



# Kokuhaku

[Confession]

By Machida Kō

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告白  
町田康

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Machida Kō is an author with a unique résumé, having taken up writing after a period as a punk-rock singer. With his ability to open up new areas of potential for contemporary Japanese fiction, today he is seen as one of the country's most vital writers. *Kokuhaku* is a noteworthy work putting his full talent as a novelist on display.

The protagonist of the novel is a real figure from history, Kumatarō, a notorious killer who carried out the “10 Kawachi murders” in 1893 in what is today part of Osaka Prefecture. The book traces his interior landscape and actions from his early years to the tragic conclusion of his life. It draws on historical fact to describe the time in which the story is set, but this is no ordinary work of historical fiction. The entire novel is infused with the theme of the gaps between what people think and what they express in words. Kumatarō is a deeply contemplative character, despite being born into the poverty of a farming household, and throughout his life he is tormented by the inability to find the words he needs to express the ideas in his mind.

The novelist makes talented use of Kawachi-accented Japanese as he depicts the words and psychology of the protagonist throughout this lengthy work. Machida makes use of unusual rhythms in his writing, which features a delicate balance between the Kawachi dialect and standard Japanese, dialogue that can be as amusing as a comedy sketch, and piercingly accurate observations of human beings. All these factors make his text one that keeps a firm grip on the reader's attention until the book's very end. (NM)

## Machida Kō

Born in Osaka Prefecture in 1962. Author and musician. Began playing music in a band under the name Machida Machizō. His debut novel *Kusun Daikoku* won him the 1997 Noma Literary Prize for New Writers and the Bunkamura Deux Magots Literary Prize. His 2000 “Kire-gire” [In Shreds] won the Akutagawa Prize. He also won the 2005 Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize for *Kokuhaku*. His many other works include *Meoto-jawan* [The Couple's Teacups] and *Tōkyō hyōzen* [Wandering in Tokyo].



### 町田康 (マチダ コウ)

1962年大阪府生まれ。作家、ミュージシャン。高校時代より町田町蔵の名で音楽活動を始める。1997年に処女小説『くっすん大黒』で野間文芸新人賞、Bunkamuraドゥマゴ文学賞、2000年には「きれぎれ」で芥川賞を受賞する。2005年『告白』で谷崎潤一郎賞を受賞。他に『夫婦茶碗』『東京飄然』など多数。

町田康はパンクロック歌手から小説家に転身するという異色の経歴の持ち主だが、いまや現代日本小説の新しい可能性を切り開く、もっとも重要な作家の一人と目されている。『告白』はその彼が、本格的な長編作家としての力量を示した注目すべき作品である。

『告白』の主人公は、1893年に「河内十人斬り」事件を起こした悪名高い殺人犯、熊太郎という実在の人物である。小説はその彼の心理と行動を生き立ちから悲劇的な最期に至るまで追求したもので、史実や時代背景を踏まえてはいるが、普通の意味での歴史・伝記小説ではない。全編を貫いているのは、意外にも、思考と言語表現のずれというテーマである。貧しい農民の子に生まれながら極度に思弁的だった熊太郎は、一生を通じて、自分の思考を表現する言語を持たないことに悩まされ続ける。

そして小説は熊太郎の日常語である河内弁を駆使しながら、主人公の心理と言葉に肉薄する文章の奔流をえんえんと繰り広げる。町田康の文体には稀有のリズム感覚が備わっており、河内弁と標準語の絶妙の混交、漫才のように可笑しなかけあいや、鋭く射た人間観察などが織り成すテキストは、読者を最後まで放すことがないだろう。(NM)

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