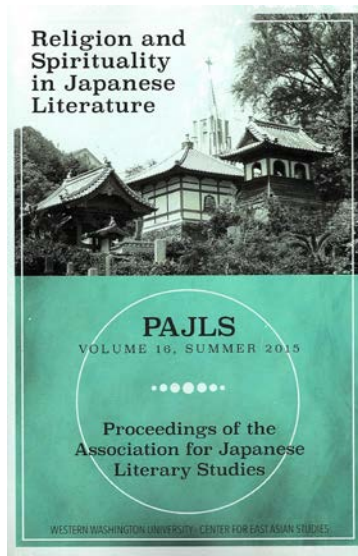


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## *Christianity and the Question of Faith in Kunikida Doppo's Thought*

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The initial Japanese encounter with the Western religious tradition is well known. Arrival of the Jesuits and Roman Catholicism in the mid-sixteenth century ushered in a period of successful missionary work, with a significant number of converts (about 300,000, or 2% of the total population). Some have even called this Japan's "Christian century" (1549-1639). Seeing a serious foreign threat, however, and fearing disruption of social stability and the delicate balance of power in their recently reunified realm, the Tokugawa *bakufu* eventually took drastic measures against the imported religion. In the early seventeenth century, a series of decrees was issued that moved from banning Christianity, to persecution of its adherents and expulsion of all foreign priests. Severe restrictions were now placed on all forms of exchange with the outside world. What little remained of Christianity in Japan went underground.

Some two centuries later, however, facing a new foreign threat – American gunboats – Japan opened up again. The Meiji Restoration (1868) that followed ignited a process of Westernization in all sectors of Japan's culture, economy and society, leading to the influx of new technology, the birth of new ideas, and the proliferation of new schools of thought. Exposure to the Western world also led to renewal of contact with Christianity.

Christianity thrived among the younger generations of Meiji intellectuals, who viewed it as the true repository of the Western cultural tradition and as an effective tool for understanding Western thought and civilization. Its rapid spread was facilitated by a major political development: in 1873, the government began to ease the Tokugawa prohibitions against the Christian faith. In that one year, the missionary force more than doubled, leading to an exponential growth in the number of churches and believers throughout the country. The socio-political dynamics of the 1870s added significantly to this development: the "new" religion—as it was perceived by many—soon became associated with social protest and political reform. Christianity, in fact, found important common ground with the Meiji Freedom and People's Rights Movement (*Jiyū minken undō*), sharing with it the notion that all humans are

born free and equal. This movement, with its emphasis on people's rights and its commitment to social issues and women's emancipation, helped characterize Christianity as a source of moral values that superseded power, hierarchy, gender, and the State.

Several writers embraced the Christian faith upon its return to Japan during the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) periods: Wakamatsu Shizuko (1864-1896), Tokutomi Roka (1868-1927), Kitamura Tōkoku (1868-1894), Shimazaki Tōson (1872-1943), Kinoshita Naoe (1869-1937), Masamune Hakuchō (1879-1962), Arishima Takeo (1878-1923), Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, and Kunikida Doppo (1871-1908), are only some of the notable young intellectuals who were either baptized or at least deeply influenced by the religion during their formative years.

Ideas of an absolute God and perhaps especially an independent and free self promoted by Christianity often overlapped with these writers' search for answers to the meaning of human existence and the purpose of life, prompting them to probe meaningfully into the possibilities of the Christian faith and its beliefs. In this connection, it is important to note the reintroduced version of the religion was not Catholicism, as it had been in the "Christian century," but almost exclusively Protestantism, and more specifically Calvinism. The initial popularity of the reintroduced religion, and its influence on Japanese literature, must be viewed against the distinctive eschatology and worldview held by those particular denominations, particularly with respect to its demise. The doctrine of predestination—the belief that God has already chosen those who will be saved and those who will not—and the notion that man is completely depraved and without hope for redemption unless through faith, were in fact major points of contention for many writers, including Hakuchō, Arishima and Akutagawa.

Critics have noted that virtually all of these authors eventually recanted their faith, emphasizing the allegedly ephemeral character of their religious experience and so questioning the significance that such experience could have had on the development of their narrative. As these writers strove to rationalize the internal conflicts surrounding the construction of the modern self, they became, in fact, unable to address their predicaments within the dictates of orthodox Christianity, particularly with respect to its sexual constraints. As a result, they either formally apostatized, as in the case of Arishima and, to an extent, Hakuchō, or simply gradually distanced themselves from the Church. The personal tragedies of Tōkoku, Arishima, and Akutagawa, who took their

lives after years of intense engagement with the Christian religion, epitomize, according to some scholars, the paradoxical nature of their experience and their "shallow understanding of the faith."<sup>1</sup>

Despite this relationship of potential conflict, if not ultimate rejection, the connection between the realm of faith and the realm of art in modern Japanese literary discourse has been much more complex and multifaceted than scholarship on the subject has so far allowed. There is, in fact, significant evidence that Christianity played an important role in the process of self-construction of these writers, informing their narrative and critical deliberations at multiple junctures of their literary careers.

