Towards a Comparative Poetics:  
Sakutaro’s *Tsuki ni Hoeru* and Stephen Crane’s *The Black Riders and Other Lines*

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In his discussion of traditional poetics in the East Asia, Earl Miner underscores the importance of lyrical heritage and argues that Asian poetics is strongly determined by an affective-expressive orientation.\(^1\) Japanese poetry, for instance, has inherited a long tradition of lyrics, chiefly *waka* (*tanka*) and *haiku*, those short forms of metrical verse that characteristically merge the poet’s feelings with descriptions of seasonal cycles. This lyrical orientation, as Miner points out, still holds a strong influence in modern Japanese poetry; and it is within this poetic context that Japanese poets at the beginning of the twentieth century encountered newly-introduced Western poetics and struggled to reconcile it with their own tradition.

Hagiwara Sakutaro, one of the most eminent modern Japanese poets, intensely experienced this poetic confrontation between the East and the West. Having practiced traditional *tanka* poetry for more than ten years, Sakutaro started to write free verse under the strong influence of French Symbolism. On the one hand, Sakutaro himself indicates the affective-expressive orientation of his poems firmly rooted in the traditional poetics, while, on the other, he radically experiments with exploration of imagery and its suggestiveness, simultaneously introducing Western vocabulary and idioms into his poems. Graeme Wilson, in the introduction to his celebrated translation of *Tsuki ni Hoeru* [Barking at the Moon], sums up the revolutionary aspects of Sakutaro’s presence in modern Japanese poetry under the following six headings: “his use of novel forms, his use of novel language, his escape from the bonds of traditional metric rhythms, his entirely personal vision, and his unprecedented achievement of sustained lyricism.”\(^2\)

One of the striking features of Sakutaro’s experimental poetics is the use of
Christian concepts such as sin and repentance. Among Sakutaro’s poems, there is a group subtitled “Jozai Shihen” [Poems of Repentance] which, written between 1914 and 1915, were largely incorporated into his first collection, *Tsuki ni Hoeru*. In these poems, Sakutaro effusively deploys visions of sinners and penitents to convey his own feelings and psychological states. “Poetry is a consolation of my life,” writes Sakutaro, “and also a process of repentance to God” (*HSZ* 12: 93).

The Christian vision of sin in Sakutaro’s poems has been studied from two different points of view, either biographical or rhetorical. The biographical studies have mainly investigated the poet’s view of Christianity and his personal experiences corresponding to his profound sense of guilt. Nishiwaki Junzaburo, a celebrated contemporary poet and critic, for instance, looks upon Sakutaro as a “good Christian” having a strong awareness of Original Sin. Both Ooka Shohei and Kawamura Masatoshi find in Sakutaro’s poems a radical projection of Christian belief, while many other critics indicate that Sakutaro’s sense of guilt, in many respects, arises from the delinquencies of his personal life, mainly his extramarital affair with a woman called Erena. Obviously, these critics have regarded Sakutaro’s poems essentially as confessional, the poet being strongly aware of his guilt; and his poetry merely a “process of repentance to God.”

Apart from debates over whether Sakutaro is a “good Christian” with a strong sense of sin, it should definitely be taken into account that his use of sinners and penitents is inextricably linked to his poetic method. In other words, Sakutaro, by employing Christian images, deliberately aims to create new visions and images so as to enhance the poetic effects of defamiliarization. Among those who underscore the aesthetic aspects of Sakutaro’s vision of sin, Ito Shinkichi first points out that Sakutaro merely “thought” of repentance and sinners. Shibuya Kunitada, editor of Sakutaro’s notes on “Jozai Shihen,” comments that the poet’s envisioning of sinners and penitents is just one of “tools for his poetic expression,” while Naka Taro, another poet-critic, considers Sakutaro’s vision of sin simply as a poetic metaphor, and his use of the vision as a “matter of poetic diction.”

