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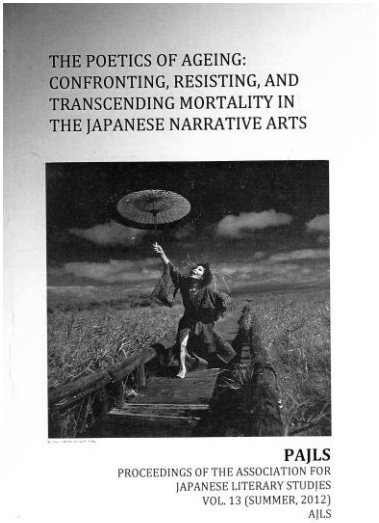

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New Whines in Old Skins: The Recluse in Contemporary Japanese Literature

Maryellen T. Mori

Ōe Kenzaburō 大江健三郎 (b. 1935) and Mori Makiko 森万紀子 (1934-1992) are among the many modern Japanese authors who have written fiction that explores the nature of reclusion. These works encourage readers to consider possible connections between the pre-modern Japanese recluse tradition and the recluse as s/he is portrayed in fiction shaped by the very different socio-historical conditions of recent times. Is the recluse resurrected in a spirit of appreciation and cultural continuity, or merely to produce a range of humorous effects through caricature? In either case, which aspects of the mentality and behavior of the pre-modern recluse do these authors choose to highlight, which to downplay or jettison, which to use as a basis for their innovations?

In *Inja no bungaku: Kumon suru bi* 隠者の文学：苦悶する美 (Recluse Literature: Beauty in Torment, 1968), Ishida Yoshisada 石田吉貞 contends that the genuine recluse renounces not only society but humanity; that utter solitude generates indescribable pain; and that this particular kind of pain is vital to the exquisite spiritual and aesthetic rewards that become available to him, in his thatched hut in the wilderness, once his perceptions have been transformed by social deprivation and physical hardships. Satō Masahide 佐藤正英 maintains in *Inton no shisō: Saigyō o megutte* 隠遁の思想：西行をめぐって (The Mind of a Recluse: Saigyō's World, 1977) that in the Heian and Kamakura eras many men were motivated to renounce society and live alone in some borderland in order to contemplate the question: "What is the nature of my original place and ultimate refuge?" (彼岸の原郷世界はおのれにとって一体如何なる世界であるのか, 75). The recluse's orientation is fundamentally paradoxical because his "place of origins and return" is a purely private concept.

Satō and some other scholars of reclusion imply that self-extinction on every level, including physical death, is the perfect realization of the recluse ideal. In *Inja wa meguru* 隠者はめぐる (Hermits Keep Going On, 2009), Tomioka Taeko 富岡多恵子

prioritizes the issue of funding. How does a recluse of any era who has ostensibly renounced direct participation in society's systems of production, generate the income or secure the patronage necessary to survive? Komatsu Kazuhiko's 小松和彦 essay "*Yosute to sanchū takai-kan*" 世捨てと山中他界観 (Renunciation and the View of the Mountain as Other World, 1972) explores through a folklorist lens the nature of Japanese world-renunciation and reclusion. When an individual renounces the realm of communal "daily life" (155) to live in a threshold zone, whether wilderness or village periphery, s/he becomes aligned with attributes and values that oppose those of community life and thus threaten its integrity. Analogous to the African bush, such a borderland is a place where gods and demons dwell and where humans encounter spirits of the deceased. A person who lives there is despised as dangerous and evil, but s/he is endowed with paranormal abilities and shamanic functions.

Many scholars believe that the intellectual and emotional patterns of reclusion established in ancient times deeply inflect the Japanese psyche. Ishida, Satō, and Sakurai Yoshirō 桜井好郎 offer examples from various works of modern literature to demonstrate the persistence of the pre-modern reclusive sensibility. The paradigms that these and other scholars of reclusion have proposed can contribute to our understanding of how established concepts of reclusion have been assimilated and transformed in the modern literary texts under discussion.

