

Baptized by American Water

—— Gozo Yoshimasu and Christianity

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1. Christianity and America

Christianity is extremely significant in the life of Gozo Yoshimasu. There are quite a few literary people, after the Meiji period, who have wholeheartedly accepted the impact of Christianity and have written about it, but what is characteristic of the case of Yoshimasu is that Christianity came along with the American occupation, following Japan's defeat in World War II. First, I must quote and introduce words that cannot be excluded in relation to Gozo Yoshimasu and Christianity.

In the interview section included in the “separate volume” of a collection of poems entitled *Tabi* by Shuntaro Tanigawa, revived in 1995 (Shichosha), Yoshimasu talks to Tanigawa. (Tanigawa, born into a Christian family, is a writer and Christian believer whose poems don't make overt reference to his faith.) Yoshimasu says, “Going back to ‘Toba,’ there is a Western context in you, Mr. Tanigawa. I also hide it, too... I hide being baptized by an American missionary... And by having such physical experience and hiding it, I make myself a kind of an open seam...” (27). What is characteristic of Yoshimasu here is his description of the experience of being baptized as “physical,” talking about it being performed by an “American” missionary, and speaking of it as if it were a wound that should remain hidden.

According to “Hadaka no Memo” [“Naked Writing”], included in *Mokpo Tsushin* [*Mokpo Correspondence*], the most detailed chronicle he has written about himself, Yoshimasu was born in February 1939 and baptized in 1951 at the age of 12 at a private school called Keimei Gakuen. He writes, “Around that time, Keimei Gakuen became a mission school. Orville D. Bixler was an American missionary of the school. When I went to his vacation house in Karuizawa, I was truly certain (determined) in my heart. So, rather than ‘being baptized,’ it was more like, ‘I received baptism’ (Church of Christ)” (199). In the dialogue with Yoji Harada, which is included again at the end of the book, he describes in detail how influential Keimei Gakuen was.

Additionally, we can refer to the interview by Kazuo Tanaka, posted in volume 75 of the magazine, *Mita Bungaku* (2003). There, Tanaka asked, “Mr. Yoshimasu, you were baptized in 1945, the year that the war ended, right?” Yoshimasu answered, “Yes” and continued as follows:

Mr. Tanaka, your impression of the year that the war ended is correct, I think. In fact, I was a sixth or seventh grader. So, it was a little after the war ended. But the “year the war ended” is correct. And much to my shame, that's something I am not sure I would be able to talk about before I die. I have already decided in my heart that I need to deal with this for such a long time, and I am not sure I can talk about it. I grew up near the military base. I was baptized by an American missionary who belonged to a school of Protestantism, who came to Japan when I was little. I was soaked in water. I want to express this with different words, but that boy, even though he was little, must have felt in his mind, “I saw God.” That boy must have experienced something like revelation. That didn't just happen within his personality. It happened by absorbing enough air surrounding that boy. (173)

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Actually, it was 1951, but he admits that it is fine to say it was the “year that the war ended.” In this perception of his, we can see the singularity of Gozo Yoshimasu’s acceptance of Christianity. At the same time, from an all-encompassing viewpoint of the theory of civilization, the baptism was an inevitability of the time, that we may even call public injury, because, to him, Christianity was promoted by the victors to a defeated country.

There is another remark that I must quote here. In the “Discussion” section of *Dolce*, published in May 2001, which Yoshimasu co-authored with film director Aleksandr Sokurov and Miho Shimao, a Japanese novelist who embraced Catholicism, Sokurov asked Yoshimasu, “It is probably possible, only in Japan, to veil the influence of Christian belief. Is this the uniqueness of Japan?” Yoshimasu answered as follows:

I wonder how old I was... when I was thirteen or fourteen, I was baptized by an American missionary and I was very much aware of it. Considering this, let me tell you why I like the works of Mr. Toshio Shimao and Ms. Miho Shimao as one of the readers of their works. They have a sense of grace, like I said earlier, but somewhere in their works, there is definitely an honest and distinct sense of confession, unlike “I-novels (Shi-Shosetu).” Clearly, when Christianity first began to spread in the Meiji period, the biggest thing that influenced the people of Japan was that people had used to keep silent and hide in a hole, but now they listened to their heart and began to face themselves and avowed (白状) with honesty. It was a huge thing. I am probably different from other people, but in my case, for example, there is an image of Christ obviously behind me. It may be distorted. In relation to the portrait we mentioned earlier, it may be blurred a little, but casts a very, very distinct shadow. (37-38)

Before this remark, Sokurov talked about his impression that he cannot find any “psychological” portrait in the art of the pre-modern Japan. He also said that there seems to be no issue of “original sin” in Japanese people’s tradition. Yoshimasu responded to this, “I didn’t have what you, Mr. Sokurov, would call ‘original sin’ from the beginning. The body of Christ came closer to me and talked to me. I may be using this instead of the portrait we talked about earlier, but there was an acceptance in this form, in my case I think” (39). Sokurov’s question was very honest and straightforward. It developed from the experience of making the film *Dolce*, using Miho Shimao as the lead character right before this dialogue took place. That’s why Yoshimasu gave an answer from the depth of his heart, the like of which we have never seen before elsewhere. He used the word “白状” which may be translated as “avow” for the act of “confession (告白)” and implied that it was the most important act that Christianity gave to Japan. Here again, the term “American missionary” is used in conjunction with baptism. At the beginning of the section of 1953 (ninth grader) of the self-authored chronicle, included in *Mokpo Tsushin*, which I referred to earlier, we see a quote from the Bible, “Though I spake with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I have become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal” (1 Corinthians Chapter 13), which gives a glimpse of how profound the influence of Christianity was for Yoshimasu while he was in junior high school (203).

