Charlotte Eubanks

The Pennsylvania State University
State College, Pennsylvania

On the Wings of a Bird

Folklore, Nativism, and Nostalgia in Meiji Letters

Abstract

In the wake of Western colonial expansion in Asia, the Meiji government of Japan (1868–1912) began a massive push toward *bunmei kaika* 文明開化 (civilization and enlightenment). This campaign was not limited to the political sphere but extended into the cultural realm, resulting in growing public interest in all things Western. Despite this sea change in Japanese cultural orientation, however, there was a constant literary undercurrent of nativism and a recurrent interest in folk practices and oral traditions as well as in the Japanese countryside, rather than the developing cityscape. Focusing on the work of ethnographer Yanagita Kunio and his impact on the Meiji literary climate and particularly on the work of Izumi Kyōka, this article will suggest some of the ways in which Japanese authors in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries mined the folklore and rural customs of Japan's past in order to express their fear, excitement, and ambivalence about life in the modern age.

Keywords: folklore—nativism—Meiji literature—Yanagita Kunio—Izumi Kyōka

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> Boredom is the dream bird that hatches the egg of experience. A rustling in the leaves drives him away. His nesting places—the activities that are intimately associated with boredom—are already extinct in the cities and are declining in the countryside as well.
>
> — Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," 1936[1]

> [P]utting myself in the position of the adult reader, who claims there is nothing he can bear to read beyond the classics, I must acknowledge that our modern literature is somehow defective. For only that writing which one has leisurely perused by the hearth, which has offered consolation and a lifetime of untiring companionship—only such writing can be called true literature.
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> — Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, "On Art," 1933[2]

One of the main thrusts of modernity in Japan was the need for the emergent Meiji state to prove itself to, and thereby create or solidify, its *kokumin* 国民 (national polity), which was to be organized around the centralizing modern culture of Tokyo. In the process of turning localized subjects into centralized citizens, the civilizing state needed to provide evidence of its superiority to older ways of living and of structuring belief and thought while still being able to mine those old ways for imagery of a pure, identifying Japanese essence. One way for the state to do this was to provide a "cure" (the characters for Meiji, 明治, literally mean "enlightened cure") to the various local "ills" of superstition, beliefs which were often backed up by voluminous folkloric traditions of possessing fox spirits, cannibalistic mountain hags, goblin-like *tengu*, enormous catfish holding up the earth, birds that could take on human form, and other assorted *bakemono* 化け物 (monsters of transformation). It was only against such forces that the modern figure of the Western-trained physician or the state-sponsored educator could prove themselves. And yet complete

eradication and denigration of the folkloric supernatural was out of the question, for then what would the Meiji state have to prove itself and define itself against? After all, the state was remarkably unsuccessful at dealing with the less supernatural illnesses of modernity, such as *tokai netsu* 都会熱 ("city fever," that is, the depopulation of the countryside).[3]

One of the defining characteristics of Japanese modernity is the tendency to see Tokyo not only as a national center, but also as Japan's point of contact with the modern. Consequently, provincial Japan, and especially its more remote and far-flung areas (such as rural mountain communities), came to be identified more and more with the past. As Carol Gluck points out, the provinces and their denizens were ideologically disapproved of—for example in the Meiji government's educational and medical campaigns—for their "obdurate boorishness" and their persistence "in the backward social practices of the rural past" (Gluck 1985, 183) while simultaneously being viewed as a "repository of ancestral custom" and thus a location, at once temporal and geographical, of Japanese cultural essence (180–81). Folklore—its value both as a developing discipline in the university system under the auspices of *minzokugaku* 民俗学 (ethnology) and also as a trove of images, symbols, and plot lines to be mined and manipulated in fiction—was one of the key areas in which these tensions between differing views of the Japanese countryside played themselves out.