"Kaku-jidai no mori no intonsha" 核時代の森の隠遁者 (A Forest Hermit in the Nuclear Age, 1968; hereafter "Intonsha") is a brief coda to Ōe's gorgeously complicated, symphonic novel *Man'en gannen no futtobōru* 万延元年のフットボール (Football in the First Year of Man'en, 1967; tr. *The Silent Cry*, 1974; hereafter *Cry*), which features several of the same characters and their concerns. It is a compact short story that is richly complex and suggestive in its own right, and also inspires fresh interpretations of the novel on which it is based. "Intonsha" takes the form of a letter written by the former head monk at a temple in a remote valley of Shikoku. It is addressed to Mitsusaburō (Mitsu), a native of the same locale, who departed for Africa over a year before.

The opening of "Intonsha" meshes smoothly with the conclusion of *Cry*, in which the brooding intellectual Mitsu, who

has spent considerable time down in the dumps, metaphorically and literally, has resolved to forsake Japan for the sunny wilds of Africa. He envisions leading an energetic, socially engaged life there while pursuing his dream of freedom, emblemized by life in a thatched hut. In *Cry*, Ōe deftly makes use of various connotations of "thatched hut" (37), both within Japanese culture and across cultures. He lets these blend and blur, rather than neatly juxtaposing them; by doing so, he invites his reader to join in imagining new permutations arise and vanish as the narrative progresses. For Mitsu, the thatched hut seems to signify the warm, communal environment of childhood in his old-fashioned, rural hometown. But because of Mitsu's reclusive personality, the image may also conjure up the solitary dwelling, usually in mountain or forest, of a pre-modern Japanese hermit. In the context of Mitsu's romantic dream of exotic adventures in the tropics or subtropics, the "thatched hut" evokes a humble but idyllic abode. Here its occupant is released from the burdens of his past and from his society's rules and expectations, so he can access his stifled "individual self" and savor a kind of freedom.

At the beginning of *Cry*, Mitsu returns to his native village in search of "the thatched hut of the old days" (59), a metaphor for his spiritual homeland; it encompasses his origins (including his personal and cultural roots) and the new, revitalized life that he hopes will spring from those roots. Reconnecting with his past might release him from his current apathy and alienation; paradoxically, this would also be a kind of freedom. But he finds that the dream-hut fashioned from nostalgic memories is gone, or perhaps it never existed. The filthy outdoor pit where Mitsu sits at the outset of the novel and the secret stone cellar where he ensconces himself near the novel's end are also versions of his "homeland." They are simultaneously symbols of womb and tomb, and thus they too are analogous to the "place of origins and final destiny" that Satō describes. Mitsu withdraws to the reassuring darkness of cramped underground spaces to ruminate in solitude and also to luxuriate in regressive pleasures. In contrast, life in a thatched hut is conducive to maintaining a hopeful, even exhilarating sense of expectation, of new beginnings. Like Ishida's recluse, Mitsu also craves these sensations; but to experience them, he probably must be alone in his thatched hut. These two recurring

images, the thatched hut and the subterranean enclosure, seem to manifest distinctly different aspects of reclusion; they are one pair of images that can express its paradoxical nature. Yet they cannot be polarized; each in itself is multifaceted and includes associations that overlap with the other.

In "Intonsha," Ōe continues his reflection on the paradoxical and slippery nature of reclusion, now from the Buddhist monk's vantage point. The monk informs Mitsu that having chanced to see him on television in a news clip featuring an adventurous Japanese man in an African wilderness, the monk had awakened to the cause of all the hardships and misery that he had suffered in his lifetime. He had been unconsciously "yearning for 'freedom'" (365) but because freedom is a tantalizing illusion, a subjective concept with no external referent, its pursuit is like a "chronic case of starvation." (365) In the news clip Mitsu had appeared utterly disgruntled, isolated, and weary. Had he perhaps realized that his dream of the invigorating new life symbolized by the thatched hut was no more attainable in Africa than it had been in his native valley? That like the medieval recluse described by Satō, his vision was not to be actualized in this world? Judging from the expression on his face, Mitsu had seemed to be on the verge of succumbing to the lure of the pit. The monk's realization had had another facet. He had always considered himself, a traditional Buddhist monk living in a backward little valley, to be worlds apart from Mitsu, a skeptical, well-educated, cosmopolitan intellectual. But the two of them are quite alike, he had decided; they are fellow solitaries, nurtured yet tormented by their utopian dreams.