In relation to this, let me quote one last thing. It is the text from *Shizukana Amerika* [*Quiet America*], which he wrote for a speech he gave in December 2009 at the Tokyo American Literature Society. There, he uses the term “humbleness” to describe “what America meant to me.”

What this one word “humbleness, ...” has brought is similar to walking toward the bottom of my heart. And today, I really wanted you to know. I have written about this already. It can even be called *naked writing*. The translation would be to “write about the bare truth of one’s heart,” rather than confession or avowal. From the baptism I received from an American missionary when I was little, and the way people bow their head while they are “praying,” I learned intuitively something like the depth and the edge of “hypocrisy.” (262)

The “depth of hypocrisy” does not mean “very hypocritical.” It probably means that, when he was a little boy, he came across people who were trying to live by taking very seriously what might seem “hypocrisy,” starting with missionaries and including Japanese teachers at school, and that it was something too formidable (like “edges”), even if it was called “hypocrisy.” For Yoshimasu, Christianity came to Japan as something inseparably linked with

(the United States of) America. It's probably fair to say that the Christian sense of confession and the associative mentality, like an abyss, of its doctrine of love (= "hypocrisy") were crucial to Yoshimasu.

This has been a long introduction, but this is the premise of what I am going to propose. When discussing Gozo Yoshimasu's poems and expressions, the angle of Christianity can never be ignored. From here on, I am going to illustrate that argument, mainly by referencing *Goro-goro*.

2. Pursuit of Hidden "god"

This has not been understood much by critics, but an extended poem, entitled *Goro-goro*, which Yoshimasu wrote in 2004, was a poem of determination, as if he staked almost everything he had on it. The fact that many of the readers of this poem are Japanese has become an obstacle to appropriate evaluation of this poem, I believe. Here, he consciously expresses the wound given by Christianity, which he has wholeheartedly accepted for decades. (The English translations of these poems suggest only a rough equivalent of the meanings at play in the original.) "Gozo was the son of Kazuma, who was a manufacturing engineer of zero fighters in the Showa Aircraft Factory / Haijima was a sandbar in old Tamagawa / Here / My old heart aches, I try not to use the word "heart" as I was taught by Naoki Sakai's voluminous book *Kako no Koe* [*Voice of the Past*] (Ibunsha), but, I don't exist if I didn't touch the quiet water of silence here" (「昭和飛行機ノ0戦製造ノ技士だったKazuma (一馬)の子、Gozo (剛造)ハ、／ 拝島ハ、古多摩川ノ、中州ノひとつ／こゝニ／古い心には、イタイノけれども、酒井直樹さんの大著『過去の声』(以文社)ニ教えられて、もう「心、などとはいわないようにしているのだけれども、けれども、けれども、こゝで、沈黙の静かな水ニ、さわらなければ、わたくしハ、存在ヲしない」)。Then, he writes, "I am a gravel of Tamagawa that was soaked in water and baptized" (「ワタクシハ、多摩川の石ガ、水に漬けられて、洗礼を受けたモノだ」) (40-41). As revealed in the dialogue at the end of *Mokpo Tsushin*, Haijima was located on the opposite side of Tamagawa from Keimei Gakuen. As discussed earlier, Yoshimasu was actually baptized in Karuizawa, but just as he was able to say he was baptized in the "year that the war ended," from a subjective viewpoint, he re-engraved the place where he was baptized in the text, saying that it was the Tamagawa river that was running beside Keimei Gakuen. The fact that his father was a manufacturing engineer of zero fighters, Japanese combat planes, establishes a tension with the influence of America through American missionaries who came to Japan following Japan's defeat. The water of the river used for baptism was "quiet water of silence." It must have been a deep-rooted experience, as Yoshimasu says he could not have existed without touching that water. The way he calls himself a "gravel of Tamagawa" has a deep meaning I will elaborate later. In *Goro-goro*, Yoshimasu talks about the American military base that occupied the central area of Okinawa. He grew up near the Yokota base and he says he could not have existed without baptism. The wound of such baptism makes his attitude toward America in this work a complicated one.

Goro-goro is a poetry travelogue written as Yoshimasu traveled from Amami to the mainland Okinawa. What he felt in Yoron Island, especially, depicts the thematic range of this work very well. We can call it a pursuit of or desire for "god" for the time being. Let's quote a crucial part.

与論 (古名、ゆんぬ)、……「古名」の岩陰ニ、マタモ (再モ)、ナハ (汝ハ)、スガタヲ (姿ヲ) カクソー (隠ソー) トスールッ。隠岐 (オキ) デモ、ソーダッタ。「隠岐は僕の盲目の時間の下にある」(『螺旋歌』、一九九〇年)、イッシンニ、綴ッテイル、シカシ、イッシンニ、ナレバナルポード、ナハ (汝ハ) 隠レル。ナハ (汝ハ)、「盲目の時間」ノ下ニ、隠レル。盲目ノ性ノ、シータ (下) ニ、ソノ、スガタヲ、カクス、隠レル。オソラク、ワノ (我ノ)、詩 (シ)、ヘノ、イッシンノ、モウ、ヒトツノ、イッシンノ、ツクシ、(尽シ) ハ、コノ、隠レ性カラ、薄日 (ハクヒッ)、剥ク日ッ、ナンデモ、ヨイ。薄 (ハク)、日 (ヒ)、ニ、ゾー (造?) ヲ、トーズル (投ズる)、トーズル、コートナノダ、…… (69)