These complicated and somewhat contradictory concepts of the countryside (the *kuni* 国 "provinces" that made up the *koku* 国 "nation") did not, of course, spring up out of nowhere. Beginning in the Tokugawa period (1600–1868), Japanese *kokugakusha* 国学者 (nativist scholars), such as Kado no Azumamarō (1669–1736), Kamo no Mabuchi (1697–1701), and Motoori Norinaga (1730–1801), had already begun working on interpretations of Japan's past, referring to their construction as the *kodō* 古道 (Ancient Way). Though for these nativist scholars any and all foreign influence on Japan (such as, most notably Confucianism, but also Buddhism, Sino-Japanese word compounds, and myriad other components of daily life) were viewed as sources of contamination, ideologues of the Meiji state, as inheritors of nativist philosophy, nevertheless looked determinedly, if under duress, to foreign sources for models. In its early years, the Meiji state sent missions to most Western European countries and the United States to observe and document everything from systems of military hygiene and bicameral government to the content of textbooks and even the production of beer. These two currents—one nativist, one Western-looking—combined during the Meiji period to create a very specific understanding of, among other things, the value of folklore and even helped inform opinion on related questions concerning the best, most enlightened way to write modern fiction.

Nativism and the Folkloric "True Heart"

One of the key beliefs consistently worried over by nativist scholars was how modern Japanese people could access original Japanese character, a sort of hazy cultural or racial essence referred to often as the *magokoro* まごころ (true heart). In his study of Tokugawa nativism, Peter Nosco notes that, "The intention of [nativist] studies was, first, to reenter the past and to reconstruct the 'Ancient Way,' and second to reanimate the dormant beatific qualities they believed to have characterized life in the primordially distant past" (Nosco 1990, xii). This intention or, perhaps more accurately, quest was often formulated in terms that have an epic, even supernatural, feel to them, almost as if it were the plot of some piece of romantic literature.

Literature, in fact, is where these scholars turned, believing the effects of temporal displacement from originary Japanese *magokoro* were reversible, and that one could actually "reunite oneself with the Ancient Way" (Nosco 1990, 8). The most commonly recommended method for doing this was "through immersion in the reading, study, and recitation of ancient verse," an immersion which was thought to possess the power to reactivate that "true heart" which lay dormant in every living Japanese person (Nosco 1990, 12). By poring over pieces of classical Japanese literature, most notably the first poetry collection, the *Man'yōshū* 万葉集, scholars believed that they could absorb the "spirit" of ancient Japanese words and rhythms (*kotodama* 言霊), eventually sloughing off the contaminating effects of Sinological constructions and immersing themselves in the pure language of Japanese antiquity. This immersion in and identification with the past, it was thought, would eventually color one's moral character, reactivating in one's own heart that "true heart" of the Japanese of antiquity.

During the Meiji period, however, it was not the verse of the ancient aristocratic capitals that was envisioned as a potential point of numinous reconnection to Japanese cultural identity. Instead, this potential point of connection was located in the rural countryside, and especially in the oral storytelling traditions of the folk. This idea, though it may have grown out of Tokugawa period nativism,[4] was, I believe, profoundly shaped by ideas imported from Germany, especially those of the Grimm Brothers. I will continue, then, by examining the linkage of rural geography with national essence not as it developed in the Japan of the Meiji period (1868–1912), but as it was figured nearly a century earlier in the Germany of 1812–1816. Much like the nativists of Tokugawa Japan, the Grimm Brothers saw themselves as intimately involved in a quest to establish a point of numinous contact with German antiquity. Jack Zipes argues that, "What fascinated the Grimms and compelled them to concentrate on old German literature was a belief that the most natural and pure forms of culture—those which held the community together—were linguistic and were to be located in the past"

(Zipes 1988, 209). For the Brothers, this pure form of culture remained most clearly in the guise of folklore.