The letter's preamble situates the story's dominant motif—the pursuit of freedom—within a cluster of images connoting the kinds of mental and physical pain that afflict both Mitsu and the monk: starvation, confinement, isolation, shame, failure. These images revive scenes from *Cry*, of Mitsu in the pit dug for a septic tank and in the stone cellar, where an ancestor who had led a muddled local uprising had sequestered himself for years. The preamble resonates powerfully with the interpretations of reclusion advanced in the studies by Ishida and Satō. And the life-affirming and death-seeking images that it combines are treated as thoroughly enmeshed and unstable. So too are the

identities of Mitsu, the monk, and another character from *Cry* of whom the reader is reminded: the constantly gorging yet chronically ravenous Fat Woman Jin. Jin's death from starvation is instrumental to advancing the narrative action of "Intonsha," and her specter continues to reinforce the starvation motif. But Mitsu and the monk, together with the forest-hermit Giichirō (Gii), are the focal points of the story, and they are developed as a composite; the "intonsha" of the story's title embraces the three male characters.

This preamble lays the groundwork for the story's elaboration of a dynamic and fluid narrative space, in which characters and their convictions, ideals, and aims, their behavior and social personae, statuses and roles are constantly converging and diverging, switching positions and reversing course, turning into their opposites. Within this tense and effervescent atmosphere of everyone and everything in motion—a vertiginous world of shifting and recombining fragments—a meditation on reclusion is being performed, its definitions and parameters reconsidered, reshaped, expanded, by way of a constant dialectical process of affirming, then subverting, then reconfiguring the concept. A revised portrait of reclusion emerges that synchronizes with established concepts of the phenomenon, but that imbues them with new dimensions and emphases. Particularly provocative among these revisions are the story's foregrounding of self-sacrifice as a primary expression of the recluse's pain, and its consideration of the possibility of creating a "recluse collective," in an idyllic, remote setting, as an earthly version of utopia.

As the reader of *Cry* will recall, years prior to Mitsu's departure for Africa, the monk's wife had run off with another man, and since then the monk had been an object of pity and a target of mild ridicule among the valley residents. But his wife suddenly returns to the temple with two female children in tow and insists upon resuming married life with the monk. Together the couple becomes an intense focus of the community's disapproval and degradation. The monk's flock ousts him from the temple and builds the family a tiny hovel outside the village. The location would be an exemplary borderland, except that unlike the traditional recluse's refuge, it lacks natural scenic beauty; it is a wretched plot of land, formerly the site of a Korean ghetto, and

afterwards, of a disastrous chicken-breeding experiment. Consistent with the recluse motif, the hut is a flimsy structure, full of crevices. But the drafty dwelling is not intended to facilitate the monk's contemplation of the temporary nature of his abode or of his oneness with the natural world outside. Rather, the coop-like hut has been designed to enable the villagers to spy on the odd couple late at night and to collect new material for the demeaning rumors that they circulate about them. The entire family of outcasts is shunned and harassed. The motif of starvation is preserved and that of scapegoating is introduced; the henpecked monk with the pleasant, egg-shaped face is being readied for a new position.

A turning point in the tale occurs when Jin dies of starvation, having shrunk from an obese monstrosity to a wraith. The valley residents send a signal to the monk (in the form of a symbolic food offering left outside his hut) that they regard him as eligible to assume the role of Jin's successor as "sacrificial lamb" (贖罪羊, 376). They need someone to blame for whatever goes wrong in the valley, a person who embodies their fears and anxieties. Only the most conspicuously pathetic outsider is fit to function as the "garbage pit" (376) into which the valley folk can toss their negative feelings and be alleviated (at least mentally) of their burdens. As the roles and identities of the physically starved Jin and the psychologically starving monk start to merge, a peculiar union starts brewing between the categories of Buddhist recluse and sacrificial lamb.