(Yoron (old name, Yunnu), you tried to hide yourself behind the rock again. You did the same in Oki. "Oki wa Boku no Momoku no Jikan no Sita ni aru" ["Oki is under my Blind Time"] (*Rasenka* [*Helix Songs*], 1990), I wrote devotedly. The more devoted I become, the more you hide. You hide under the "blind time." You hide yourself behind that blindness. Perhaps, another devoted commitment to my poetry is to project images onto weak sunlight or peeled sunlight, whatever, from this hiding nature,)

If we (coarsely) convert the katakana syllabaries to interpret this passage, we can see that he re-interprets his devoted effort to write poetry (=poetry composition) as the action of “projecting images” onto the phase of the world (here, this is projected on “weak sunlight,” i.e. certain fading of light) seen when the existence called “you” hides. The existence that hides is “you,” and the subject talking is “I,” which implies the echo of Buber-like Christian ideology. However, the reason we might interpret this “you” as “god” can be found in a collection of his poems, *Rasenka*, published 14 years before *Goro-goro*. *Rasenka* is the work, in which Yoshimasu used the word “god” most frequently among his books.

Rasenka was a collection of poems made up mainly of a group of extended poems serialized in a literary magazine, *Bungakukai*, from 1986 to 1987. It occupies an extremely important position in Yoshimasu’s career up to this point. This is because in the book we find most of the major motifs that appear in the poems he came to write after that, and because this is a work that marks the milestone of the establishment of the style (through *Aozora* [*Blue Sky*] and *Oshirisu, Ishinokami* [*Osiris, God of Stone*]) of expressing what he felt while actually traveling to various places in the world (for example, Okinawa, Tohoku, Hokkaido, Brazil, and India). Moreover, it is crucial because the act of “confession” comprises the core of the collection. In the poem “Oki wa Boku no Momoku no Jikan no Sita ni aru,” mentioned in the above citation of *Goro-goro*, Yoshimasu describes the experience of going to Oki island. At the beginning of this poem, he writes, “when god tilted the horizon a little, I heard a faint sound of water running toward outside the island” (「神が、水平を、すこし傾けるとき、島の外へ、幽かに水の流れる音がした。」)。And he expresses his deep emotion, “(I wonder whether I can go and reach the bright hill)” (「わたしは行き、着けるだろうか、かがやく丘に。」), as if to become one with “waves going to Oki,” of which he notes, “the waves think they don’t have to reach the island” and “they seem free” (98). It would be reasonable to imagine that the bright hill exists on the island of Oki, but what the poet portrays here is the sensation of “abandoning the universe, ……” (101) (「宇宙をすてる、……」) and the feeling that “the universe becomes blank because of loneliness, ……” (「淋しさによって、宇宙は、白紙に、……」) (103). “The dock gets hurt (like a painting) and gets deeply hurt when the time comes. I sat down, nearly crouched and wrote. Time is coming. When the time has come, I no longer had a place to go” (「波止場は (絵のように、……) 傷つき、ときが、くると、ほんとうに、深く傷つき、わたしは、腰が近づき、うずくまって、書くよう、になってしまった。ときがみちてくる。時が満ちて来ると、わたしにはいき場所がないようになって、いった。」) (110). By the windowsill of the ferry on which Yoshimasu returns to Sakaiminato in Tottori prefecture, the poet found a spider which must have been there when the ferry left the island, and describes, “The spider from Oki by the windowsill is outside my blind time. The spider is outside and swaying in the wind // Humans are a lonely existence” (「窓辺の、隠岐の、蜘蛛は、僕の、盲目の時間の、外に、居る。外に、居て、風に、揺れ、て、いる / / 淋しい、人間は、存在だ、」) (128). The poet, who is a “lonely human,” can never know how the spider spends its time and its life. The self as the waves that cannot reach the “bright hill” could not go to the “bright hill” in Oki either. That’s why, retrospectively, he remembers in *Goro-goro*, which he wrote nearly 14 years later, that he also experienced the state of “you” in hiding back in Oki. However, the poet also thought, “Whirl, (……). (……), (while whirling, ……), eventually, we get intoxicated and sober up somewhere in the universe, we get intoxicated and sober up, (……), and then we will probably find the “place for staying” (Rilke), which is “nothingness of nothing” (Tokoku)” (「旋舞し、(……)。 (……,) (旋回しつつ、……)、やがて、わたし、たちは、宇宙の、……何処かで、酔っては醒め、……酔っては醒め、……しつつ、(……,)、わたしたちは、「空の空なる」(透谷)、不思議な「滞留の場所」(リルケ)を見出すのではないだろうか。)], and said, “(slowly……), / Whirl, and swirl. (……), / (the naked mountain, bright mountain of obsidian, ……). / When I looked back, I saw a glimpse of its back” (「ゆっくり……,)。 / 旋舞し、旋回し。(……,)。 / (裸の山、明るい山、黒曜石の、……)。 / 振り返ると、背が、……幽かにみえた」) (118). Tokoku and Rilke (especially Rilke) give decisive indices here.