In this essay, we shall examine the rhetorical and aesthetic aspects of Sakutaro’s vision of sin. We will investigate: (1) how Sakutaro incorporates the
Christian concepts and images into the traditional lyrical poetics; (2) how the vision of sin is intrinsically related to other images, metaphors, and poetic tones; (3) and how the Christian vision functions to affect the Japanese reader. In doing so, we will seek to examine how the Christian vision of sin has been configured as a symbolic metaphor, uniquely dislodged and transfigured, in modern Japanese literature. For the purpose of comparative studies, moreover, we will also draw upon Stephen Crane's *The Black Riders and Other Lines*, not merely to illustrate the cultural differences, but to demonstrate how Sakutaro and Stephen Crane similarly played the pioneering role in the development of the symbolist poetics either in Japan or in America.

**A. Sakutaro’s Symbolist Poetics**

In his preface to *Tsuki ni Hoeru*, Sakutaro states that the essence of poetic expression is to capture the “nerve of emotion” and to attain its “abundant overflow” (*HSZ* 1: 10). The poet fundamentally communicates feelings to the reader; and lyrics is the most supreme form of poetic expression. Sakutaro continues in the preface: “What I expect from the reader is that he or she does touch the feelings at the heart of my poems, rather than look for certain concepts and ideas on the surface. What I try to convey through the medium of poetic rhythms is my feelings, such as ‘sadness,’ ‘happiness,’ ‘fear,’ and other inexpressive and complex feelings” (*HSZ* 1: 10-11)

Despite his expressive poetics and his Wordsworthian assertion of emotional overflow, however, Sakutaro hardly communicates his feelings directly and spontaneously: with his profound interest in Baudelaire and Poe, Sakutaro experiments with the symbolist technique of engaging images in a way that evokes and communicates a state of mind. William York Tindall’s discussion of French Symbolism will be particularly useful in illustrating Sakutaro’s symbolist poetics.

Without intended reference to external reality, his [Mallarme’s] worlds or poems are “inclosed.” Fictions or virtual realities, they exist as a piece of music does, by symmetry, interaction of parts, and what he called “reciprocal reflections.” … [Mallarme] said that symbolism consisted in evoking an
object little by little in order to reveal a state of mind, or inversely, choosing an object and from it disengaging a state of mind.¹⁰

Sakutaro’s poetic world is equally autonomous and evocative, while his use of colloquial Japanese language stand like a “piece of music.” Through the combined effects of rhythms and images, Sakutaro succeeds to create a particular poetic mood or “flavor,” as he calls it, which he defines as his poetic essence. Sakutaro’s method may well be related to what T. S. Eliot termed the “objective correlative,” the use of particular images that evoke an emotional response.¹¹

The first poem in his collection Tsuki ni Hoeru, titled “Jimen no Soko no Byoki no Kao” [The Sickly Face at the Bottom of the Ground], essentially stands for Sakutaro’s original tone and peculiar image patterns.

Jimen no soko ni kao ga araware,  [At the bottom of the ground a face emerging,  a lonely invalid’s face emerging.  
Samishii byonin no kao ga araware. 

Jimen no soko no kurayami ni, in the dark at the bottom of the ground,  
Uraura kusa no kuki ga moesome soft vernal grass-stalks beginning to flare,  
Nezumi no su ga moesome rat’s nest beginning to flare,  
Su ni kongarakatteiru, and entangled with the nest,  
Kazushirenu kami no ke ga furuedashi, innumerable hairs beginning to tremble,  
Touji no korono, time the winter solstice,  
Sabishii byoki no jimen kara, from the lonely sickly ground,  
Hosoi aotake no ne ga haesome roots of thin blue bamboo beginning to grow,  
Haesome, beginning to grow,  
Sore ga jitsuni awarefukaku mie, and that, looking truly pathetic,  
Kebureru gotoku ni mie, looking blurred,  
Jitsuni, jitsuni, awarefukage ni mie. looking truly, truly, pathetic.  
Jimen no soko no kurayami ni  
Samishii byonin no kao ga araware.¹²

One instance of Sakutaro’s revolutionary poetics is that he introduced into Japanese poetry modernist images of the macabre and the grotesque. The prevailing
tone and sentiments of his poems are those of fear, solitude, and sickness; his uniquely dark images, such as rat’s nest, tangled hairs, bamboo shoots, communicate the poet’s state of mind and thereby evoke an emotional response in the reader. By engaging novel and fragmented images and by disrupting a process of semantic construction, Sakutaro defamiliarizes the reader in a way that inversely enhances its poetic mood. In the first stanza, for instance, the singular connection of a sick face and the dark ground may give an aesthetic shock to the reader. The following images of grass sprouts, rat’s nest, and bamboo shoots successively disengage the reader’s response, whereas these grotesquely dark and mysterious images function to evoke and communicate the poet’s feelings of loneliness, melancholy, and existential fear.