The monk is delighted at the prospect of assuming the scapegoat role and thereby intensifying his abjection, presumably in preparation for an excruciating death. Not only will he refine his understanding of freedom, but he will surely regain the valley people's respect and affection. He foresees that they will forsake the services of the monk who has replaced him at the temple, a callow neophyte who knows nothing of such suffering. They will flock to seek the guidance of this very monk, who must somehow remain the object of their scorn and abuse, if he is to preserve the credibility that he will recover in return for being their scapegoat! This mental twist on the monk's part prefigures the later convoluted narrative developments. The monk's grandiosity escalates in inverse proportion to his diminishing dignity; he

predicts that after his death he will be venerated as the guardian deity of this valley. In the midst of shame and squalor, greed and ambition arise within the monk and run rampant, in utter contradiction to the vows and values appropriate to a Buddhist monk, and certainly to a world-renouncing recluse.

The reader senses that Ōe is aiming his satirical arrows at many different targets at once. The sacrificial lamb that bears others' burdens, placates the god(s), dispels misfortunes, expiates sins, and so forth, is of course laden with Judeo-Christian connotations. But the figure of a heretofore mild, self-effacing, long-suffering Buddhist monk whose worldly and otherworldly ambitions are ignited and run wild suggest that Ōe is also skewering greedy and resentful Buddhist clergy of all eras. Furthermore, he seems to be slyly exposing the duplicity of pre-modern Japanese recluse-literati who posed as indifferent to readers and renown, but could not quell their impulses to create, and even managed to circulate their compositions. This connection seems to be confirmed later in the story when the monk appropriates the poetic outpourings of the innocent hermit Gii and dismisses him as mad. He uses Gii's words to bolster and add another dimension to his own public persona and thus to enhance his future possibilities—for worldly leadership and afterlife deification. The monk claims that it is he who has decoded Gii's nearly incoherent ravings and shaped them into a beautiful poem about the perils of the nuclear age and the reinvigorating potential of forest life. The poem is as much a lyrical celebration of the joys and wonders of forest life as it is a sermon. It thus affirms Gii's literary flair (also noted in *Cry*) and thereby his link to medieval recluses who valued aesthetics as much as religious insight.

As the monk's intensifying abjection is conjoined with his escalating ambitions, he is caught up not only in a rivalry with his successor at the temple, but in a more insidious and complex competition with the gentle, gullible Gii. Gii conforms most closely to the popular image of a recluse. He has acquired preternatural powers and extraordinary wisdom during his decades of painful solitude and communion with nature. But now he realizes that he might be able to capitalize on his spiritual resources. Not only does he hope to reinstate his membership in the valley community; he wishes to be recognized and revered as a

venerable village elder, a sage and a shaman, a prophet, a preacher, a poet, and a revolutionary leader. He changes from a humble, pacifistic, forest-dwelling hermit; to a pest whose rejected bid for acceptance from the valley community turns him into a noisy, pushy nuisance; and finally into a violent, bamboo-spear-wielding maniac. Eventually he leaps to his death in a fiery pit, shrieking his apocalyptic poetry, and goes down in flames like a devil.

This climactic moment of the story—Gii's sacrificial death in the pit—is richly suggestive on many levels, one of which is the total entangling of the issues of identity and sacrifice that have been treated throughout the story, separately and together. Gii's immolated corpse reminds the monk of a Hiroshima bomb victim; the burnt and blackened figure merges recluse with sacrificial lamb. Gii's death enables the calculating monk to usurp all of Gii's actual and imagined roles. The community as a whole ends Gii's life by their callous behavior, but it is the monk who steals his dreams and his legacy. Gii's death in a pit underscores the fundamental continuity among him and Mitsu and the monk, and perhaps is meant to justify the monk's absorption of Gii's greater vitality and of his accomplishments, potential and actual, into himself. Flush with self-confidence and energy after Gii's death, the monk seems ready to utilize his expanded persona to launch his exciting new life.