In the poem “Sakamaku Mizu no Ue o Iku yo ni” [“As If to Go on the Turbulent Water”] which he wrote immediately before the poem “Oki wa Boku no Momoku no Jikan no Sita ni aru,” Yoshimasu once again summons the vision he had at Maimaizu Ido, the historical site of an ancient water well in Hamura City, Tokyo, the place that he mentions earlier in the poem “Yuki? Yuki” [“Snow? Snow”] included in *Oshirisu, Ishinokami*, which is a collection

of poems published earlier (1984). Bearing in mind the experience of going down to Maimaizu Ido, the poet wrote in “Yuki? Yuki,” “we began to engage in forbidden play, play with god, without realizing it” (「わたしたちは知らず知らずのうちに禁じられた遊び——神遊びをするようになった」) (43). *Oshirisu, Ishinokami* is an important work, in which Yoshimasu began, perhaps as an experiment, to pursue in his poems the ancient god or gods asleep in the history of Japan (although at the same time, he embeds Christian elements in “Yokan to Hai no Ki” [“Foreboding and the Tree of Ash”] and “Rosanheresu” [“Los Angeles”]). Even if we look at “god” in *Rasenka*, we can’t presume, since the poem takes place at Oki, that he’s referring strictly to a Christian god. Instead, this reference might suggest an ancient god of Japan and Asia, especially when we consider Yoshimasu’s long-term interest in the two Japanese folklorists, Shinobu Orikuchi and Kunio Yanagita. Indeed, he mentions Okinawan god(s) in *Rasenka* and mentions the “turbidity” he experienced in India. In “Oki wa Boku no Momoku no Jikan no Sita ni aru,” immediately after writing about “spider from Oki by the windowsill” (「隠岐の、窓辺の、蜘蛛」), Yoshimasu imagined that spider’s “soft thread” (「柔か、い、いと」) and wrote, “(walking, standing, spending months to produce soft thread out of something……)” (「歩みつつ、佇み、幾月を過ぎて、何かを、柔かい、いとにする、……」) (128-129), alluding to his own agonizing months trying, like the spider, to spin poems from himself. After a few lines, Yoshimasu writes, “Is it about the wound? Or this confession, Baptism (why!) created double and triple wounds. For me, it takes a long time before those are healed. Or, like this I may notice even deeper wounds” (「傷、の、ことでしょうか。あるいは、この告白の、……。受洗が、(なんで!) 二重三重の傷を、つくっていました。わたしには、それが、解けるまでの、ながい時間。あるいは、こうして、さらに、深い傷に、気づくのか。」) (129). This is, of course, a clear reference to the Christian baptism he received as a boy and to the act of “confession.”

A speech entitled “Lecture / Mimi wo Sumasu [Listening Carefully]” that Yoshimasu gave at the Nagasaki Prefectural Isahaya Commercial High School is included in *Rasenka*. Its inclusion in the book indicates Yoshimasu’s intention to contextualize the whole book to readers. While talking passionately to high school students, Yoshimasu makes mention of Tokoku Kitamura.

Humans are strange creatures. For example, there are words like romance and love. These are ideas that came to Japan around the Meiji period from the West along with Christianity. These very strong, deep feelings may be wrong, but these showed up before the minds of the people back then in the Meiji period, just like the Black Ship showed up. There was a genius poet who passed away at the age of 26 named Tokoku Kitamura (北村透谷). He presented the idea of love for the first time at the beginning of the Meiji period by saying “Love is the secret key to life.” (213)

This point can be linked to the words of Rilke that Yoshimasu quoted in the form of re-quotation. “Animals and flowers never try to justify themselves. They have freedom, that is open but hard to describe with words, before them, on them.” Then, Yoshimasu quotes Rilke as follows. “This freedom, in our case perhaps, this is an (extremely instantaneous) equivalent to the first moment of love when humans or lovers see themselves expand within their partner, or to commitment to god” (214). Needless to say, Tokoku becoming a Christian was closely and inseparably linked with his love for Mina Ishizaka. As the first moment of love and the mentality toward god are combined, we can see his intention of placing *Rasenka* on the line of “Tokoku → Rilke → himself.”

Rilke is the poet most frequently quoted in *Rasenka* (along with Kafka, but more than Kafka). Even though we see the pursuit of “god” beyond Christianity in Rilke, we cannot deny the fact that Rilke’s is a deeply Christian god. In “Sakamaku Mizu no Ue o Iku yo ni,” Yoshimasu writes, “That’s right. It is no longer a heathen god, the wound on the body, knife in the water. / (A leaf of old film, surrounded by new air). / Very old, strange, foreign,, even if I try to hide that old practice of bathing in water, I can no longer do that” (「そうなのです、もう異神ではなくなった、身体の傷、水のなかのナイフ。／ (あたらしい空気がつつむ、古い、一葉のフィルム)。／非常に古い、異風、異国の、……、水浴みの、習俗を隠そうとしても、もう、隠しきれませんですね。」) (76). Here, he accepts the “heathen god” which has no origin in Japan. The Christian baptismal god, on the other hand, is the “wound on the body,” that Yoshimasu tries to understand as a practice of bathing in the water of a very old, foreign realm, like the realm of the Judaic or pre-Christian era or even a much older era. Therefore, it would be miscon-

ceived to characterize Rilke’s influence or the influence of “Western” elements (via America) in *Rasenka* within a narrow framework of Christianity. However, within this collection of poems, Yoshimasu quotes from Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*: “True singing is a different breath. / A breath serving nothing. A gust in the god. A wind” (along with the original German version, 91-92). As such a line makes evident, in *Rasenka* “breath” is connected to the world through inspiration. In addition, the text by Shinobu Orikuchi and the poem by Rilke are both quoted as epigraphs in the poem “Watashi no Tabi wa Hikari ga Sasu Basho o Motomete no Tabi nanoda” [“My Journey is a Journey in Pursuit of a Place Where Light Shines Through”] (307). As is succinctly expressed here, what he seeks in *Rasenka* is the mode of the world that is felt and pictured as “light” (“kagayaku oka” [bright hill]). Breath as inspiration and light as the (true) phase of the world —both are deeply Christian themes. Of course, references are not Christian in an orthodox sense, nor do they presume some monotheistic god. They are not necessarily limited to the “influence” of Rilke either. Breath and light, as he uses them, are elements nurtured within the life of Gozo Yoshimasu alone. They cannot be replaced with symbolism and cannot be included in any religions or religious schools. The issue here is that the shadow cast by the wound left by the “heathen god,” accepted by one Japanese poet as the pain he felt within him after Japan was defeated in the World War II, goes beyond America and the West to recover aspects of the religious view of the world of ancient Asia within the felt experience of a trembling, palimpsestic subjectivity. The “hiding god” in *Goro-goro* is perceived through such subjectivity as a swamp.