The two most important factors of Sakutaro’s symbolist poetics are rhythms and imagistic visions. “In my first collection Tsuki ni Hoeru,” writes Sakutaro, “I roamed in the purely poetic world of imagistic visions and projected a physiological sense of fear” (HSZ 2: 145). Sakutaro seeks to create a pure autonomous world of mental visions; his images of rat’s nest, tangled hairs, and bamboo shoots do not refer to external realities, but solipsistically to his inner state corresponding to his “physiological sense of fear.” The sharpest points of bamboo shoots and almost quivering thinness of the hairlets serve as metaphors suggesting the poet’s heightened sense of fear and anxiety as well as the keenest edge of his creative imagination.

The visionary appearances of solitary figures are successfully combined with the effective use of poetic rhythms. Having discarded fixed traditional metrics (the seven-five syllable metric rhythm), Sakutaro puts forward the “rhythm of self,” which he defines as inseparably linked to one’s sentiment and psychic flow. More specifically, the evocations of the visions are reinforced by the rhythmic patterns created by the repetition of similar verbs and verb forms. In this poem, Sakutaro repeatedly employs such verbs as “mieru” [look, appear], “arawareru” [emerge], “haeru” [grow], and “someru” [begin], with exactly the same forms of conjugation indicating progressive action (“mieru,” for instance, is conjugated as “mie,” and “haeru” as “hae”). Disregarding the traditional seven-five metric patterns, Sakutaro moves closer to the Western rhyme scheme, although Japanese poetry actually does not embrace a tradition
of rhyme. By the effective use of verbal rhythms, Sakutaro hints at the simultaneity of these visionary appearances which, in turn, facilitates a continual flow of poetic feelings.

B. Sakutaro’s Vision of Sin

It is precisely in line with his symbolist poetics that Sakutaro seeks to engage Christian imagery in his poems. Sakutaro is particularly intrigued by the novel and psychological overtones of Christian vocabulary; and he finds these Christian images as providing materials for the new direction of poetic experience. Christian imagery in a Japanese context, moreover, conveys not only a sense of novelty and exoticism, but, as Ryunosuke Akutagawa once commented, it connotes implications of secrecy and fanaticism because of Christians’ long period of persecution in Japanese history and their underground experiences. It is indeed the case that Sakutaro explores and intentionally experiments with these aesthetic phases of Christian vocabulary and associates the dark and melancholic atmosphere of his poems with visions of sinners and penitents.

It is particularly important in this context to note that Sakutaro interprets Christianity from an aesthetic and purely literary point of view. In “Shukyo no Gensosei” [Fantastic Aspects of Religion], Sakutaro writes, “Religion, in general, carries fantastic and mysterious facets in its mythical and superstitious dimension. Stripped of superstitious elements, it instantly loses its poetic beauty and fantastic quality” (HSZ 5: 250). In the following poem, titled “Su” [The Nest], the images of bamboo shoots, the dark ground, and tangled hairs, as recurrently used in the collection, are directly linked to imaginary visions of penitents.

Take no fushi wa hosoku nariyuki
Take no ne wa hosoku nariyuki
Take no senmmou wa chika ni nobiyuki
Kiri no gotoku nariyuki
Kennshi no gotoku kasureyuki
Keburi no youni kiesariyuki
Aa kaminoke mo midare midareshi

[Bamboo shoots grow thinner
Bamboo roots grow thinner
Their hairlets pierce the ground
Like points of files sharpened
Growing flimsy like threads of silk
Fading away like a smoke
Oh, sinners, with their tangled hair]
Kuraki dojo ni tsumibito ha
Zanngge no su ozo kakesomeshi

Start to weave a nest of penitence
In the darkest bottom of the ground.