Near the end of his letter, the monk reports that after Gii's death there has been a steady exodus of valley residents to unknown destinations. The monk is regarded as a paragon of freedom, and people often stop by his hut to seek his advice before embarking on new lives. He plans to stay here, an outcast in a miserable hovel, until every last person has left this loathsome place. He hopes that by then some of them will have established a utopian commune in the forest; he wants to take his family and follow them there, and install himself as the community shaman. (The descriptions of the threshold zones in this story—the forest and the village periphery—and the liminal characteristics, supernatural powers, and shamanic roles of the individuals who become strongly identified with them, are consistent with Komatsu's thesis in his above-cited essay).

What are we to make of the monk's apparent complete change of attitude toward the possibility of actualizing one's

dream of freedom on earth? The reader is left pondering the oxymoronic notion of "a community of forest hermits" as a viable goal, a utopian collective in an earthly forest that is both borderland and homeland, a contemporary alternative to a Buddhist afterworld such as Amida's Pure Land. Where are we to situate this collective hermitage in the context of Japanese reclusion? Does it represent a stage beyond solitary reclusion, or perhaps an ephemeral vogue, roughly coinciding with 1960s Japan? Possibly it has been constructed as a cultural hybrid that admirably participates in global trends while retaining some of the core values of pre-modern Japanese reclusion. Does the entire story simply spoof the obsolete category of reclusion through a narrative that uses carnivalesque literary techniques to achieve deconstructive goals and zany effects? Is the main function of "Intonsha" to further enrich its lush source-novel by presenting some of that work's reclusion-related themes from the viewpoint of one of its novel's minor characters? But that viewpoint remains opaque; the chummy, confessional tone of the first-person narrative voice seems to fluctuate among pseudo-sincerity, cynicism, and self-mockery, and finally to veer off into naïve romanticism, which might be another decoy in the monk's bag of tricks.

The conclusion suggests that the monk believes and wishes Mitsu to believe that Gii's call to action and his probable suicide were not in vain, that he inspired a wave of exiles from village to forest in search of freedom. But it also implies that this sea change would never have come about without the monk's mediation on several levels. The details of Gii's life in the forest are utterly unknown; there is only speculation, as in the case of those hermits of antiquity whose lives vanished into thin air. But the monk dwells on an accessible periphery. And perhaps most importantly, the monk, unlike Gii, is an effective communicator, at least in the monk's version of events. This is probably why Gii must lose and the monk triumph in the end. So perhaps we can say that Ōe awards laurels to the self-avowed writer, even when the vision he communicates is derived from a more original and poetic thinker than himself.

The monk has won the people's hearts, or at least their tolerance, by accepting the role of valley scapegoat and sacrificial

victim. Does their continued good will toward him depend upon his remaining in this role, or will life in the forest make obsolete the need for a scapegoat? If he manages to install himself as the hermit community's leader and shaman, what will be the basis of his authority? The monk refers to Gii's poetic preaching as the voice of "a person crying in the wilderness" (野に叫ぶ人, 380), implying that at this time the monk already considers himself the community's "savior." How can he continue to claim either Jin or Gii as his precursor if he tries to evade his accepted destiny as sacrificial lamb?

The reader may suspect that the monk has no intention of ever seeking out any of the valley folk who have so recently thirsted for his blood. Playing the scapegoat may be a ruse for laying waste the entire valley that he secretly feels has ruined his life. By the tale's "happy ending" the monk is well on his way to dispatching all of the valley residents in the guise of saving them. Now he may well abandon his family and flee alone to some desolate borderland to continue his reclusive life in true solitude, free from the threat of being "sacrificed." (Perhaps Mitsu will find him and occasionally visit him.) If a singlehanded, grand-scale vendetta is indeed present as a subtext, it surely inscribes a stunning reversal into the narrative, and it provides an awesome testament to the paradoxical nature of the reclusive personality.