When drawing a line from *Rasenka* to *Goro-goro*, from the perspective of the hiding god, we must pass through

the poetry collection *The Other Voice* (2002). There is no space to do so in this paper, but what plays a crucial role here is *Gravity and Grace* by Simone Weil. Yoshimasu quotes Weil’s words, “the absence of God is the mode of divine presence which corresponds to evil — absence which is felt” (55). For Yoshimasu, the hiding god loses its strictly Christian elements when it is placed in contraposition with the world as it is manifested in the particularity of cowries, beautiful Japanese shells found in Okinawa. But Weil’s perception was certainly inherited.

I can point out, to a certain extent and using *The Other Voice* as an index, in connection with the word “universe” that was already there, that the direction that Yoshimasu was going toward has changed gradually from “god” to “world” in a broader sense. (This is well represented in the subtitle of the work *Mukidashi no Nonohana* [*The Bared Wildflower*], authored in 2001: “Shi kara Sekai e [From Poetry to the World].”) It is not that he stops using the word “god,” but it may be that his interest has shifted to the “archipelagic” image of the world (*Archipelago: Gunto to shite no Sekai e* [*To the World as Archipelago*]). Therefore, “god” is not mentioned in places that may be seen as revealing contact with “god” in *Goro-goro*. (Citation 1) “Each time, every time, without making any footsteps, the moon came down to Sumiyoshi Kurago (deep underground on an elevated coral reef on Okinoerabu Island) and danced, I am sure. / We forget (holes of poetry’s tide), gradually forgotten (holes of poetry’s tide) / Eyelashes of the moon / So soft, different kind of serenity = real existence of

Citation 1

その都度、その都度、月ガ、足音もなく、住吉(スミよし)、沖永良部島ノ、隆起珊瑚礁ノ、地下深クニマデ、下りて行く、ソコニあるところノ
 暗河(クワゴ)ニ、下りてきて、舞っていたのはたしかだった、……。
 忘れて行く(シノシホノアナ)、忘れられて行く(シノシホノアナ)
 月ノ睫毛(まつげ)
 やー、柔らかな、別種ノ、沁(シ)澄(ス)毛(け)左(さ) || 静けさの存在。わたくしハ、ソレヲみた。ソレヲ「モーレ」、(奄美言葉の「ト
 とーざかり行く
 霊(ト、いうー必要モ、精霊ノロギンスト、名付ける必要モ、寸毫(すんごう)モない、……。間髪(かんぱつ)モ、ない。そのような、コー、
 月の嘆(なげき)ニ、ミミを澄ます、こと、こと、こと、……。
 ろー、ツーンノころ(なげき)ニ、ミーミヲ、澄ませ

serenity. I saw that” (「その都度、その都度、月ガ、足音モなく、住吉 (スミよし、沖永良部島ノ、隆起珊瑚礁ノ、地下深クニマデ、下りて行く、ソコニあるところノ) / 忘れて行く (シノシホノアナ)、忘れられて行く (シノシホノアナ) / 暗河 (くらごー) ニ、下りてきて、舞っていたのはたしかだった、……。 / 月ノ睫毛 (まつげ) / やー、柔ーらかな、別種ノ、沁 (し) 澄 (ズ) 毛 (け) 左 (さ) = 静けさの实在。わたくしハ、ソレヲみた。」) (62). The special kind of serenity described in this section is different from the feeling of ordinary quietness. Yoshimasu uses a description of “沁 (し) 澄 (ズ) 毛 (け) 左 (さ) [shi-zu-ke-sa (serenity or silence)]” to verbalize this. But the choice of the phrase “real existence” can be interpreted as a trace of Christian god or its altered or transformed form. We need a massive volume of text examples to verify it in a strict sense, but bluntly speaking, one of the things Yoshimasu has been doing as a poet is crushing a singular, adamant god, that is a monotheistical god of creation, into extremely small particularities, specific worldly things that can be touched with the eyes of a “blind turtle” (「盲亀」) (to borrow the expression from *Goro-goro*).

3. “Confession” and a Little Stone that is Passed by

Goro-goro was written, Yoshimasu has suggested, as a sort of denouement to his pursuit of God. It is indicated at the beginning of the book, along with the concept of “白状 (avowal).” We may remember this word from its context in relation to *Dolce* in Section 1 of this paper. There, Yoshimasu said, “Clearly, when Christianity first began to spread in the Meiji period, the biggest thing that influenced the people of Japan was that people had used to keep silent and hide in a hole, but now they listened to their heart and began to face themselves and avowed with honesty. It was a huge thing,” pointing out that there is “an honest and distinct sense of confession” unlike “I-novels” in the literature by Toshio Shima (probably *Shi no Toge* [*The Sting of Death*]). In other words, “avowal” is a word by which Yoshimasu transforms the word “confession” in its Christian context into a Japanese context. In the first stage of *Goro-goro*, picturing himself as “the phantom thief of Oume, Shichibei Urajuku” (「青梅の怪盗、裏宿七兵衛」), he describes, “Goro-goro / Calling out Mr. Shogo (Ohta), Mr. Shigeyuki (Toshima), I try to close my lips and shut my mouth, but words escape from my mouth, / One-time-only *doron* / I avowed at *oshirasu* (court of law), I avowed at *oshirasu* / Smell of the form of my life for the first time / Smell of the mouth like an animal smelling the true form of avowal.” 「ごろごろ／ショーゴ (オータ) さん、シゲユキ (トシマ) さんト、呼ブコッ、ト、呼びかけながら、口を縫いながら綴じかけながら、漏らしながらスルようにして、／一回かぎりのどろん／オシラス (御白州) デ、ハクジョウ (白状) ヲッ、スル、オシラス (御白州)、デ、ハクジョウ (白状) ヲッ、スル／初めてノ生ノ姿ノ匂ひ／「ハクジョー」というようなものノスガタを、嗅ぐ獣 (けもの) のような口元 (くちもと) の匂ひ。」 (9) (Citation 2) The interpretation of this section is not easy. The words are used in a way very characteristic of Yoshimasu. Katakana characters are used for the word “avowal” as “ハクジョウ,” so it is transformed twice from the English word “confession.” Claiming to be a thief named Shichibei Urajuku,