Here the ghostly emergence of sinners and penitents is almost synchronized with the deepening awareness of loneliness and fear. As the poet’s feelings of loneliness and melancholy intensify, they are metaphorically configured and projected as visions of sinners and penitents. In the following poem, titled “Zange” [Penitence], the poet envisions a highly imagistic and rather surrealistic appearance of a sinner.

Aruminium no usuki shihen ni
Subete no kotoba ha shirusaretari
Yukigumoru sora no kanata ni tsumibito hitori
Hinemosu hagamina shi
Ima haya inochi kooran to suruzokashi
Mafuyu o hikaru matsu ga e ni
Zanngge no hito no sugata ari

[On a fine sheet of aluminum
The Word is all written down
A lonely sinner appearing
In the wintry sky shivering
A frozen soul hung
On a gleaming branch of the pine tree
A figure of a penitent appearing]

The reader will immediately recognize the similarity of Sakutaro’s peculiar image patterns: visions of sinners appearing in the sky or digging a nest of penitence on earth, both of which serve as fixed metaphors for the poet’s psychological state. Rather than suggest the universality of sin or a concept of original sin, Sakutaro creates intensely personal visions of sinners and penitents. Thus, the Christian concepts are transfigured as images, metaphors, or verbal correlatives evoking the poet’s state of mind.

Our argument will be supported further by the fact that Sakutaro’s vision of sin is totally destitute of a moral and discursive dimension. Without references to the transcendental presence of God or to the man’s spiritual state in general, Sakutaro is merely concerned with the suggestive qualities of the Christian vocabulary—a case which directly points toward the absence of dramatic struggles over the matter of conscience normally associated with the Christian’s awareness of sin. Sakutaro’s visions of sin, in other words, are most frequently reduced to representations of his loneliness and melancholy, or merely his feelings of dull un-

Characteristically, his vision of sin is closely associated with the image of sickness. Throughout the collection *Tsuki ni Hoeru*, the motif of sickness, which is intensely psychological and imaginary, is predominant; and together with the visions of sinners and penitents, it serves to constitute the lyrical essence of Sakutaro’s poems. In a fragmentary poem titled “Shippei” [Sickness], Sakutaro writes: “Being sick, the soul soars into heaven/ A soul created by a sick man/ A sad trembling soul of a penitent.” The poet’s awareness of his ailing psyche is transformed and crystallized into creative visions of sinners and penitents. Thus, the emergence of the sick man’s face, as seen in the first poem of the collection, thematically corresponds to the visionary appearance of sinners and penitents.

We have seen in Sakutaro’s poems a uniquely original convergence of traditional expressive poetics and the modern symbolist movement. Sakutaro’s use of Christian imagery is suggestive of his emotional and psychological state, while creating intensely personal visions with exotic and fantastic overtones.

**C. Stephen Crane’s Vision of Sin**

The singular practice of Sakutaro’s image-making will be sharply outlined when compared to an instance of poetry strongly rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Stephen Crane’s *The Black Riders and Other Lines* will provide us with a point of reference to illustrate not only a different cultural and poetic tradition but also the similarity of the process in which the symbolist poetics, originated in Europe, is transplanted and assimilated either to American and Japanese tradition.

There is no direct contact or literary relationship between Sakutaro and Stephen Crane from either literary or biographical points of view. However, the two poets demonstrate marked similarities in their creative attitudes and literary careers as a whole. Both poets are equally experimental and revolutionary in their respective poetic tradition; and they are similarly regarded as the precursors of the symbolist and the imagist movements. Stylistically, they wrote in untraditional free verse: Sakutaro discarded the traditional seven-five metric scheme; Stephen Crane rejected fixed meters and rhymes. Thematically, too,
their poems are sensationally rebellious: Sakutaro experimented with such extraordinary themes, at least in his days, as sex, crime, and madness, while Crane dealt with moral hypocrisy and religious skepticism. Naturally, they suffered similar consequences: two of Sakutaro’s poems were censored and labeled as being obscene, whereas seven of Crane’s poems were banned by the publisher for their unmasked profanity.