The Biblical allusions in the story, together with the whole concept of a sacrificial lamb—a pariah that is persecuted, fattened up for its slaughter, then glorified as a god after its death—make the reader wonder to what degree this nexus of images and metaphors are an expression of the mood of anger and disillusionment with all things Western that many Japanese were feeling during the anti-Security Treaty era in which the story was written. Why and how do the ideas of scapegoating and human sacrifice that permeate "Intonsha" fit into the utopian vision that is enunciated at the story's end? Depictions of these phenomena are used in the service of bawdy and slapstick humor as well as of irony. Far from being denounced as absurd or abhorrent, these behaviors are celebrated as leading to beneficial social outcomes. The reader cannot escape the feeling that s/he is being challenged to consider their real-life counterparts as not only funny, but also

inevitable and desirable. (Another story by Ōe that was published in 1968, "*Ikenie otoko wa hitsuyō ka*" 生け贄男は必要か [Is a sacrificial man necessary?] also indicates that the author was grappling intensely with these issues at the time. Taking this work into consideration deepens readers' understanding of the significance and narrative role of sacrifice in Ōe's literature of this period.)

Must we assume that incorporating a "sacrificial man" into the Japanese literary category of reclusion represents an infusion of foreign ideologies, for whatever reason? Might there have been a contemporaneous, compelling Japanese version of "sacrificial man" that at least partially contributed to Ōe's merger of the categories of recluse and scapegoat-sacrifice? The images of starvation, confinement in small enclosures, of pits and other subterranean spaces, of self-degradation and sacrifice—all somehow connected to the recluse's pursuit of "freedom"—are woven through *Man'en* and even more intensely concentrated and scrutinized in "Intonsha." It is possible that despite, or perhaps reinforced by, Judeo-Christian parallels, inspiration for this remarkable nexus of images was provided by the self-mummified Shingon ascetics of Tōhoku, most of whom practiced at Mt. Yudono and in the nearby valley of Senninzawa during the Edo period. The ascetics' corpses were supposedly discovered around 1950-1960. The men performed years of arduous fasting and other austerities, and most were buried alive in stone cellars. Aided by a breathing tube, an ascetic would continue to chant sutras and strike his bell until he finally starved to death. There is a merely a passing reference to the mummies in *Cry* (109); but the title of John Bester's English translation seems to convey brilliantly the subtle link between the starvation-and-pit imagery in the novel and the excruciating lives and deaths of those ascetics. After an ascetic's interment, his muffled voice would be audible from deep within the earth, as if crying out to his fellow ascetics still living above the ground.

The mummies' discovery provoked a media sensation, and quite a few articles and books on the topic have appeared, beginning in the early 1960s. (Naitō Masatoshi's 内藤正敏 nuanced study is especially compelling.) The unveiling of those grotesque figures must have enflamed the cultural imagination,

and the phenomenon probably began creeping into works of fiction, to different degrees and in different forms. Might these rare ascetics, who undertook such painful types of self-mortification in the name of liberation—political as well as religious, some say—have sparked a resurgence of interest in the hermit ideal and even facilitated its association with notions of sacrifice and collective reclusion?