Kunikida Doppo's spiritual journey reflected, in many ways, the typical Meiji Christian experience. Doppo was an avid reader and an admirer of Yoshida Shōin (1830-1859, the renowned Tokugawa educator. But these interests lay alongside an equally great passion for politics and early on he moved from Yamaguchi to Tokyo with the hope of fulfilling his dream of becoming a successful politician. Over time, however, his interest in politics seemed to wane, as he turned to increasingly personal concerns about social injustice and inquiries into the meaning of existence, the afterlife, and the boundaries of the self. Doppo himself confirmed the existence of this type of trajectory in his life in the 1907 memoir "Ware wa ika ni shite shōsetsuka ni narishi ka" (How I Became a Novelist), where he spoke of how in his younger years a spiritual revolution had gradually replaced his early interests in politics and social success, pushing him to probe into the nature of God and the place of man in the universe. It was an internal upheaval, he acknowledged, that was strongly mediated by Christianity and that led him to even consider devoting his entire life to evangelization.<sup>2</sup>

In 1891 Doppo was baptized by Uemura Masahisa, a Christian pastor and literary critic. Originally a member of the so-called Yokohama Band, led by Reverend James Ballagh (1832-1920), Doppo was thus, like Tōkoku, Tōson, Hakuchō and others, fully exposed to the teachings of the Presbyterian doctrine. Unlike Hakuchō and Arishima, however, whose experiences culminated in

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<sup>1</sup> Sako Jun'ichirō, who has written extensively on the subject, is among those scholars who have been most skeptical about the true place of faith in the lives of these authors. See, for example, his "Meiji bungaku to kirisutokyō," *Bungaku* 30:6 (1962), 10-15, and *Kindai nihon bungaku no rinriteki tankyū* (Shinbisha, 1966).

<sup>2</sup> "Ware wa ika ni shite shōsetsuka ni narishi ka," in vol. 1 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū* (Gakushū kenkyūsha, 1965), 495-99.

unequivocal forms of public apostasy, Doppo's own later separation from the Christian religion was not as dramatic. It was instead characterized by silent negotiations surrounding the place of the self in society, a personal struggle with the irreconcilable polarities of material and spiritual life, and a profound fascination with the inscrutable mysteries of nature. In this respect, his relinquishment was similar to that of those among his fellow writers who chose passively to retreat to the backstage of their respective religious communities, albeit never ceasing to pursue a dimension of life that could help them transcend the historical constraints of the period in which they lived. With Doppo, however, one could also see a relentless and unyielding desire to define and explore the problem of faith that was not only unprecedented but probably also unmatched among his colleagues. Only Akutagawa would be able to attain the intensity of such inquiry two decades later in fictional works—his *kirishitan mono*—that cogently addressed the intersections between religion, God and modernity. Doppo's internal struggle epitomized the clash between faith and skepticism seen at the turn of the twentieth century; as one author who probed deeply into that conflict, he therefore sat squarely within the developments of those years, exemplifying the multifaceted character of the Meiji era collective response to impelling questions about God and the meaning of life.

### ***Azamukazaru no ki*: “Sincerity” and the Rejection of Self-Deceit**

Doppo's first encounter with Christianity was characterized by sentiments of elation and wonder. In his piece “Ano jibun” (In Those Days) of 1906, the young intellectual recalled the winter night of 1889 when he had accepted the invitation of a friend to attend service at the Kōjimachi church in Tokyo. On the way to the church, the friend had asked him in a serious tone whether he did not believe in the man born in Bethlehem, Jesus Christ, “the savior of humanity.” The word Bethlehem itself had struck a chord within his sensibility, and he had soon felt a fascination that was difficult to resist. Upon entering the building, Doppo had found himself in a dreamlike atmosphere: the soft and warm air that touched his cheeks, the young ladies gathered in prayer, the high ceilings and white walls, and the fragrance of the flowers that had been placed on the altar all made him feel as if he had been given “wings to fly away toward a place of purity and beauty.” Presently, the congregation began to sing, and he was struck by such expressions as “true power” or “spring of love,” some of which even aroused fear in him. The singing was followed by the pastor's passionate sermon after which there were moments of silence. It was a world he had never seen.

That night, Doppo wrote, he went back home almost in a trance. Whether he had read the Bible or joined in singing the hymns, he did not remember, but this had certainly been an experience he could never forget.<sup>3</sup>

Doppo's baptism took place approximately two years after that experience, on January 4, 1891. Little is known about the events that led to his conversion, but most scholars agree that his decision was likely externally driven, stemming mostly from a desire to contribute to the improvement of society. In essays Doppo published toward the end of 1889—the time of that special winter night he attended service in Kōjimachi—he clearly decried the wish for social success as egotistic and harmful to society, and strongly welcomed the recent rise of movements that opposed prostitution.<sup>4</sup> Although the event of his baptism was barely recorded in his diary, subsequent entries showed that during the following months he was actively involved in the activities of his religious community. He attended service regularly, held prayer meetings with the youth group of Tōkyō Senmon Gakkō where he was enrolled, and attended Uemura's lectures every Wednesday. His enthusiasm and dedication were such that during a temporary absence from Tokyo between 1891 and 1892, when he returned home to Yamaguchi prefecture, he often worried about the well being of his church community. Upon his return to the capital he sent a letter to his friend Tamura Sanji (1873-1939) expressing joy for the renewed opportunity to attend service and listen to Uemura's sermons.<sup>5</sup>

