

Christianity and Japanese Literature : The State of Scholarship in the Anglophone Academic Community

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Christianity and Japanese Literature: The State of Scholarship in the Anglophone Academic Community

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Christianity played an important role in the literary developments that followed Japan's reopening to the Western world. A significant number of Meiji writers converted to the faith, mostly to Protestantism; and a similar surge of conversions took place after the end of the Pacific War, this time mainly to Catholicism. Japanese studies around the world has lagged behind in the study of these events. This article provides an overview of the state of scholarship in the Anglophone academic community, calling for a clear distinction between the individual contributions of Protestantism and Catholicism to developments in Japanese literature across the WWII divide.

Keywords: Christianity, Japanese literature, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, Dazai Osamu, Endō Shūsaku

In 1982, in his seminal essay, “Voices in the Wilderness: Japanese Christian Authors,” scholar of Japanese literature Van Gessel wrote:

The phenomenon of writers who are Christians has reached epic—some might say “epidemic” proportions—in the postwar period, and it is time to strike a balance between the Christian critics who laud these writers to an embarrassing degree and the conventional literary analysts who pass over them as fleeting aberrations. With more than a score of Christians now actively working and extremely influential on the Japanese literary scene, the time seems ripe to begin dealing with the literature of these individuals neither as religious wolves in literary sheep's clothing, nor as gems of virtue immune to criticism because they have donned

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the heavy vestments of religious privilege.¹

Gessel's ensuing analysis tackled the truism that had affected the reception of Christian thought among Japanese intellectuals ever since the deliberations of Christian leader, Uchimura Kanzō 内村鑑三 (1861–1930): namely, the irreconcilability of literature and religion. The works of several postwar authors and the way that they, unlike their Meiji colleagues, grappled with the theological implications of Christianity were for Gessel a testament to the fallacy of that truism, warranting the need to reassess the merits and literary implications of their attempt to “transform the experience of Christian conversion into literary materials accessible to the uninitiated Japanese reader.”² “Voices in the Wilderness” examined for this purpose three contemporary novelists, Shiina Rinzō 椎名麟三 (1911–1973), Endō Shūsaku 遠藤周作 (1923–1996) and Shimao Toshio 島尾敏雄 (1917–1986), highlighting in the process developments in recent Japanese literary history not yet fully acknowledged in Western academic circles: namely, that not only had the number of writers of Christian persuasion dramatically increased during the immediate postwar period—so much so as to assume almost “epidemic” proportions—but also that Christianity had left an indelible mark on Japanese literature during the interactions of the Meiji years. Although Gessel did not discuss the details of that earlier experience, his characterization of the modalities with which it had unfolded struck at the heart of the phenomenon. The writers of that earlier period, he wrote in the concluding section of his piece, had seen

Christianity as a mirror of their own egos: once that mirror stopped offering them mute images of their own individuality upon which to rhapsodize, and began spewing back ‘thou shalt nots’ as if to mock the independence of the reflected self, Meiji intellectuals [had] either turned their back to that mirror or smashed it to pieces.³

The end result had been a collective relinquishment of Christian ethics, which continued nonetheless to exert influence upon them and their *oeuvre*.

Gessel published his essay at a time of increased interest among Japanese scholars in the significance of these newly acknowledged intersections between faith and narrative, and also in a reassessment of the role that the Christian faith had played in the formation of the Meiji literary canon. The extraordinary number of studies that appeared in Japan during the late 1960s and 70s, including the publication of the two series *Gendai Nihon Kirisutokyō bungaku zenshū* 現代日本

1 Van C. Gessel, “Voices in the Wilderness: Japanese Christian Authors,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 37, no. 4, 1982, p. 473. Gessel has continued to write extensively on the theme of Christianity in Japanese literature, especially on the literary production of Endō Shūsaku. See, for example, his “Endō Shūsaku: His Position(s) in Postwar Japanese Literature,” *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* vol. 27, no. 1, April 1993, pp. 67–74; “The Road to the River: The Fiction of Endō Shūsaku,” in Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel, eds., *Ōe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999, pp. 36–57; and “Silence on Opposite Shores: Critical Reactions to the Novel in Japan and the West,” in Darren J.N. Middleton and Mark Dennis, eds., *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shusaku Endo's Classic Novel*, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015, pp. 25–41.