The author Mori Makiko hailed from Yamagata Prefecture, where Mt. Yudono is located. Her short story "Unga no aru machi" 運河のある町 (A Canal District, 1982) takes up the subject of the Tōhoku mummies directly. Mori uses this esoteric practice as a point of departure for attempting to clarify, from a gender-sensitive perspective, the impetus behind the behavior of a female recluse, and for creating a clever and subtle critique of "mummyhood" (in both senses). "Unga" concerns a young woman, Yuiko, whose discomfort with all facets of conventional life has led her to embrace the Shingon doctrine of *sokushin jōbutsu* 即身成仏, becoming a Buddha in this very body. Partly in emulation of the ascetics who mummified themselves to demonstrate their dedication to this ideal, Yuiko has been starving herself to death. Now in the final phase of her life, she has severed all of her social ties and come to live as a hermit in a deserted building in a district of rivers and canals near Tokyo Bay. Here in this "borderland," she figuratively buries herself alive as she continues her meditation on a tantric "seed-syllable" (*shuji* 種子) that serves as her mantra and object of visualization: "Ron" ロン. Ron is a male "seed" within her that contains the essence of immortal male beauty, whose supreme exemplar, in Yuiko's view, is Miroku Bosatsu 弥勒菩薩 (Maitreya Bodhisattva), the future Buddha-savior. According to esoteric Buddhism, each deity is symbolized by one or more "seed syllables" that are believed to contain that deity's essence in concentrated form. Yuiko names her imaginary consort "Ron" and equates him with Miroku. Yuiko will enter her "homeland" when through her austerities she becomes capable of projecting her mental word into flesh. Miroku/ Ron will manifest himself in this world as a result of her sustained spiritual efforts over countless reincarnations.

Yuiko's version of utopia is a groundbreaking revision of the *sokushin jōbutsu* doctrine that interweaves Buddhist, aesthetic,

feminist, and transgender strands. Yuiko rejects as an object of veneration the mummy she saw at her local temple in childhood; despite her fascination with it, she was repelled by its ugliness and diabolical grisliness. Yet even at the time, she intuited some kinship between her and the man who had had such ardent spiritual aspirations. To her innocent way of thinking, his mummy was full of physical "seeds;" if she could obtain some of those seeds and plant them, they would surely produce magical children, a Kaguya-hime かぐや姫 and a Momotarō 桃太郎 (71). In a sense, the beautiful androgyne Miroku/Ron represents the continuation into adulthood of that fairy-tale fantasy of miraculous children. Yuiko is a paradigmatic recluse in the sense defined by Satō; she must live alone in a borderland, devote herself to contemplating Ron, and defer fulfillment to some future life.

The dominant discourse on Japanese reclusion is premised on a concept of reclusion as a phenomenon that exists on a continuum, and it deems the more extreme forms of worldly renunciation to be purer and more authentic (and hence "superior" to) partial detachment from secular life and its values and objectives. Yuiko's extreme isolation, her fanatical devotion to Buddhist methods of self-liberation, and her total indifference to social norms and worldly concerns would seem to situate her closer to the gold standard of the recluse ideal than any of the three hermits in "Intonsha." But clearly she has not succeeded in "cutting through spiritual materialism"; rather, she has self-deceptively redefined the most ordinary human desires as spiritual aspirations. What is more, she fancies that her efforts will lead, eons hence, to her apotheosis as a Buddhist Immaculate Conception, a kind of whip-cracking Miroku-Madonna. She will attain this status without any male intervention, whether human, divine, saintly, or scientific.

During their final encounter, a female relative who had occasionally supported Yuiko in the past scolds her for being a whiny moocher; she tosses some money at her and bids her good riddance. Yuiko chooses a premature death rather than continuing to seek the resources to prolong either a search for a niche in society or her nun-like cloistered existence. There are interesting correspondences between Yuiko and the hermits in "Intonsha." Gii's failure to garner support from his original community leaves

him with no recourse but to die. Unlike Yuiko and Gii, the village temple monk is independently wealthy. He has the means to indefinitely indulge his tastes for contemplation and self-debasement as well as his power fantasies. These stories compel the reader to ponder a point, all too easily dismissed as crude or frivolous, to which Tomioka Taeko repeatedly returns in her study of reclusion: Who foots the bill?

Tomioka relates an amusing anecdote that encapsulates her perspective on reclusion. A woman approached a female Buddhist clergyperson for advice on how to renounce worldly life and enter the Buddhist Path. With Zenlike spontaneity the monk quipped, "Do you have money?" Just in case her compassionate slap had failed to induce *satori*, the monk went on to explain that without this vital credential, the woman would always be treated as a drudge at any temple that deigned to admit her (139). One can only wonder if this particular aspiring recluse opted for an early death.

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