It is, however, only toward the end of 1892, almost two full years after his formal conversion, that Doppo is said to have experienced a true inner spiritual revolution. A record of that transformation can be found in *Azamukazaru no ki* (An Honest Account), a new diary that he began to compile in February of 1893.<sup>6</sup> Covering a period of over four years, this diary provides a vivid portrayal of a conscientious Christian, regularly attending service and reading the Bible, and eagerly seeking the help of God against the significant

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<sup>3</sup> "Ano jibun," in Sasabuchi Tomoichi and Sako Jun'ichirō eds., *Kindai nihon kirisutokyō bungaku zenshū*, vol. 2 (Kyōbunkan, 1978), 224-30.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, his essays "Anbishon (Yabōron)" (Ambition) and "Kanzuru tokoro o shirushite Meiji nijūnin o okuru" (Some Reflections at the End of 1889), which both appeared in the journal *Jogaku zasshi*. For a discussion of these essays, see Suzuki Hideko, "Kunikida Doppo to kirisutokyō," *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kanshō* 47:8 (1982), 45-50.

<sup>5</sup> Letter dated September 22, 1892; quoted in Suzuki Hideko, "Kunikida Doppo to kirisutokyō," 48.

<sup>6</sup> *Azamukazaru no ki* would be posthumously published in 1908.

epistemological challenges brought on by the coming of the modern age. Purporting to be an authentic and candid confession of the soul, and entirely predicated upon Thomas Carlyle's concept of "sincerity"—"a necessary personal attribute of all heroes and leaders of men"—the work is an earnest inquiry into the mystery of faith that, replete with insightful reflections on the meaning of existence and the depth of human belief, leads to the protagonist's ultimate awakening to his vocation as a writer. *Azamukazaru no ki* is thus not exactly an ordinary diary; the description of everyday happenings is kept to a minimum, with the only major exception being the story of his romance with Sasaki Nobuko—his future wife—an exception that illustrates how deeply important this relationship would be to the establishment of Doppo's persona, both as an artist and an individual.

Key events in Doppo's life are mentioned in *Azamukazaru no ki*. These include Doppo's short professional collaboration with religious leader Kanamori Tsūrin and his newspaper *Jiyū shinbun* (Freedom News) during the early months of 1893, and his one-year assignment as a teacher of English and math in Saiki from September of that year through June 1894. This was followed by association with the critic Tokutomi Sohō's *Kokumin shinbun* (Citizen's News) and Doppo's resulting experience as a reporter of the Sino-Japanese war from October to March 1895. His encounter and marriage with Nobuko take up the remainder of that year, followed by Nobuko's abandonment of him in April 1896. During that summer we see Doppo's correspondence and visit with the religious leader Uchimura Kanzō, the account ending with his association with Tayama Katai in Nikkō which preceded his literary debut as a novelist with the publication of the story "Gen oji" (Uncle Gen).

The first signs of the deep introspective posture that became the trademark of Doppo's metaphysical inquiry began to appear approximately three months into this diary. On June 20, 1893, for example, Doppo wrote of how he had finally been able to fully understand and emotionally experience Thomas Carlyle's idea of "sincerity." He also wrote that he had read Ralph Waldo Emerson's theory of the immortal and transcendent Over-Soul, and that having read this essay was now free from all the social constrictions that had oppressed him in the past. It was a critical juncture in the formation of his religious thought: the concept of "sincerity" became in fact indissolubly tied to his spiritual development. Sincerity was, in his very words, a religious sentiment

that had, within itself, the potential to lead an individual to faith.<sup>7</sup> Beyond this, Carlyle's "sincerity" also led to harmony with nature, which was, Doppo believed, an essential attribute for a poet.

As he pondered his future, however, and began to examine the possibilities of devoting his life to literature, Doppo also often struggled to construct the self-image of himself as a man of letters endowed with the special trait of sincerity. This was not, he claimed, something that could be taught; it was instinctive in principle, and he, unfortunately, had yet to achieve it, which prevented him from experiencing a feeling of oneness with the universe: "I am unable to experience unity with nature or men: there is no more painful and desperate time than this. I cannot live without sincerity, and I feel as if I cannot breathe."<sup>8</sup> Whereas he believed on the one hand that "only Christ's love and faith in the love of God could save [him]," on the other, he acknowledged that his faith was merely made of passion and not by strong convictions, and that it was the lack of sincerity within him that lay at the roots of his sufferings:

I confess, my will is weak and so are my actions. I do not have sincerity. God, please help me. . . . When I think of the strong faith that Christ, Socrates, Wordsworth, Carlyle and other wise men had, I become aware of my lack of sincerity.<sup>9</sup>

Sincerity was elusive. But "in light of twenty years of sin and misconduct," Doppo stated, he still held faith in God to be the supreme goal of his life: "my only hope is that the faith in God that once burned in me never fade . . . my life is to be serious and so is my heavenly task. I will study life passionately and share that knowledge with my fellow men."<sup>10</sup> Doppo's belief in the centrality of faith in a person's life was therefore unequivocal. He preferred "to live a day under the flame of faith to a thousand years of ordinary life," and stated that, without faith and belief in "the existence of God and the immortal and forever lasting soul," he could never hope for a peaceful existence.