The symbolist use of language in Stephen Crane’s and Sakutaro’s poems is similarly linked to the central image of their poems: the Christian vision of sin. In both poems, the Christian vision is presented not so much as a discursive element as an intensely personal vision, conveying the poet’s state of mind as well as a dark and pessimistic view of the world. The title poem of Stephen Crane’s *The Black Riders* shows us how closely his poetic method is related to the creation of imagistic visions.

Black riders came from the sea.  
There was clang and clang of spear and shield,  
And clash and clash of hoof and heel,  
Wild shouts and the wave of hair  
In the rush upon the wind:  
Thus the ride of Sin. (BR I)

Crane’s vision of sin, represented allegorically with the use of dramatic personification, is also marked with the richness and vividness of the visual and acoustic images, each serving to intensify the nightmarish quality of the experience.

I stood upon a high place  
And saw, below, many devils  
Running, leaping,  
And carousing in sin.  
One looked up, grinning,  
And said, “Comrade! Brother!” (BR IX)

Daniel Hoffman distinguishes between two types of Stephen Crane’s po-
Hoffman sees a gradual progression in Crane's poetics, moving away from allegorical inclinations toward more allusive poems producing complex and rich poetic experiences. In contrast to the allegorical discursiveness which virtually outweighs symbolist elements in the above poem, the following poem explores more fully the suggestive and evocative qualities of poetic experience with the use of metaphors and color imagery.

God lay dead in Heaven;
Angels sang the hymn of the end;
Purple winds went moaning,
Their wings drip-dripping
With blood
That fell upon the earth.
It, groaning thing,
Turned black and sang.
Then from the far caverns
Of dead sins
Came monsters, livid with desire.
They fought,
Wrangled over the world,
A Morsel.
But of all sadness this was sad,—
A woman's arms tried to shield
The head of a sleeping man
From the jaws of the final beast. (BR LXVII)

Here the allegorical construct, with its religious themes, is reinforced further by the intimation of poetic sentiments as created by such images as "Purple winds went moaning,/ Their wings drip-dripping/ With blood" and also "A woman's arms tried to shield/ The head of a sleeping man/ From the jaws of the final beast." Although Crane was unaware of the symbolist movement among his European peers, he was keenly alert to the rhetorical use of poetic visions and color imagery; and he has been considered as a precursor of major poetic move-
ments in the twentieth century, especially the Imagist movement.

D. Color Imagery

In order to enhance the symbolistic qualities of their poems, Stephen Crane and Sakutaro similarly resort to the effusive use of color imagery: Crane’s vision of the world is predominantly black and white, while Sakutaro shows a marked preference for blue and green. If Crane’s vision is said to be a moral nightmare of black and white, Sakutaro’s world is a nightmare of melancholy in blue and green. Sakutaro once wrote of his poetry: “Here is a flute whose music is pure green.”19 Among Sakutaro’s titles are “Blue Cat,” “Green Flute,” and “Pale-blue Horse,” and in Tsuki ni Hoeru there are effusive references to the colors blue and green: “green bamboo,” “blue flame,” “blue blood,” “green window.”

The color imagery in Sakutaro’s poetry is closely linked to the key concept of sin and repentance—a case strongly indicative of Sakutaro’s tendency to expressive poetics. His deep sense of melancholia, visualized in the world of blue and green, are figuratively projected into the visions of sinners and penitents. In the following poem, the poet’s melancholia and sense of despondency are configured as illusive blue flames in his mind.