Citation 2

ごろごろ

ショーゴ (オータ) さん、シゲユキ (トシマ) さんト、呼ぶコッ、ト、呼びかけながら、口を縫いながら綴じかけながら、漏らしながらスルようにして、

一回かぎりのどろん

オシラス (御白州)、デ、ハクジョウ (白状) ヲッ、スル、オシラス (御白州)、デ、ハクジョウ (白状) ヲッ、スル

初めてノ生ノ姿ノ匂ひ

「ハクジョー」というようなものノスガタを、嗅ぐ獣 (けもの) のような口元 (くちもと) の匂ひ。そう、きのう、八王子の加住の戸口の下で「ホー」抜きて

ほげきよ

ト、しか啼かずニ二三歩ハ、必ずや歩いてたであらう、あのクソ (糞) ヲウゲイスのように、……「あのクソ (糞) ヲウゲイス」ガ、

隅ノ〇 (オー) のホー

Yoshimasu expresses a larkly lightness. Even if he says that “avowing at *oshirasu*” is a “one-time-only” thing (in his life), his use of the word “*doron* (どろん),” the imitative sound normally used when ninjas disappear, hides behind its acrobatics Yoshimasu’s seriousness (as though a ninja literally blinds us by using ninjutsu).

Such passages diverge at many levels from the strictness of Christian theology, for example, the duty of penance. Yoshimasu also draws Western context closer to Japanese context by intentionally using a Kabuki-like (Edo-like) metaphor. However, for a person who devoted himself to Christianity at Keimei Gakuen from the time when he was in the upper grades of elementary school until he finished junior high school, the quoted section cannot be just a lark. Even though Christian “confession” has brought a sense of strangeness that Yoshimasu likens to “hypocrisy,” we can see the expression of his determination to bear “an honest and distinct sense of confession” unlike “I-novels,” even in light of forerunner Toshio Shimao’s attitude toward writing. The thief is a sinner and, therefore, is brought to “*oshirasu*” [court of law in Edo period]. Toshio Shimao’s sin was breaking Miho’s heart, but what kind of sin or what is Yoshimasu “avowing”?

Here, I am not going to discuss anything about his private life. Private elements are shown, erased, hidden, and described as if they are coded messages in Yoshimasu’s works, such as *Neppu* [*Devil’s Wind*], *Daibyoin waki ni Sobietatsu Kyojyu e no Tegami* [*A Letter to the Tall Tree Standing Next to the Great Hospital*], and *Rasenska*, or even in *Goro-goro*. I wonder whether I can simply call them “private,” but there is a vanishing point that we cannot see beyond a massive volume of surfaces, projecting sorrow and despair. I feel that Yoshimasu’s “avowal” is connected more with the entirety of his life, something we cannot pinpoint, or his sense of self. In *Goro-goro*, it is linked with what he calls “slight stain in my heart” (「わたくしッこゝろノ、薄い汚れ」) (22), or the state he described with the lines, “I also suck up to others” and “I even came to suck up to my poems to sell them / ‘I also want to destroy my words’” (「ワタクシモ、コピ (媚) ヲ、ウル (売ル)。」「シー (詩) ニ、コピ (媚ビ) ヲ、ウラセール (売ラセル) ト、コロマディー / 《わたくしモわたくしノ言葉ヲ亡 (ほろボ) してしまいたい》」) (64), or even the state of himself expressed in the line, “the bird that became flat will never rise up again or can’t be brought back to life even if we sprinkle beautiful water” (「ウル、ハシヒ (麗シヒ)、ウーチミズ、ウーチミズ (打水) ニ、ヨッティ、モ、モウ、ヨミガヘル (蘇ヘル、蘇生=いきかへる) コートノ、ナイ、ヒラベッタ、ク、ナッタ、トリー (鳥)」) (83). One signal word from *Goro-goro* is “rust.” It implies the sense of self, described as “heart = red rust” (「こゝろ=赤錆」) which the poet “can’t bear to see, I am something that people can’t bear to see” (「ミルニ、タヘナイ。ワタクシハ、ミルニ、タヘナイ、モノ、ダ。」) (50). If we shift our eyes toward the words of his deceased friend, great sculptor Isamu Wakabayashi, “rust is something we can bear to see” (「サビハ、ミルニ、タエル」) (50), we can see the poet transformed it as in the line: “If ‘rust is something we can bear to see’ (Isamu Wakabayashi), that’s because there is rust here” (「サビガ、ミルニ、タヘル、」 (若林奮) ノハ、コゝニ、サビガ、アルカラダ。」) (52). His intention here is to affirm the accumulation of time in his life as something like “rust,” something worthy to be seen, by writing *Goro-goro*. (“Make room for the red of rust,” (「サツ、ビツ、シュ (錆朱ユツ) ニツ、ミチヲ、アケルコト、……。」)) (116)

The intention of Yoshimasu’s remark is revealed here, “I didn’t have what you, Mr. Sokurov would call ‘original sin’ from the beginning....” According to the teachings of Christianity, confession is a mode of reciting (counting) one’s sins. But the moral act of self-inspection was alien to the Japanese poet who thinks of the Western god as a “heathen god.” The poet has “stains,” but no sins, no regretting (self-reflection). Therefore, Gozo Yoshimasu’s “confession” is different from penance. He cannot insist on doing that different type of confession openly. Instead, he does it as if he were a thief stealing things from the West (Christianity), while having a certain sense of shame and guilt for not being able to do it in an orthodox fashion.