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<sup>7</sup> Entry of June 26, 1893; see *Azamukazaru no ki*, in vol. 6 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 156.

<sup>8</sup> Entry of August 7, 1893; in *ibid.*, 209. Shiota Ryōhei pointed out that the concept of sincerity embraced by Doppo closely resembled the notion of *shisei* (integrity, truthfulness) strongly advocated by Yoshida Shōin in his teachings. See Shiota Ryōhei, "Kaidai," in vol. 6 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 450.

<sup>9</sup> Entry of August 10, 1893; *Azamukazaru no ki*, in vol. 6 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 217-19.

<sup>10</sup> Entries of August 21-22, 1893; *ibid.*, 238-39.



His longing for faith was, however, often accompanied by pain, and he soon began to think that he should perhaps focus his attention on nature instead:

I finally understand. Instead of obstinately seeking the passion of faith, which does not come, causing me pain, I have now resolved to relinquish my ardor and instead calmly contemplate nature, life, the independence of men and infinity; and by means of this contemplation, seek God, feel love, experience beauty, and wait for faith to come to me. . . . With tears of passion I pray to God. . . . faith is life, faith is everything.<sup>11</sup>

This increasingly profound captivation with nature led him to develop a pantheistic notion of God that was at times indistinguishable from the natural world. Sasabuchi Tomoichi has pointed out that in Doppo's case, "between nature and God there is little, if no distinction at all."<sup>12</sup> The young writer himself clarified the extent of that influence:

When I think of how infinite nature is and compare it to the brevity of human life, I feel terror, and I cannot withstand the grief. When I think of the essence of nature, of human feelings and then of life, faith comes, and with it hope and courage come, too. You have to think of nature like Wordsworth does!<sup>13</sup>

Although now completely absorbed into existential questions that placed his relationship with nature at the center of his inquiry, Doppo continued to be tormented by the feeling that he lacked sincerity. On October 11 of the same year he wrote: "Why is my faith shallow? It is not because I do not believe in God. I truly believe. But I think of him rarely. Why so? It has to do with my lack of sincerity. It is because I lack in meditation and self-reflection. I utterly regret that I do not have sincerity."<sup>14</sup> He then seemed to find temporary relief from his emotional pain in Carlyle's "Great Man theory":

Without great men my life would be hopeless. I now for the first time finally grasp the gist of Carlyle's adoration of heroes. If there were no Christ, no Milton, no Luther and others standing in front of us and teaching us with sincerity, leading and ruling mankind, I would have no hope in life. I gain hope in life through the spirit of the heroes. Without heroes, the world is empty. It is nothing but a crowd of fools, a herd of animals. Through heroes I know sincerity. With sincerity I hope for God and believe in the holiness of the world. . . . being a hero is a duty, this is the gist of my faith.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Entries of August 27-28, 1893; *ibid.*, 248-49.

<sup>12</sup> See Sasabuchi Tomoichi, "*Bungakkai*" to *sono jidai*, vol. 2 (Meiji shoin, 1963), 1401.

<sup>13</sup> September 11, 1893; *Azamukazaru no ki*, in vol. 6 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 277.

<sup>14</sup> Entry of October 11, 1893; *ibid.*, 305.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

As his writings make clear, for Doppo, faith was not exactly a belief in a transcendental being, nor did his conceptualization of such a being necessarily mirror a conventional Christian view of God, or for that matter of Christ. For him, the essence of faith was the “act of believing.” In his work *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, Carlyle had stated that “the merit of originality is not novelty, it is sincerity. The believing man is the original man; whatsoever he believes, he believes it for itself, not for another.”<sup>16</sup> Therefore, in Doppo's view, “to believe” meant to be original and at the same time sincere. That Nature might ultimately challenge the supremacy of the Abrahamic tradition's anthropomorphic God did not seemingly matter to him: faith, i.e. to believe, was paradoxically more important than the object of one's belief. It was a principle that tied into the very meaning of existence and that could provide an interpretive key to the mystery of life.

It was amidst these deliberations and under increasing financial pressure, that in October 1893, Doppo moved to Saiki, in Oita Prefecture, where he taught for one year. The time he spent there was, according to his own account, the most joyful of his life. Under the influence of Wordsworth's writings, he continued to explore the meaning of the self and its relationship to nature and God, and although the shadows of skepticism that had accompanied him since his earlier philosophical deliberations never left him, his determination to prioritize faith in his life did not falter. On June 20, 1894 at the end of his stay, he wrote: “faith is believing in the goodness, beauty and truth of God who is the center of the universe.” He also stated that without the presence of faith one could not achieve harmony between thought and emotions.<sup>17</sup>

Around this time, Doppo wrote a long essay titled “Shinkō seimei” (The Life of Faith) that mirrored the chief motifs that had become the foundation of his philosophical inquiry: the upholding of sincerity as the defining trait of a true human being, the restless negotiations with the shadows of skepticism, the longing for a unity with nature and the questions regarding its relationship to God, and the contemplation of eternity and the immortality of the soul. At the center of his concerns was still his failure to experience the transcendental: “I confess I am unable to feel the presence of God. . . . I must admit that I do not have a strong and true faith. Nature is just cold. . . . where is

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<sup>16</sup> See Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 108.