Miyo subete no tsumi ha shirusaretari [Behold all sins have been inscribed
Saredo subete ha ware ni arazariki yet not all are mine,
Makoto ni ware ni arawareshi wa verily manifest to me are
Kagenaki aoki honoo no genei nomi only the illusions of blue flames
without shadows
Yuki no ue ni kiesaru aishou no yuurei nomi only the ghosts of pathos that fade
off over the snow,
Aa kakaruhi no setunaru zange wo mo Ah, painful confessions on such a
day, what shall I make of them
Subete ha aoki nonoo no genei nomi all are but the illusions of blue
flames (7)]

Here the color blue serves to enhance the general opaqueness of the poetic vi-
sion. Unable to penetrate into his ailing psyche, the poet evokes through a cluster of associations such as "sins," "illusions of blue flames," "ghosts of pathos," and "painful confessions." Divorced from the religious context, these Christian concepts are subtly transformed into figurative expressions suggesting the poet's state of mind. In other words, Sakutaro seeks to harmonize these Christian images into his lyrical poetics with very little reference to its moral and religious implications.

Crane's use of color imagery, on the other hand, is heavily imbued with biblical and religious implications. The visionary appearances are clothed rather allegorically in black and white, with occasional flashes of red. The color black is exclusively associated with sin, death, evil, and war, as demonstrated in the title poem in which the appearance of the black riders is inseparably connected with the vision of sin. In Black Riders, we encounter "black terror" (BR X), "Lands turned black and bare" (BR XIV), "From whence the world looks black" (BR XXVIII), "Shrouded above in black impenetrableness" (BR XXIX), "Little black streams of people" (BR XXXII), "I stood musing in a black world" (BR XLIX), and "He went through valleys/ Of black death-slime" (BR LIVIII).

Ruth Miller observes that Crane is "not concerned with how things look, but how people act. And it is not too much to say that for Crane they act black or white. As for the rest, he is easily satisfied. Death-slime is black, evil is black, his beloved is fair, angels are golden."20

Ruth Miller's comment should be slightly modified with reference to the color white as it is a little ambiguous in its symbolic implications. Crane, in other words, is scarcely more concerned with the moral impunity as suggested by the color white than with the force of irony and sarcasm with which the color is portrayed in turn to mask the presence of evil. Despite its apparent association with purity, innocence, and moral integrity, the color white is related to vanity, hypocrisy, and death. The image of purity and virtue, however, often proves to be a veil of vanity and hypocrisy. In the following poem, the priest in "the white procession" paradoxically uncovers his guilt and sin.

There was a great cathedral.
To solemn songs,
A white procession
Moved towards the altar.
The chief man there
Was erect, and bore himself proudly.
Yet some could see him cringe,
As in a place of danger,
Throwing frightened glances into the air,
A start at threatening faces of the past. (BR LXIII)

Similarly, in Crane’s other poems, the man “Clothed all in white, and radiant” betrays “the features of Vanity” (BR LX): and the “good white lands” remain a mere illusion to the one who only sees the scene of gray (WK 97). The color white is also occasionally associated with images of death, as seen in “Two white fish stand guard at his bier” (BR XXXVIII) and “the rolling white eyes of dying men” (WK 126).

Provided, as Daniel Hoffman aptly points out, that Crane’s poetics ranges, and shifts in the course of time, from allegorical to symbolistic, we may also argue that Crane’s use of color imagery evolves from the monotone phase of black and white to the enriched “chorus of colors.” In other words, the allegorical discursiveness and more or less explicit subjectivity of Crane’s poems gradually give way to exploration of imagery and its symbolistic suggestiveness. Particularly, in the second collection of his poems, War Is Kind, the symbolic use of color imagery becomes manifest.

Each small gleam was a voice
--A lantern voice—
In little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.
A chorus of colors came over the water;
The wondrous leaf-shadow no longer wavered,
No pines crooned on the hills
The blue night was elsewhere a silence
When the chorus of colors came over the water,
Little songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.
It may well be noted that, along with the enrichment of colors and synaesthetic effects ("chorus of colors"), the allegorical sensibility is sharply undermined by the image of natural abundance.

Small glowing pebbles
Thrown on the dark plane of evening
Sing good ballads of God
And eternity, with soul's rest.
Little priests, little holy fathers
None can doubt the truth of your hymning
When the marvelous chorus comes over the water
Songs of carmine, violet, green, gold.