2 Van C. Gessel, “Voices in the Wilderness: Japanese Christian Authors,” pp. 456–457.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 456.

キリスト教文学全集 (The Collected Works of Contemporary Japanese Christian Literature, Kyōbunkan, 1973) and *Kindai Nihon Kirisutokyō bungaku zenshū* 近代日本キリスト教文学全集 (The Collected Works of Modern Japanese Christian Literature, Kyōbunkan, 1975), were clear evidence of the unprecedented attention that was now being paid to these areas of literary discourse.⁴ Very little research had however been published on these topics outside Japan. A handful of studies of Meiji writers—Francis Mathy’s essays on Kitamura Tōkoku 北村透谷 (1868–1894) and Janet Walker’s study of both Tōkoku and Shimazaki Tōson 島崎藤村 (1872–1943), to cite a couple—had to an extent suggested the prominent role Christianity had played in the formation of these and other writers, but very few scholars in the West had until then seriously considered the impact of Christian thought and faith on the literary developments of Japan’s modern and postwar periods.⁵ Gessel’s 1982 essay was thus in many respects ground-breaking, and its purported goal to “strike a balance between the Christian critics who laud these writers to an embarrassing degree and the conventional literary analysts who pass over them as fleeting aberrations” raised awareness in Western academic circles, where the issue of Christianity in Japanese literature was still arguably receiving a very tepid, if not entirely cold, response. In 1971, for example, Donald Keene, who had already translated both *Shayō* 斜陽 (The Setting Sun, 1947) and *Ningen Shikkaku* 人間失格 (No Longer Human, 1948) had written of Dazai Osamu 太宰治 (1909–1948)’s extensive reliance on the Bible in these terms:

The innumerable references to Christianity in Dazai’s works are another source of difficulty for the Western reader. Christianity seems at times to have filled a spiritual vacuum in Dazai’s life, and some think that at the end he genuinely considered himself to be a Christian. But the mentions of Christianity are hardly more convincing than an American beatnik’s references to Zen. In the *Setting Sun* especially there is such excessive quotation of the Bible that this was the one place where I felt it necessary to abridge in making a translation. The quotations and frequent references to Christianity at no point suggest sincere belief or even desire to believe. Dazai is intrigued by Christianity, and he is delighted to discover appropriate passages to insert in his books, but whatever degree of faith he may have attained in his private life, in his writings Christianity is a disconcerting and not very important factor. It failed to give his works the additional depth he sought.⁶

Only a few years later, in 1974, Masao Miyoshi had stated in a similar vein that “Dazai was very

4 See, for example, the special issues of *Bungaku* 文学 vol. 30, no. 6, 1962; *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* 国文学解釈と鑑賞 vol. 32, no. 7, 1967; *Kokubungaku kaishaku to kanshō* vol. 39, no. 8, 1974; *Bungaku* vol. 47, no. 3, 1979; and *Bungaku* vol. 47, no. 4, 1979.

5 See Francis Mathy, “Kitamura Tōkoku: The Early Years,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 18, no. 1, 1963, pp. 1–44; and “Kitamura Tōkoku: Essays on the Inner Life,” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 19, no. 1/2, 1964, pp. 66–110. See also Janet Walker, *The Japanese Novel of the Meiji Period and the Ideal of Individualism*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979. Other monographs that similarly suggested the importance of Christianity in Meiji literature include Robert Rolf, *Masamune Hakuchō*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1979; and Leith Morton, *Divided Self: A Biography of Arishima Takeo*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1988.

