity is a source of anxiety and exhilaration, a threat and a thrill.

Conclusion

As we see from these three stories, Akutagawa performs a number of different yet interconnected operations with his *Kirishitan mono*. At the most basic level, he presents the "Christian century" as proof that Japan is as much an heir to the Western religious tradition as Europe is. He thus undermines the dominant narrative that presented Japan as being "forced open" by Western powers after centuries of isolation, and modernization as a traumatic process of imposition of foreign values onto native ones.

At the same time, the way the author constructs these stories on the linguistic and narrative level defamiliarizes both Western and Japanese traditions. The language Akutagawa chooses, as we have seen, is a combination of old and new, foreign and local, that ultimately deconstructs the very idea of languages and cultures as original and discrete entities. The narrative structure, multilayered and Chinese-box-like, highlights the textual nature of reality, while the choice to intertwine authentic historical record and pure fiction underscores the importance of the past as a mirror of the present and a hermeneutic tool for critical reflection on it.

Within this relativistic and transcultural context, the stories offer reflections on ethical and political matters. First and foremost, they address the issue of subject formation. By raising questions of awareness, punishment, and temptation, the stories demonstrate how the individual is constructed ideologically. What Akutagawa presents, however, is different from a simple Foucauldian model of subjection through subjectification. His Christians and devils form their identity through paradox; they build it upon an unresolved tension between conflicting values and ideological systems, between different cultural models held in a productive tension. Such contradictory and paradoxical individuality is a reason for anxiety and struggle for the characters but also a source of agency. For the Wandering Jew, for Habian,

56. Ibid., p. 286.

for the devils, for Akutagawa's contemporaries, and perhaps for all modern individuals, where there is awareness, there is suffering but also salvation.

Akutagawa's concerns overlap with the most prominent questions that emerged from the scholarship on the *Kirishitan* discussed at the beginning of the article. If the genre of *Kirishitan monogatari* used the Christians as an absolute Other against which to project the idea of a Japanese Self, Akutagawa's *Kirishitan mono* perform a parallel and inverse operation, using the Christians and their devils as a mirror for the Japanese of his time to simultaneously highlight the paradoxes of the Western tradition and those of Taisho Japan. Similarly, while Tokugawa-era popular practices assimilated Christianity and transformed it into a "Japanese religion," thus eliminating its Otherness altogether, Akutagawa preserves its strangeness and its unresolved tensions as a source of intellectually productive paradoxes and as a way to express his simultaneous fear and celebration of the cultural hybridity of his age.

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