Stephen Crane's and Sakutaro's use of color imagery, however, still differs considerably from the principles of French Symbolism as defined by William York Tindall. In his analysis of Mallarme's aesthetics, Tindall underscores the principle of autonomy in the poetic images as well as the evocative use of language. In other words, the symbolist poetics is characterized by the creation of an aesthetically autonomous realm which is somewhat detached from the external reality. As Tindall observes, Mallarme's poems are generally "impersonal, objective, and incommunicative" in their effects.21 "The symbols of Symbolism," Edmund Wilson also comments, "... were metaphors detached from their subjects."22 Viewed from this context, Sakutaro's poetics sharply departs from French Symbolism in that his images and metaphors, configured within the framework of the traditional expressive poetics in Japan, directly serve to represent the poet's subjective feelings and psychological conditions. His poems are strongly personal, subjective, and highly communicative.

Crane's symbolist method, on the other hand, can also be differentiated from Sakutaro's and from the French symbolists'. His symbols and dramatic visions are not entirely liberated from the religious frameworks of thoughts and sensibility. His poetic world, as Daniel Hoffman observes, is created with "the allegorical prerogative of providing an imaginary construct to represent the real world not, as the Symbolist would, to substitute for it."23 Crane's images are
strongly biblical, while his metaphors work within the moral and didactic framework of Christian tradition. Like Hawthorne, Melville, and Dickinson, Crane works within the strong influence of allegorical sensibility as a part of his cultural and literary heritage; and his “symbolistic metaphors develops from a persistent background of allegorism.” The Calvinist dogmas, allegorical epistemology, and biblical imagery and typology doubtlessly place Crane’s poems within the cultural and moral tradition in America. Amy Lowell, pioneer of the imagist movement in America, was the first to point out the strong biblical influence upon Crane’s poetry: “Crane was so steeped in the religion in which he was brought up that he could not get it out of his head.” Several other critics, while in search of sources for Crane’s poetic inspiration, have connected his poetry to various Christian writings: Daniel Hoffman, for instance, detects the similarity of the religious visions and images between The Black Riders and What Must I Do to be Saved?, a religious tract that was written by Crane’s uncle, Bishop Jesse T. Peck; James Cox argues that the allegorical form of The Black Riders is directly borrowed from Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress; and Itabashi Yoshie also observes that the arrangement of poems in The Black Riders closely parallels the biblical sequence.

E. Sakutaro’s Christian Vision

In contrast to Stephen Crane’s use of biblical imagery, Sakutaro’s visions of sinners and penitents are almost entirely dissociated from the biblical and moral context. While introducing Christian vocabulary into his poems, Sakutaro carefully sifts the conceptual and religious elements, thereby creating highly visionary and crystallized images. The realm of poetic experience Sakutaro explores in this collection is somehow foreign to the moral and religious dimensions of the Christian concepts—a case which is further vindicated by the fact that he apparently intends to exclude more religiously-oriented poems from the collection.

Sakutaro’s use of the Christian vision may well be related in effects to his favorite choice of foreign vocabulary. Loan words, particularly, are abundant in his poems: “prachina” (platinum), “rajiumu” (radium), “pisutoru” (pistol), “shaberu” (shovel) are some of these examples. The novelty and exoticism of these
foreign words directly correspond to the effects of the Christian vision in that they both serve to defamiliarizes the Japanese reader; in other words, the religiosity of the Christian vision is subtly transformed and relegated to something more akin to evocative functions. It should be noted in this context that the reader finds in Sakutaro’s poems a singular combination of the Christian images and the traditional Japanese images. In his poems of repentance, Sakutaro engages such traditional cultural icons as bamboos, chrysanthemums, pine trees, and turtles. By combining these culturally opposite images, Sakutaro seeks to enhance the effects of novelty and exoticism, thus radically defamiliarizing the reader’s response. In the following poem, “Tenjo Ishi” [Hanged in Heaven], the reader witnesses a highly visionary and surrealistic use of the Christian image:

Tooya ni hikaru matsu no ha ni,  
Zange no namida shitatarite,  
Tooya no sorani shimoshiroki  
Tenjo no matsu ni kubi wo kake  
Tenjo no matsu wo kouruyori,  
Inor eru sama ni tsurusarenu (27)  
[Onto the pine needles that gleam in distant sky,  
tears of penitence drip,  
he hangs his neck from a pine in heaven,  
white in the sky of distant night.  
Out of his longing for a pine in heaven  
like a prayer, he’s been hung (13).]