6 Donald Keene, *Landscapes and Portraits: Appreciations of Japanese Culture*, Kodansha International, 1971, pp. 198–199.

fond of quoting from the Bible. But it is a mistake to take his Christianity seriously. Sako Jun'ichirō 佐古純一郎, for instance, is much too eager to read a Christian saint into Dazai's histrionic utterances."⁷ In important essays that appeared over the following years neither Makoto Ueda nor Thomas Rimer significantly explored this topic.⁸ It would take at least a decade after Gessel's essay for another scholar, Mark Williams, to acknowledge in his own seminal piece that

to dismiss entirely the importance of Biblical motifs in Dazai's oeuvre is ... to belittle the continuous soul-searching evidenced in his literature—as suggested by the following comment in 'HUMAN LOST': 'By one book, the Bible, the history of Japanese literature was clearly divided into two parts, with such a distinction as was impossible in the past.'⁹

Dazai's famous statement, written during his life-changing experience in the "human warehouse" of Tokyo Musashino Hospital, warranted a deeper look into the Christian experience of each of these authors, and Williams's attempt "to assess the extent to which Japanese literature has been influenced by Christianity over the past century and, in so doing, to explore several possible explanations for this apparently disproportionate influence" was consistent with that view.¹⁰ His identification of four distinct stages in the interface of Christianity and Japanese literature—a first phase from the Meiji Restoration to 1890, a second one that began with the writings of Kitamura Tōkoku and ended towards the end of the Taishō era, a third following thereafter and lasting until the end of the Pacific War, and a fourth period that unfolded during the postwar years—spoke of a diverse, complex, and fluid literary landscape in which the place of Christianity had yet to be fully assessed. Williams' important monograph, *Endō Shūsaku: A Literature of Reconciliation* (1999), brought to fruition these and other research endeavors, and located Endō's narrative squarely within the borders of the evolving literary and spiritual landscape, spurring new inquiries into this writer's work and its relationship to the Christian faith.¹¹

Williams made further critical contributions to the field when in a subsequent essay of 2003 he advanced two other important notions: that "the literature to emerge in the [postwar] ensuing

7 See Masao Miyoshi, *Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel*, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974, pp. 187–188.

8 Makoto Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1976, pp. 145–172; and J. Thomas Rimer, *Modern Japanese Fiction and Its Traditions: An Introduction*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978, pp. 182–199.

9 Mark Williams, "From Out of the Depths: The Japanese Literary Response to Christianity," in John Breen and Mark Williams, eds., *Japan and Christianity: Impacts and Responses*, Houndmills, England: Macmillan Press, 1996, p. 166.

10 Mark Williams, "From Out of the Depths: The Japanese Literary Response to Christianity," p. 156.

11 Mark Williams, *Endō Shūsaku: A Literature of Reconciliation*, London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Later scholarship on Endō includes, for example, Emi Mase-Hasegawa, *Christ in Japanese Culture: Theological Themes in Shūsaku Endō's Works*, Leiden: Brill, 2008; Adelino Ascenso, *Transcultural Theodicy in the Fiction of Shūsaku Endō*, Rome: Gregorian University Press, 2009; Darren J.N. Middleton and Mark Dennis, eds., *Approaching Silence: New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō's Classic Novel*, New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2015; Justyna Weronika Kasza, *Hermeneutics of Evil in the Works of Endō Shūsaku*, Oxford and New York: Peter Lang, 2016; and Darren J.N. Middleton and Mark Dennis, eds., *Navigating Deep River: New Perspectives on Shūsaku Endō's Final Novel*, Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2020.

decades can be depicted ... as continuing where their predecessors in the Meiji and Taishō eras had left off,” and that one of the most significant traits of the Meiji experience had been the “emphasis on the harsh, paternal God of the Old Testament.”¹² The first observation was extremely significant because it suggested the possibility of meaningful intersections between the deliberations of the Meiji period and the literary discourse of the following years, especially during the least studied of these phases, that between the end of the Taishō era and the Pacific War. The second consideration was also consequential, as Endō Shūsaku would significantly capitalize on this image of a stern God, calling it an unfortunate and enduring legacy of Meiji Christianity, and using it as a dialectical foil against which to develop his literary motif of a “motherly religion” (母の宗教). The two notions advanced by Williams unequivocally confirmed the necessity of interpreting the Christian discourse of the postwar period *vis-à-vis* the deliberations of the earlier years.

Indeed, the influence of the Meiji Christian experience can be detected across a large segment of postwar spiritual discourse, not only in the perpetuation of the religion versus literature paradigm—which Gessel moved to debunk in his pioneering essay—but also in the connections that can be discovered in the narrative developments that followed. The protagonists of Akutagawa’s novel *Haguruma* 齒車 (Spinning Gears, 1927) and Dazai Osamu’s *Ningen shikkaku* epitomize in many respects the depth of those connections. Both characters fear God and are terrified by his anger; both of them believe in hell and are incapable of believing in God’s love; and both of them cry to him in protest as a last resort to find a way out of their predicament.