<sup>17</sup> Entry of June 20, 1894; *Azamukazaru no ki*, in vol. 7 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 151.

my spirit, where is my soul?”<sup>18</sup> Frustrated by this inability to feel like he truly was a child of nature, he acknowledged his dependence on materialism and carnality. He believed, however, that these maladies were not afflicting him alone, but were rather the product of the age in which he lived: although this should have been an age for the Gospel, he lamented, the only thing that unfortunately seemed to matter these days was the Gospel of materialism and skepticism.

Doppo also realized that he was still prisoner of the historical constraints and prejudices of his time; metaphorically speaking, he said, the sun he saw, was not the same that Wordsworth had seen, nor was the world in which he lived the same as Christ's. Fortunately, he found inspiration in what he deemed to be Emerson's most important statement: “Our faith comes in a moment; our vice is habitual. Yet there is a depth in those brief moments which constrains us to ascribe more reality to them than to all other experiences.” It was the sublimity of such moments that drove his quest, he wrote. His wish was to feel his life as part of the universe: this, he believed, was the first step towards faith. He also believed that such awareness rendered his spirit immortal: “I am not like smoke and dust that vanish away: I cannot but feel like I am an immortal spirit that is part of the holiness of heaven.”<sup>19</sup>

“Shinkō seimei” tackled such themes as eternity and the afterlife that would emerge often in Doppo's narrative. One can already see glimpses of them in “Takibi” (Bonfire), a short piece from 1896 about a group of boys building a bonfire on a beach that, Jay Rubin has noted, “contains the germ of all that ever interested him: the rootless wanderer, the anonymous who come and go through nature, the nostalgia for boyhood, the impossibility of human interchange.”<sup>20</sup> In the final scene of this story, the boys' fire and the old man's footprints become one with nature as they are all erased by the eternal waves. Traces of the same motifs can also be found in “Wasureenu hitobito” (Unforgettable People), a story of 1898, in which, recalling those who had made a vivid impression on him in the past, the protagonist Ōtsu Benjirō admits to finding a moment of peace in his otherwise tormented and restless life only when “thinking of those unforgettable people, not as people themselves, but as part of a moment, of a

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<sup>18</sup> This essay would also be posthumously published. See “Shinkō seimei” (1894); in vol. 9 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 215.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 231-32.

<sup>20</sup> Jay Rubin, “Takibi: The Bonfire by Kunikida Doppo,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 25:1 (1970), 198.

larger scene." It is only then that, he states, he is able to experience a sense of belonging and oneness, with "all of us returning hand in hand, along that same eternal track, to that infinite heaven."<sup>21</sup> But it is perhaps "Haru no tori" (Birds of Spring), another short story that appeared in 1904, that best illustrates Doppo's continuing fascination with the question of eternity and the afterlife. Doppo brings philosophical inquiry to life in the story with a mentally challenged boy, Rokuzō, who dies jumping off a wall trying to imitate the birds that he so much loved. Even before the event, the narrator, a teacher, had had the "profound impression . . . that, for all his imbecility, the young boy was after all a child of nature." Two days after the funeral, he found himself thinking about the strangeness of life, "the difference between men and the other animals, the connection between man and nature; life and death," and recalling Wordsworth's poem "There Was a Boy," in which a child dies and "his spirit returns to the bosom of nature." At the end, he begins wondering whether the birds flying about as he stood watching from the top of the wall might not be Rokuzō himself.<sup>22</sup>

"The Life of Faith," "Shinkō seimei," critically mirrored such belief in the immortality of the spirit. In this piece, Doppo wrote:

The great philosophers went somewhere, the philosophers are somewhere. The Wordsworth and Carlyle whom I profoundly respect, they all went somewhere, their works are without a doubt here on my desk, they wrote them. . . . what is that they believed in? What is that they wrote about?

Oh, immortality! They wrote about immortality. . . . Their spirit is somewhere. Where is the way in this universe in which they believed? Look, look, the blue sky that they looked up to, is now actually above my head. . . . What about me? What about me? As a human being I hold a life within the domain of the mysterious, and within that life I hold a soul that is aware of its mystery within the mysterious.<sup>23</sup>

Despite its strong pantheistic overtones, this very long essay may have been the young intellectual's last genuine attempt to discuss faith within a Christian framework. In the following months his hopeful outlook began in fact to give way to increased uncertainty and hesitation. On August 26, 1894, he wrote "my faith is like smoke, not like fire," and on October 10 of that year he

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<sup>21</sup> Jay Rubin, "Five Stories by Kunikida Doppo," *Monumenta Nipponica* 27:3 (1972), 303.