Closely related to the visions of sinners and penitents are the contrasting images of light and darkness. While suggestive of the Christian implications, the imagery of light and darkness used in Sakutaro’s poems is radically distinguished from the moral, biblical context. For Sakutaro, especially in the early stage of his poetic career, the image of light and darkness holds a special significance. In the afterword to *Tsuki ni Hoeru*, Muroo Saisei, poet and a close friend of Sakutaro’s explains Sakutaro’s contrasting use of light and darkness in relation to the poetic vision of sin:

The truth of his stories are deep inside. Dark inside the intestines of the man are sundry confused machines and organisms, sick, rotten, and dying, which desperately turn to light. Toward light. This is all that he seeks. The mystery of his poems can be compared neither to that of Poe nor Baudelaire. It is a special realm of experience that only an ailing man can
Sakutaro’s use of light and darkness, Saisei explains, illustrates the poet’s creative process. Darkness, often represented by such images as “bottom of the ground” and “night,” suggests the poet’s awareness of his ailing psyche, whereas the image of light is often associated with spirituality, inspiration, and poetic vision. More significantly, Saisei compares Sakutaro’s poetic process to an act of repentance and praying. Rather than suggesting Sakutaro’s pseudo-religious confession of sin in his poems, Saisei merely indicates that, in Sakutaro’s poems, the visions of sin and repentance serve as metaphors for his creative process.

It is noteworthy that Sakutaro’s visions of sin and penitence are often associated with the image of light. Discussing the role of the poet as a medium for divine inspiration, Sakutaro directly connects the poet’s creative self with the image of spiritual light. The figure of a “great poet” surrounded by a “heavenly halo” (HSZ 12: 33) directly corresponds to the vision of a penitent in his one-line poem titled “Kyokko” (The Ultimate Light):

Zangesha no haigo niwa bireina kyokko ga aru. [Behind the penitent arises a halo of beautiful light.]

If the image of light represents poetic inspiration, the vision of a penitent here is associated with the poet’s ideal self. The poet’s ailing psyche is somehow transformed into the imaginative vision of a sinner. While strongly suggestive of the Christian idea of redemption, the image of light goes further to indicate the poet’s ideal vision of self envisaged in his imagination.

Notes

For a discussion of Sakutaro’s relationship with Erena, see especially Komatsu Ikuko, “Sakutaro to ‘Erena,’” *Gendaishi Dokuhon* 136-41.

It remains still a moot point whether Sakutaro was really a “good Christian” with a strong sense of faith and religious duty. In fact, Sakutaro’s attitude toward Christianity is undermined by profound skepticism. “For us Orientals,” writes Sakutaro, “Christianity is a foreign religion full of mysteries and fearful profundities, the one we cannot fully understand forever” *HSZ* 5: 222.


Hagiwara Sakutaro, *Tsuki ni Hoeru*, *HSZ* 1: 18. The page numbers on the original poems are based on this edition.


Two of Sakutaro’s poems, “Airen” [Love] and “Koi ni Koisuru Hito” [Man in Love with Love], were censored for their obscenity and banned from *Tsuki ni Hoeru*. *HSZ* 5: 421.


21 Tindall 50.
23 Hoffman 61.
24 Hoffman 251.
25 Hoffman 12.
27 Hoffman 53-73.
31 Shibuya 325.
32 Shibuya Kunitada argues that the principal images in *Tsuki ni Hoeru*, such as bamboo, pine, chrysanthemum, and turtle, have strong cultural implications as traditional Japanese icons. Shibuya 330.
33 Almost all references to light and illumination in *Tsuki ni Hoeru* have spiritual significance. In “Jozai Shihen Noto,” moreover, Sakutaro refers to his poems as “poetry of light” (Shibuya 304) and also engages light imagery as a metaphor for spirituality.
34 Muro Saisei, “Kenko no Toshi” [City of Health], *Tsuki ni Hoeru, HSZ* 1: 100.