What is important in this sense is the fact that he wrote “God probably won’t count” (「神は、おそらく、数をかぞえない、」) (47) in the title piece, “*The Other Voice*.” When he wrote the poems that were included in *The Other Voice* and in the collection *Tenjo no Hebi, Murasaki no Hana* [*Snake of Heaven, Bloom of Violet*] (2005), I believe that Yoshimasu had a certain conflicted feeling between counting and not counting. In *Goro-goro*, in the section where he reads Satoshi Ukai’s critical remark on Shijon Kim (金時鐘), a great Korean poet who writes in Japanese, we can see his perception, “numbers aren’t counted” (「数がかぞえられてはいない。」) (45). He continues: “Don’t count the numbers, don’t count the numbers, Leibniz was wrong,” (「かゾエないことだ、かゾエッないことだ。

ライプニッツハ間違っていた、……。』) (46). He quotes Leibniz's words, "Music is the pleasure the human mind experiences from counting without being aware that it is counting" in "Bach," included in *The Other Voice* (120). In "Bach," there is a quote from the Gospel According to St. John, "I am a child Christian, I am a child Christian / Jesus 'stooped down, and started to write on the ground'" (「ぼくは子供のクリスチャン、ぼくは子供のクリスチャン / イエスは 〴身をかゝめ、指で地面に何か書きはじめた。」), and the poet even says, "we are, too" (「ぼくもそうだろうよ」) (119). If writing poems is like Jesus's writing, and creating music, as the act of human mental counting is a Christian act, then we are allowed to go back to *Goro-goro* in order to see that the poet is trying to choose "not to count." That corresponds with "god not counting the numbers" in "*The Other Voice*." God, according to the orthodox teachings of Christianity (God of not "child" but adult Christians), exists as a "god that counts" in Yoshimasu. Therefore, confession, as the act of counting one's sins, is an act appropriate in the eyes of God. In this case, God is a god that designs and judges. On the other hand, a "god that doesn't count" is a "god that doesn't judge." "God that doesn't judge" in this case is not a "god of love," as described in Pauline theology. It is rather a god *as* the world where individual things are not separated, but are put together like a thread of twill, that is, a non-Christian god. It is not wrong to say that it is a deeper god that has existed even from before Christianity was born. In Section 2, I said that Yoshimasu crushed a monotheistical god of Christianity and transformed it to something like Asian god(s). Therefore, the landing point here is the one where he no longer needs to use the word "god." For example, it is more like an animistic "god" as described by cultural anthropologist Keiji Iwata in *Kami to kami* [*God and gods*] (Iwata's *Dogen tono Taiwa* [*Dialogue with Dogen*] was one of Yoshimasu's favorite books). Yoshimasu's god that does not count appears here.

It's not that Christianity is nullified. As Yoshimasu said to Sokurov, some Japanese people took on a sense of confession, unlike I-novels, due to the impact of Christianity. That confessional trajectory tended to deny and cut the confessor off from horizontal human relations. For Yoshimasu, who came across Christianity and dedicated all his strength to it when he was a boy, at a most sensitive age, this intention of cutting oneself off from mundane situations has never changed. That's why Yoshimasu's poems cut off his past self-expressions one after another from his present urge to express a heretofore unarticulated region. For Yoshimasu, all things in the past (including the poems he has written so far) cannot be affirmed as they are. They must be denied as a departure point to reach something "beyond" (and that's why readers are left behind). This denial of self, of status quo, is the form of life Christianity showed to Yoshimasu. Therefore, even if Christian penance can be abandoned, "confession," or "avowal" as a sense of confession, cannot be abandoned. For that is a mode of confession that doesn't count or that doesn't make a recitation of sins. Confession that is offered by a non-guilty or innocent self ——— it is a "confession" not directed toward the inner self but directed out to the "world."

So, we might even call it "fake confession." We do not need Foucault to see that the confession system of Christianity contributed to form a subject which harbors Nietzschean resentment. It means that the "ideal" self is fabricated, but what a "fake confession" creates is the self that deviates in other directions and becomes multiplied, multi-layered. It is a view that does not see individual objects of the world as isolated pieces, but sees them as continuous and contiguous, as parts of a pathway leading to the world itself. It is the schizophrenic self that is not integrated, yet corresponds to various segments of the world instantly. What is pursued here is the subject like the eyes of an ant or a blind turtle that goes down toward a narrow place accidentally, or something like a screen or a water mirror that projects the world, to borrow from another of Yoshimasu's metaphors (107, 108). It is rather "self-annihilation," or nullification of the "I" seen in I-novels. We can also say that it is an ethical choice coming from the love taught by Jesus Christ. Yoshimasu is a poet who tries to see the pathway to the world by cutting off and denying narcissism, not, as often criticized, a narcissist who constantly records personal matters that happen around him. However, that can only be done *through* his own subjectivity (it cannot be done by securing the impregnable subject at a safe distance from others and world). Therefore, one needs to crush oneself into fine pieces. It will become for Yoshimasu an ethical challenge to fragment, scatter, and spread the self that "I" does not own and make it multi-layered and mysterious.