<sup>22</sup> See David G. Chibbett, "Bird of Spring. Haru No Tori," *Monumenta Nipponica* 26:1 (1971), 202.

<sup>23</sup> "Shinkō seimei," in vol. 9 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 238.

stated that “faith in God is immortal. But do I have that faith?” indicating that while he did not seemingly question the existence of God, he did paradoxically continue to question his own ability to believe in God. An entry dated February 5, 1895, exemplified the nature of his predicament: “Two years have passed since I began to write *Azamukazaru no ki*. Two years is not a short time. . . . but just like back then, I still do not have faith.”<sup>24</sup> The rigor and moral strictness he had imposed on himself in the hope of leading an ethical life and thus achieving peace had not yielded any tangible result.

As he had done often in the past, Doppo then looked up to his heroes: he painfully realized, in his own words, that he still did not love God as Christ had done, that he did not feel the energy and life of nature as Wordsworth had, and that he was not as sincere as Carlyle had been in probing the mysteries of the universe.<sup>25</sup> This deepening crisis was fortunately mitigated by his encounter with Nobuko in the summer of 1895. On August 1, in fact, Doppo wrote: “my life has entered a new phase. We fell in love,”<sup>26</sup> and from that point onward, *Azamukazaru no ki* became in essence an “honest record” of their short-lived romance. Three months later, despite opposition from her family, the two were married. However, after a few months of marital life Nobuko suddenly ran away, and the event, including the resulting divorce, left Doppo in despair. During this time of grief, Doppo confided in religious leader Uchimura Kanzo, whom he visited in Kyoto during the summer of 1896, seeking advice on a possible trip overseas. In August of the same year he wrote: “I am gradually feeling more intimate with nature, whereas I continue to grow apart from men. Nature is beautiful and honest, whereas men are selfish and mendacious beings.”<sup>27</sup>

Doppo’s plans to travel ultimately did not materialize. During that summer, however, yet another important transformation took place, with his writing of a piece — “Waga kako” (My Past) — that many scholars have seen as his formal relinquishment of the Christian faith.

### “Waga kako” and the Paradox of Contrition

Doppo’s process of separation from the faith was not just driven by struggles in his own heart and mind. Like Kitamura Tōkoku before him, he, too, had over time become disenchanted with the Church, and begun to criticize it. Already in

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<sup>24</sup> *Azamukazaru no ki*, in vol. 7 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 198, 235, 271.

<sup>25</sup> Entry of May 24, 1895; *ibid.*, 334.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 340.

<sup>27</sup> Entry of August 14, 1895; *ibid.*, 380.

August 1891, only months after being baptized, he wrote a letter to his friend Tamura Sanji in which he decried Christians' understanding of love as hypocritical, and in a later essay titled "Tada yami o miru" (Simply in the Darkness) written in 1896, he attacked the vanity and deceitfulness that prospered "even within the Church."<sup>28</sup> Incidentally, this latter essay also underscored the emotional distress caused by his separation from Nobuko, as love and faith competed for space during this critical phase of his formation: "instead of believing in Christ who gave his life on the Cross for the redemption of our sins," Doppo wrote, "I long for the love of she who has left me." Unable to find consolation, he envied "those who have the faith to pray."<sup>29</sup>

"Waga kako," a piece that appeared only after Doppo's death, was a lucid personal assessment of the failures of his spiritual journey:

My past is made of day dreaming, evil, misery, and failure. Several years have passed since I embraced the teachings of Christ, his truth and life. . . . I am now twenty-five, and all this time I have just been living the life of a daydreamer. On a spiritual level the principles of Christianity have not guided me in any way.<sup>30</sup>

Doppo wondered whether he had truly observed the principles that should be at the foundation of a Christian life, and following a ten-question format, began asking whether he had been as humble as a Christian should be. His response was negative: "in front of God and my fellow men I have been the most arrogant . . . instead of devoting myself to endeavors that pleased God, I have always rushed to promote myself, seeking to impress the world and to fulfill my desire for gain. I have been arrogant." Next, he asked whether he had shown self-esteem, which he understood to be respect for the bond between God and the individual and a prerequisite for a Christian believer taking a stand in the world, and stated that he had always relied on others, thus bringing ridicule upon himself and the Creator. The third, fourth and fifth questions had to do with his morality, his diligence, and his devotion to prayers. Here he affirmed that he was a dissolute person who had often behaved immorally, been lazy, and prayed to God only when in need. Then, he asked himself whether he was a free man: he thought so, he responded, but the freedom he experienced was not the type of freedom that resulted from a firm belief in God; while in response to the

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<sup>28</sup> On this point, see Sasabuchi Tomoichi, "*Bungakkai*" to sono jidai, vol. 2, 1374, and Doppo's own "Tada yami o miru," in vol. 9 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 188.

<sup>29</sup> "Tada yami o miru," in vol. 9 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 187.

<sup>30</sup> "Waga kako;" in *ibid.*, 342-46.

question of whether he had been perseverant, he admitted that he had not endured adversity through prayers and humility like a true Christian should do. Answering the key question of whether love truly harbored in his heart, he claimed compassion, while expressing regret that he had been unable to love family, friends, even his wife, as he should have.