In spite of the consequentiality of these connections, research on the linkage between Christianity and Japanese literature continued to lag behind. Philip Gabriel confirmed this paucity of scholarship in his book, *Spirit Matters: The Transcendent in Japanese Literature* (2006), when he noted that, “With the possible exception of some studies of the novelist Endō Shūsaku, as well as studies of Shiga and Kawabata, the connection between literature and the spiritual in the field of modern Japanese literary studies in English has largely been left untouched.”¹³ In *Spirit Matters*, Gabriel sought to explore “in what ways, contemporary Japanese novelists have dealt with a variety of spiritual questions, including the existence of a soul or inner being of an afterlife, of a god or spiritual forces beyond the everyday; and the possibilities of the supernatural and the miraculous.”¹⁴ He engages in a rare discussion of Miura Ayako 三浦綾子 (1922–1999) and Sono Ayako 曾野綾子 (1931–), two extremely popular Christian authors, whose works had been almost entirely unexplored in English. To be precise, the focus of Gabriel’s interest was not necessarily confined to the realm of the Christian faith, as the title of his monograph implicitly suggests. As he insightfully

12 Mark Williams, “Bridging the Divide: Writing Christian Faith (and Doubt) in Modern Japan,” in Mark R. Mullins, ed., *Handbook of Christianity in Japan*, Leiden: Brill, 2003, p. 312 and p. 309. Other publications by Williams include important essays on Shiina Rinzō. See, for example, “Free to Write: Confronting the Present, and the Past, in Shiina Rinzō’s Beautiful Woman,” in Rachael Hutchinson and Mark Williams, eds., *Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature: A Critical Approach*, New York and London: Routledge, 2007; and “Writing the Traumatized Self: Tenkō in the Literature of Shiina Rinzō,” in David Stahl and Mark Williams, eds., *Imag(in)ing the War in Japan: Representing and Responding to Trauma in Postwar Literature and Film*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2010.

13 Philip Gabriel, *Spirit Matters: The Transcendent in Modern Japanese Literature*, Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006, pp. 3–4.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 2.

points out in the conclusion of his study, most of the authors of the postwar period who garnered the attention of critics and readers because of their Christian persuasion—Shimao Toshio, Shiina Rinzō, Miura Shumon 三浦朱門 (1926–2017), Miura Ayako, Sono Ayako, Takahashi Takako 高橋たか子 (1932–2013) and Ogawa Kunio 小川国夫 (1927–2008)—are no longer as widely read, and yet the search for the spiritual continues in other literary domains that are not necessarily of Christian belief. Gabriel does acknowledge, however, the important place of these Christian writers in contemporary Japanese literature, citing their contribution of such motifs as “original sin, martyrdom, and the possibilities of the miraculous,” as well as the crucial role they played in “delineating in personal terms what it means to be both Japanese and Christian.”¹⁵ It should be noted, however, that these and other motifs had already been explored by previous generations of literati, and that a vocabulary of faith already existed before the postwar years. The case of Miura Ayako could be considered emblematic. Her focus on the theme of sin and the multiple references to Dazai in some of her writings suggest the possibilities of important connections between these and other authors that should be further investigated.

