“Let me go now.” The man was blinking his golden eyes and wiping furiously at the sweat.

Miyazawa Kenji had a magical sense of the Japanese language which captured the hearts of generations of readers. He was virtually unknown however, during his lifetime. Most of his works were published posthumously, as was “Night of the Festival” which was published in 1940. The story centers on a woodsman who appears suddenly at a village festival, and is saved by a young boy.

Miyazawa Kenji’s fairy tale “Night of the Festival” is still loved today. Ryouji sets up for a festival. He comes upon villagers who is asking for a shaggy giant with a red face and golden eyes. The man ate dumplings but had no money to pay. He begs for forgiveness. He promises to bring firewood and chestnuts to settle the debt. Moved by the man’s tears, Ryouji pays for the dumplings. Ryouji’s grandfather hears what happened. He says the man must be a mountain giant. During the night Ryouji’s garden is filled with chestnuts and firewood. The tale of kind Ryouji and a good-natured giant is truly heart warming.

The woodsman who appears suddenly from nowhere is an outsider and festivals in Japan are very, very sort of insider affair. So that someone from outside when they come in, these are often sort of slights, sort of tension how to cross the threshold into the community itself. He’s completely an outsider, and they try to reject him. Someone in the crowd says “Knock him over, punch him.” And then suddenly this sort of violent, sort of swell that comes up from the people who are watching the festival itself.

Right. I’m going to help him out. He is saved because this very young boy, Ryouji, notices the tears in his eyes. And he understands instinctively that these tears mean that the woodsman is a good man and he didn’t come there especially to try to cheat the people. And it reminds us that everyone in a community has a sense of what’s inside the community, an anxiety toward what’s outside of it. We all have this sort of self-protective instinct which is something that is brought up in us, which we didn’t have one when we are children, this sort of pure childlike wonderment and sort of pity for people in trouble, for living beings in troubles which this young boy expresses very well, and very, very straight on in this short story.

He seemed to be wiping away some tears as well.

I read this story as a sort of parable, very close to the sort of teachings of Christ. Kenji was a fervent Buddhist. He really admired and believed in the Lotus Sutra, but he was also concerned and interested in the Christian faith and Christian teachings of universal self sacrificing love. The woodsman is a representative or messenger from the Japanese gods of the mountains, but he also sort of cries and shows his tears and his pain in order to make the people around him aware of what is really good, and what is really, really important and necessary to lead a good life. The fact that Ryouji notices is that and that he is sort of given a room or effort and in return wants to give something back to this strange savage man is very, very similar to the vision of a Jesus Christ. One thing that’s very good about this story is