The last two questions he tried to answer in this essay pertained to Christ and the Bible. His answers were blunt: his God was a God without Christ, and the Bible was a book he had never fully read: “[I am] a Christian without Christ, without the Bible, an arrogant, servile, immoral, lazy, weak, selfish believer. I am definitely not a Christian,” he wrote. All these years, he then continued, he had dreamt about freedom, nature, the mysterious, beauty, fame, love, and even of becoming a poet, but in return he had earned only despair. Unfortunately, Christianity and daydreaming were incompatible. Christianity, he thought, taught that life was a serious matter, something that did not go well with laziness and indolence, excess and frivolity. He had thus come to the conclusion that he did not have what it took to be a true Christian. He was therefore parting from the faith.

When it appeared in 1908, “Waga kako” was probably seen as a validation of the notion shared by many in the *bundan* that not only were literature and religion mutually exclusive but also that for historical and cultural reasons Christianity must inevitably die off among those in Japan who had gladly embraced it after the Restoration. After all, it was already common knowledge that many prominent writers—Tōkoku, Tōson, and Hakuchō, for example—had arrived at a similar predicament. In this respect, Doppo’s process of separation from the Christian religion did not differ much from that of his contemporaries. “Waga kako,” his formal recantation, concealed however a surprising element that has not been sufficiently highlighted by scholars thus far. In this consequential essay, Doppo did not exactly state that he did not believe in God. That was clearly not the reason why he was relinquishing his faith; it was rather his sense of his own iniquity and his conviction that he was morally inadequate that appeared to be the cause of his decision. One is faced here by a puzzling logic reversal: in Doppo’s case, awareness of sin led to contrition, which paradoxically resulted not in a reconciliation with God but a separation from him. Doppo took his inability to maintain a morally irreprehensible conduct of life as evidence that “the principles of Christianity [had] not guided [him] in any way.” This realization convinced him that he was morally corrupt and that redemption was for him unattainable.

Interestingly, this sense of iniquity and the conviction of being morally inadequate before God—a reflection of a desire to be authentic and not self-deceiving—was a trait common to all the writers who embraced Christianity at this time. In his 1906 work *Zange* (Confession), Kinoshita Naoe confessed his hypocrisy and falseness as a believer in Christ and wrote: “I have fought for justice, preached God’s love, called for an improvement of society and have proclaimed a spirit of sacrifice, but who am I really?”<sup>31</sup> Shimazaki Tōson echoed such sentiment in his 1919 autobiographical novel *Sakura no mi no jukusuru toki* (When the Cherries Ripen) in which his *alter ego*, Sutekichi, asks himself “are you a Christian?. . . He no longer was the type of believer that every Sunday felt the need to go to the same church, listen to the same sermon and sing the same hymns. He had even quit praying before meals.”<sup>32</sup> The protagonists of many of Masamune Hakuchō’s stories often believe themselves to be doomed, and so do Arishima Takeo’s: constantly regretting the presence of “impure elements within his heart,” Arishima was himself convinced that he was “without doubt, eternally damned.”<sup>33</sup>

Doppo’s separation from the faith signified, first and foremost, the rejection of self-deceit, a trait that, as stated earlier, was shared by the majority of writers who had embraced Christianity. Doppo’s relinquishment incidentally overlapped, however, with the elaboration of a new personal value system that now shifted the focus of his inquiry from “believing” to the need “to be surprised.” The first tangible outcome of this new theoretical development can be found in “Gyūniku to bareisho” (Beef and Potatoes), a well-known 1901 story in which a number of friends, gathered at the Meiji Club, argue over the philosophical merits of a realistic or idealistic approach to life, respectively symbolized by beef and potatoes. Okamoto, one of the men involved in the conversation and by the author’s own admission Doppo’s *alter ego*, argues that he is neither an idealist or a realist and that the cause of his indecision lies in an unusual personal wish. Prompted by his friends to reveal the content of such wish, Okamoto states that it is the desire “to be surprised:”

I don’t want to know the mysteries of the universe; I want to be surprised at the mysteries of the universe. . . . I don’t want to know the secrets of death; I want

<sup>31</sup> Kinoshita Naoe, *Zange*; in Takeda Kiyoko ed., *Kindai nihon shisō taikai* (Chikuma shobō, 1975), vol. 10, 126.

<sup>32</sup> Shimazaki Tōson, *Sakura no mi no jukusuru toki*; in vol. 5 of *Tōson zenshū* (Chikuma shobō, 1967), 469.

<sup>33</sup> See entry of April 21, 1903 in his diary *Kansōroku*; in vol. 10 of *Arishima Takeo zenshū* (Chikuma shobō, 1981), 338.



to be surprised at the fact of death! . . . Faith in and of itself isn't what I want, necessarily. But I do want to be plagued by the mysteries of man and his universe, in fact, to a point where without faith there can be no peace for me, even for a moment.<sup>34</sup>

In yet another piece titled “Okamoto no techō” (Okamoto’s Notebook), which appeared five years later as a fictitious excerpt from the same character’s own diary, the protagonist asserts his wish “to wake up from sleep, to shake off this dream and experience the endless, beautiful, and mysterious universe.” Without awakening, Okamoto believes, religion is meaningless, and so are the premises of faith. Thus, “before one argues over the existence of God, one must first be ‘awake.’ The fact that you do not have religious faith,” Okamoto affirms, “is proof that your soul is paralyzed.”<sup>35</sup> Doppo was thus able to partially solve his paradox—wishing to believe but being unable to—by declaring that being “awake” was more important than believing. Since “Okamoto no techō” is thought to have actually been written in the summer of 1896, before “Gyūniku to bareisho” and even before the end of *Azamukazaru no ki*, it was likely during that summer, at the peak of his skepticism, that Doppo formulated these last consequential deliberations.