Overall, the links between contemporary Christian discourse and the deliberations of the earlier periods—which are key to a correct assessment and interpretation of the place of Christianity in modern and contemporary Japanese literature—have remained elusive. This is even more so with respect to the role played by Catholicism. As is well known, a significant number of writers converted to Catholicism after the war, and this raises important questions as to the existence of possible links between this phenomenon, the Meiji Christian experience, and the literary developments of the interwar years. Kevin Doak’s edited volume *Xavier’s Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture* (2011) revisited in part the modalities of those relationships, reclaiming the relevance of Catholicism in the intellectual landscape of the modern era. Disapproving of historians’ tendency to identify Catholicism exclusively with the so-called Christian century and of the resulting unbalanced narrative in which “Christianity in modern Japan is largely told as a story of the advent of Protestantism,” Doak has called for a reexamination of the contributions of Catholic thought, arguing that because of its established roots in Japan’s past, it was better positioned than the newly introduced Protestantism to negotiate the arrival of modernity.¹⁶ As Doak later pointed out in another essay, the dangers of identifying Catholicism “with the *kirishitan* risks a kind of familiar Protestant historical narrative that sees all this as the ‘superstitions’ of the pre-modern era.” His point—namely, that forces other than the unequivocal impact of Protestant ethics and faith may have determined the trajectory of intellectual discourse at critical junctures of the twentieth century—is intriguing.¹⁷ There are indeed equally compelling narratives that situate Catholicism squarely within the developments of the interwar years, and Doak’s annotated translation of a piece by philosopher Yoshimitsu Yoshihiko 吉満義彦 (1904–1945), who was involved in the famous 1942 debate on “Overcoming Modernity” (近代の超克) should be read within the perimeters of this endeavor. Yoshimitsu—a Catholic—played an important role in Endō Shūsaku’s

15 Ibid., p. 173.

16 Kevin Doak, *Xavier’s Legacies: Catholicism in Modern Japanese Culture*, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2012, p. 2.

17 Kevin Doak, “Toward a Globalized Japanese Studies: What We Need to Learn from Modern Catholic Japan,” in Nanyan Guo, ed. *Sekai no nihon kenkyū* 世界の日本研究 2017, p. 16.

formation, a point duly noted by Doak at the onset of his translation, but what is not as widely acknowledged, at least overseas, is that behind their relationship hid the important literary figure of Endō's mentor, Hori Tatsuo 堀辰雄 (1904–1953). Crucially influenced by Akutagawa and his very last work *Seihō no hito* 西方の人 (The Man from the West, 1927), Hori repeatedly explored the intersections between Catholicism and Japan's ancestral world, doing so mostly *vis-à-vis* the legacy of Meiji Protestantism. The dichotomies of East versus West and monotheism versus pantheism were constant motifs in his *oeuvre*, and it was in tackling Hori's religious sensibilities that a young Endō first made a name for himself in the literary world with debut essays that were the direct outcome of his negotiations with his mentor's ideas.¹⁸

The interface between Christianity and literature is therefore one area of modern intellectual discourse where the examination of the dialectical relationship between Catholicism and Protestantism promises to reveal the true role that faith and religion have played in the developments of the twentieth century. Featuring important essays on writers Endō Shūsaku and Sono Ayako and other influential figures like Fathers Iwashita Sōichi 岩下壯一 (1889–1940) and Inoue Yōji 井上洋治 (1927–2014), *Xavier's Legacies* has added significantly to our understanding of that interface. Equally important has been Doak's own annotated translation of Akutagawa's last work *Seihō no hito*, only tangentially discussed by Anglophone scholars thus far.¹⁹ Comprising a total of fifty-nine fragments, *Seihō no hito* and its sequel *Zoku Seihō no hito* 続西方の人 are two of the most consequential of Akutagawa's works that reveal not only the author's view of Christianity during the last weeks of his life, but also the evolution of the conflict between art and faith throughout the Meiji and Taishō years. As I have stated elsewhere, the breakdown in communication that occurred between the protagonist and the Christian old man in the attic in Akutagawa's novel *Haguruma* symbolized the collapse of any possible dialectic between the modern intellectual and Christianity, sanctioning the inevitability of a separation and the consequent demise of Protestantism among members of the literary world.²⁰ In *Seihō no hito*, the epilogue of that conflictive relationship, Akutagawa made a last attempt at reconciliation by relying on his long-standing investment in Catholicism. Far from being a mere fascination of his younger years, Catholicism remained in fact a significant trait of his thought throughout, allowing him to revisit, with an incisive and effective tone, the truisms of Meiji Protestantism. Akutagawa stood at the forefront of a new paradigm in Christian discourse, and the influence he exerted on Hori Tatsuo and Dazai Osamu suggests the existence of critical intersections between the Meiji experience and the postwar years that should be further investigated.²¹ Doak's annotated English translation of *Seihō no hito* is a meaningful achievement in that direction.

18 Those essays were “Kamigami to kami to” 神々と神と (God and the Gods) of December 1947 and “Hori Tatsuo ron oboegaki” 堀辰雄論覚書 (A Memorandum on Hori Tatsuo), published between March and October 1948.