How is America related to Christianity in *Goro-goro*? The pathway to the question goes through Emily Dickinson. Dickinson, in whom Yoshimasu has had a vested interest since the 1990s, connects America and him with a

unique path. In a collection of dialogues between Yoshimasu and Hiromasa Ichimura, a Japanese thinker, entitled *Kono Jidai no Fuchi de* [*At the Edge of this Era*] published in 1998, Yoshimasu says, “I grew up near the military base. America came, and if I am to live longer from now on, I wish to know what lies at the heart of that country... perhaps, because I have nothing to dispose of, I want to pursue the core of the heart. So, I am now concentrating on reading poems of a wonderful poet Emily Dickinson. ... Emily stayed single all her life. She didn’t step out of her house during her last 25 years. That person’s eyes, they are a ‘different sets of eyes,’ too. If I am given a chance to see the America that Emily saw with those ghostly eyes of hers, through ‘different sets of eyes,’ I wonder whether I can form a circle once again and shake hands with those people with blue eyes who came with chocolate, riding a Chrysler. I have a dream to go on a trip of this vision” (147-148). Dickinson is quoted frequently in *Goro-goro* as well, as is in *The Other Voice*. Yet, in my opinion, the most significant poem by Dickinson in *Goro-goro* is not directly quoted by the poet. It is the following.

How happy is the little Stone
That rambles in the Road alone,
And does’nt care about Careers
And Exigencies never fears -
Whose Coat of elemental Brown
A passing Universe put on,
And independent as the sun,
Associates or glows alone,
Fulfilling absolute Decree
In casual simplicity - (579)

Dickinson’s “little stone” in this poem is connected to the “gravel of Tamagawa” that Yoshimasu portrays, as he says, “I am a gravel of Tamagawa that was soaked in water and baptized” (「ワタクシハ、多摩川の小石ガ、水に漬けられて、洗礼を受けたモノだ」). Dickinson could never feel at ease with the official Christian belief, but sometimes wrote poems full of deep faith, even though she was being tormented by religious doubt. She wrote these poems as she was clearly conscious that she pulled herself away from church as a system and that she was a kind of misfit. Therefore, the faith that appears in her poems was fixated barely by the action of metaphors alone that no one else can imitate, as is the “little stone” in this poem. The “little stone” can fulfill “absolute decree,” even though it is so small, because of the amazing spark of the detail, that is, the coat of “elemental Brown” which “a passing Universe” puts on it. The brown color that was put on, as time went by, is the living evidence of the little stone’s life,

and it is something that is generally regarded as a stain. Nevertheless, Dickinson, as a poet, sees it and reinterprets (or discovers) it as the beautiful brown coat in the form of metaphor. We may see this as her way of making peace with God for a fleeting moment. And this “Brown” leads almost directly to the “red of rust” of Yoshimasu.

We can read the reflection of this poem’s vision in the most excellent part, the climax of *Goro-goro*. (**Citation 3**) “Flying doubly in the sky within a fossil (between grey and green) / Birds flying, one and one more / Shade and the shade of grey —who picked up the broken branch? / I don’t know, that summer (between green and grey) / I picked up the summer / Go on, pass me by, universe, — / I will pick up your back / Everything that is picked” (「化石ノ中ノ空ヲ、二重ニ、(灰色ト、ミドリノあいダ)、飛んデルノあいダ)、飛んデル／トリハ、一羽ト一羽／蔭ト灰

Citation 3

化石ノ中ノ空ヲ、二重ニ、(灰色ト、ミドリノあいダ)、飛んデル
トリハ、一羽ト一羽
蔭ト灰色ノ蔭——枝折りを、ひろったのハ誰？
誰ダカ、判らない(緑色トハイノあいだノ)夏ヲ、
わたくしハ、ひろいあげた
透り、過ぎるガよい、宇宙、——
その背ヲ、わたくしは、ひろう
ひろハれた、すべーテ

色ノ蔭——枝折りを、ひろったのハ誰？／誰ダカ、判らない（緑色トハイノあいだノ）夏ヲ、／わたくしハ、ひろいあげた／透り、過ぎるガよい、宇宙、——／その背ヲ、わたくしは、ひろーう／ひろハーれた、すべーテ」(102-103). In terms of the “universe passing by,” Yoshimasu relates himself (“gravel of Tamagawa”) to Dickinson’s little stone. Here, he affirms the behavior of the “universe” passing by and leaving him behind by saying, “Go on, pass me by.” Picking up the “back” of the passing “universe” is Yoshimasu’s intention in writing poems, and “everything that is picked” is cosubstantial with the poems he has written. The overall theme of *Goro-goro*, as expressed in the words, “rust is something we can bear to see,” discussed earlier, matches Dickinson’s motif of affirming the stain on a little stone as a beautiful brown coat. Unlike Dickinson, Yoshimasu cannot write that he was given “decree” himself. Not because he is not a Christian in an orthodox sense, but because the Christian god can be also regarded as just one version, seen from older gods like the ancient gods of Asia. We can even say that there is no longer a need for the word “god” if we can arrive into another experience of the world (“universe”). The sensitivity toward “little stone” of a lonely American poet who was separated from communal consecration of the church system is in concert with the sensitivity of a postwar Japanese poet. The water in which the “gravel of Tamagawa” was soaked was Japanese water and, at the same time, American water. I am not sure whether I should call those waters miscible or immiscible, but I am certain that the gigantic power of history had an effect on this water, which created a certain poet.

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