Over the following decade, Doppo, who had apparently not truly abandoned his passion for politics, embarked on a number of political and commercial ventures that eventually caused him to go bankrupt and face, yet again, the hardships of financial distress. But he also launched a productive literary career that gained him the recognition of his peers, especially those who, like him, experienced a conflictive relationship with the Christian faith. His premature death received unprecedented attention from the media. Hakuchō, who at several junctures acknowledged the influence of Doppo’s narrative on his own literary career, wrote:

Doppo passed away soon thereafter. In those days, the death of a writer was not a big deal. The news of the passing of Takayama Chogyū took only a few lines at the margins of *Yorozu chōhō*. But when Doppo died, the news took three pages of the *Yomiuri*. It was something unprecedented for a writer. Because I was in charge of the literary column and was seen together with Doppo as a

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<sup>34</sup> “Beef and Potatoes,” English translation by Leon Zolbrod; in J. Thomas Rimer and Van C. Gessel eds. *The Columbia Anthology of Modern Japanese Literature*, vol. 1 (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 165.

<sup>35</sup> “Okamoto no techō,” in vol. 1 of *Kunikida Doppo zenshū*, 484.

member of the naturalist school, some probably thought that I had given him a special treatment. But that was not the case.<sup>36</sup>

Hakuchō was very aware of Doppo's past as a Christian and was especially moved by Doppo's supposed inability to pray during the last days of his life:

When he was young, Doppo was a Christian believer and he studied with Uemura Masahisa. When he became seriously ill, he had pastor Uemura come see him. . . . The pastor said: "Believe in the saving of Christ," and tried to have him pray to God, but it seems that Doppo somehow was unable to and cried. I was very frail at the time; I imagined Doppo's state of mind and felt very close to him. Uemura sensei was also my pastor; I was baptized by him, and for many years I attended his sermons.<sup>37</sup>

Hakuchō was rather skeptical about the true influence of Christianity in Meiji literature, believing that only Kinoshita Mokutarō and Akutagawa Ryūnosuke had been able to find some place for faith in their works. Nevertheless, in a 1926 essay titled "Meiji kirisutokyō bungaku" (Christian Literature of the Meiji Period), Hakuchō did acknowledge that quite a few of Doppo's works had been written under that influence, clearly setting him apart from the majority of converts in the *bundan*. The story of Doppo's last encounter with Uemura impressed him deeply, and in an article of 1954 in which he discussed his own fear of death and the problem of human mortality, he stated that he, too, like Doppo, would probably be unable to pray on his deathbed.<sup>38</sup>

Akutagawa was similarly touched by Doppo's personality and life circumstances. The only Japanese figure he included among the "saints of the Great Tabernacle" of the Kappa world in his famous novel *Kappa*, Akutagawa considered Doppo a genius and admired him for his empathy and rejection of hypocrisy. It is not surprising that Shinsuke, Akutagawa's *alter ego* and main character of his 1925 autobiographical piece, "Daidōji Shinsuke no hansei" (Daidōji Shinsuke: The Early Years), keeps a diary titled *Azamukazaru no ki* "in imitation of the writer Kunikida Doppo," in which he writes that "Doppo said he was in love with love. I am trying to hate hatred. I am trying to hate my hatred

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<sup>36</sup> "Waga shōgai to bungaku" (1946); in vol. 28 of *Masamune Hakuchō zenshū* (Fukutake shoten, 1986), 164.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> On this point, see Hyōdō Masanosuke, *Masamune Hakuchō ron* (Keisō shobō, 1968), 212.

for poverty, for falsehood, for everything.”<sup>39</sup> These were, according to the narrator, “Shinsuke’s innermost feelings,” suggesting that Shinsuke’s diary—and therefore Akutagawa’s—was like Doppo’s *Azamukazaru no ki*, an honest record of the soul, an attempt to represent the self without deceit.

In August 1908, two months after Doppo had died, Arishima wrote of him that he was “the first literary man who stood as a man in the world,” a man who “le[d] his life entirely according to his own conviction” and who “disregard[ed] every conventional and habitual precept of life, [trying] to create his own principle.” He likely thus captured the essence of his legacy.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See “Daidōji Shinsuke: The Early Years,” in Jay Rubin, *Rashōmon and Seventeen Other Stories* (London: Penguin, 2006), 152, 153.

<sup>40</sup> The piece was originally written in English. See entry of August 21, 1908; in *Kansōroku*, vol. 12 of *Arishima Takeo zenshū*, 15.

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