19 See Kevin Doak, “The Last Word?: Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's ‘The Man from the West,’” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 66, no. 2, 2011, pp. 247–255; and Kevin Doak and J. Scott Matthews, “‘The Man from the West’ and ‘The Man from the West: The Sequel,’” *Monumenta Nipponica* vol. 66, no. 2, 2011, pp. 257–280.

20 See Massimiliano Tomasi, *The Dilemma of Faith in Modern Japanese Literature: Metaphors of Christianity*, London and New York: Routledge, 2018.

21 Sako Junichirō was among the first to note the importance of this influence. See *Shiina Rinzō to Endō Shūsaku* 椎名麟三と遠藤周作, Nihon Kirisuto Kyōdan Shuppan, 1977, p. 12.

My own monograph, *The Dilemma of Faith in Modern Japanese Literature: Metaphors of Christianity* (2018), draws on all these important research developments and deliberations. Analyzing the process of conversion of several Meiji and Taishō authors, *The Dilemma of Faith in Modern Japanese Literature* unveils the significant influence that Christianity exerted on their self-construction, their *oeuvre* and, ultimately, the trajectory of modern Japanese literature. The volume also provides critical evidence that these authors' decision to renounce their faith was ultimately not driven by a superficial understanding of its tenets, but was rather the outcome of a complex process of introspection that was intrinsically tied to the pursuit of a spiritualized dimension of life. At the roots of the Christian experience of Meiji and Taishō authors was first and foremost a shared romantic desire to transcend their historicity that was deeply inspired by Protestantism's heightened sense of self. This dream of self-transcendence found however an ironic foe not in the dichotomies that frustrated its aspirations on the surface—such as the conflicts between art and faith and nature and society—but rather in the deterministic view of fate, and by extension salvation, that Meiji Protestantism itself seemed to propound. Most negotiations between faith and skepticism in literature occurred within the perimeters of this confrontation, engendering a religious space that fostered a meaningful discursive continuum of faith and salvation. This notion of a shared religious space and discursive continuum is consistent with Mark Williams's view that “the literature to emerge in the [postwar] ensuing decades can be depicted ... as continuing where their predecessors in the Meiji and Taisho eras had left off,” and as such should be considered an important methodological premise for future investigations into the relationship between art and faith in twentieth century Japan. After all, much of Endō's salvific discourse was constructed against the tenets of Protestantism, and Dazai's Christian experience can be said to have fluctuated between the fixed dogmas of Meiji Christianity on one side and the more fluid contours of postwar Christian (and more specifically Catholic) discourse on the other. Both writers ultimately revealed an interdependence of themes and motifs between the two periods that should not be dismissed.

This realization prompts the necessity to revisit the viability of the term “Christianity.” The term has been used loosely by scholars thus far, especially outside Japan. However, the type of Christianity to which most Meiji and Taishō intellectuals were exposed was almost exclusively Protestant and mainly of Calvinist derivation, and it is therefore against that eschatology that the relationship between Christianity and modern Japanese literature ought to be assessed. A realization of the primacy of Protestantism in the cultural and literary developments of the modern period is essential not only because it is key to a correct interpretation of the nature of the Meiji Christian experience, but also because it helps highlight, by contrast, the role played by Catholicism during the decades that followed. It is likely within the dialectical relationship between these two religious systems that one can fully capture the true place of Christianity in Japanese literature.

日本文学とキリスト教の問題の研究史
——英語圏の日本研究を中心に——

マッシミリアーノ・トマシ*

明治維新後、再び日本に到来したキリスト教（主にプロテスタント）は、文壇で大きな反響を呼び、受洗する文学者が数多く出現した。戦後になるとまたも注目を浴びたが、今度はカトリックが中心であった。この歴史的な流れは日本近現代文学を特徴づけたものであるが、海外では、つい最近までそれほど注目されてこなかった。この小論文では英語圏のこれまでの主な研究動向を紹介し、日本近現代文学におけるプロテスタントとカトリックのそれぞれの位置付けを再確認する必要性を述べる。

キーワード：キリスト教、日本文学、芥川龍之介、太宰治、遠藤周作

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