The Grimm Brothers opened their famous 1812 collection of folk tales, *Kinder-und Hausmärchen der Brűder Grimm*, with the following lines:

> We find it often, when a storm or other misfortune sent from the heavens has knocked down an entire field of crops, that still, near low hedges or shrubs that stand in the way, there remains a small place safe and with a few ears [of grain] still upright. Then the sun shines again on them and so they go on growing, lonely and unnoticed, no early sickle cutting them for the larder, but in the late summer when they have become ripe and full, there come poor, pious hands searching for them. And ear is laid on ear, bound carefully together and watched over closely, while all the sheaves are carried off home and all winter long are nourishment and probably are also the only seeds for the future. So it is for us, when we reflect on the wealth of German literature from early ages, and then see that from so much nothing vibrant remains, even the memories of it having been lost, and only the folk songs and these innocent folktales are left (Grimm 1956, 55).

This statement, carefully crafted and placed at the very beginning of the Brothers' first folklore collection, was central not only to the formulation of German folklore studies, but, more to the topic at hand, also to the formulation of folklore studies and ethnography in Japan. Yanagita Kunio, recognized as father of the field, cites no other single influence as regularly and as readily as the Grimm Brothers. For that reason alone, their opening comments deserve close consideration.

In these first three sentences, the Grimm Brothers have created a figuration that is incredibly rich and multi-layered. Leaving aside, for a moment, the final sentence, they have cultivated an extended botanical metaphor in order to sculpt a vision of an agricultural community struck by natural disaster. Always at the mercy of a greater force, the fields of grain, so painstakingly planted, have been ravaged by a passing storm, which, in its capriciousness, has left only a small, neglected stand of grain undamaged. Either it is too late in the season or there are no seeds to replant and the stand is left to grow in isolation, sheltered up against the protective barrier of some low-lying bushes. Finally, in a near invocation of the Ruth-Boaz story from the Old Testament, a disembodied pair of "poor, pious hands" searches out the now-ripe heads of grain and harvests them with great care, laying them up for food over the winter and relying on them "as the only seeds for the future."[5] The abiding emotion is one of near-total loss, from which, nevertheless, the hands of the faithful are able to glean some

subsistence and thereby garner a glimmer of hope for the coming year, as if hanging on to their very existence by the merest of threads.

Onto this agricultural vision the Grimms graft their understanding of the state of German literature—"So it is for us"—an understanding keyed again by a sense of tragic loss. Once vibrant and flourishing, German literature has now been reduced—not by a mere storm, but rather by nothing less than the ravages of time—to a small collection of songs and "innocent folktales." These remnants, gleaned presumably by the Grimms' pious hands, represent the only seeds for the regeneration of—what, precisely?—German letters, perhaps, or German spirit? Slightly later in the preface, folklore is described as having "certainly come from some eternal wellspring…and, even when only a single drop, which holds together a small leaf folded against itself, still shimmers in the first light of dawn" (Grimm 1956, 56). Again, the Grimms strike the nostalgic note of impending loss with the diminution of wellspring into droplet, threatening at any moment, with the coming of dawn, to dry up completely.

Thus, the Grimms place themselves at once on the cusp of the new (the dawning day) and the tail-end of the old (the soon-to-evaporate final drop). Thereby, their collection of folklore sets itself up for interpretation as a kind of longing, a narrative of desire. The gap between the riches that once were and the gleanings which remain as the only indication of their existence gapes before us, and out of this gap rises not the collection itself, but its symbolic value as window to the past. It is significant, furthermore, that the language of the foreword, in addition to being agricultural and botanical, is also markedly consumption-based. Grain is, after all, a food to be eaten and, by figuring their text as a sort of larder in which the final kernels of the German folk tradition are stored, the Grimms encourage the consumption (in the form of buying a copy) of their book as a stand-in for ingesting the real nourishment of the tales themselves, the "presence" of which has been damaged by that "storm we call progress."[6]

The Grimms' introduction to the Hausmärchen is fairly brief. Many of its implications and images, however, are amplified further in the foreword to the slightly later (1816) collection *Deutsche Sagen*.[7] The introductory paragraph to this collection reads:

> When a man sets out on life's journey he is accompanied by a good angel… in the guise of an intimate companion. He who does not sense the good fortune that this companion brings him will nevertheless feel a sore loss the minute he crosses the border leading from his fatherland, where the angel will then forsake him. This benevolent companion is none other than the inexhaustible store of tales [*Märchen*], legends [*Sagen*], and history [*Geschichte*], all of which coexist and strive to bring us closer to the refreshing and invigorating spirit [*Geist*] of earlier ages (Grimm 1981, 1).[8]

This passage resonates particularly well with, and foreshadows, that key identifying characteristic of the agrarian myth in Japan: namely, the identification of a specific, demarcated, bounded geographical space with a generally understood temporal location in the past. Unlike in Japan, however, there does not seem to be a centralizing pull, whereby the more remote a place is geographically from the capital, the further in the past it is conceived to be. Rather, in this case, the entire fatherland is defined as a potential point of access to the past, though, in actuality, the Grimms consistently evoke rural and agricultural landscapes as sites for contact with the now almost ghostly or supernatural "spirit" of German antiquity. Also important to note, with respect to this passage, is the image of the journey, the idea of moving through space and crossing boundaries, which is so necessary to understanding one's connection (or loss thereof) to the "presence" of the past, here in the guise of an angelic companion. The traveler, though he may be oblivious of it while in stasis, becomes painfully aware of his "benevolent companion" only when that companion has forsaken him. Understanding and valuation come only through absence. Again, we have the nostalgic cueing of desire for something that is (at least in these days of sparse gleanings) often felt only in terms of its lack, its impending extinction, or its departure.

If the Grimms put a premium on the return to (or at least a connection with) an "earlier age" (*Vorzeit*) in their opening paragraph, they come back to and further rework that proposal in their striking, and somewhat supernatural, conclusion. Noting that "the trivial things" of folklore have until recently been "held in contempt," the Brothers are at pains to show their care and respect, even reverence, for the materials they have collected and will continue to uncover (Grimm 1981, 11). They conclude:

> But the business of collecting, as soon as one has acquired the sincere desire to engage in it [*sobald es einer ernstlich tun will*], is soon worth the effort. And the discoveries border on the innocent joy of childhood, surprising a bird brooding on its nest amid moss and shrubbery.
>
> In regard to our legends, here too one must quietly lift the leaves and carefully bend back the bough so as not to disturb the folk, if one wishes to steal a furtive glance into the strange yet modest world of nature, nestled into itself, and smelling of fallen leaves, meadow grass, and fresh rain.
>
> (Grimm 1981, 11)

In this final passage, the Grimms posit the act of remembering certain elements from that earlier age of childhood as a sort of emotive methodological model for the (re)discovery of those "earlier ages" of German antiquity, promising the same rush of elation. The emotional connection is dependent upon, first

and foremost, the cultivation of a certain sincerity of purpose, an idea that finds resonance with the nativist "true heart." What is truly striking about the passage, however, is not so much its model of discovery but the language of that discovery. A simple bird, in which is contained the entire world of nature, though surprised by the intrusion, again of searching (and pious?) hands, continues to brood on its eggs, which in their regenerative potential evoke the earlier image of the seeds stored up for the future. Finally, in one startling and inspired flick of the pen, it is we who are surprised as we see, in an eerie transformation, not a bird, but in fact "the Folk" themselves, peering back out at us. The now anthropomorphized bird nestles into itself, leaving us (who are nevertheless not the Folk) to walk away with our "innocent joy."

In their next, and final, sentence, the Grimms then invite any and all communication on the topic, encouraging input and samples from other ornithologists, as it were. Perhaps they did not expect to attract attention from a place and time as distant as Meiji Japan, but Yanagita Kunio and that earliest cadre of Japanese folklorists and ethnographers, possibly also sensing a disturbing disjuncture between themselves and the Folk of Japan's past, were certainly happy enough to answer their call.

Casting Meiji Folklore Collections as a "New Nativism"

Yanagita—one of the many disparate influences on the development of the Meiji socio-political climate, especially as concerns the agrarian myth, the value of folklore, and the role of folkloric elements in modern literature—often referred to his scholarship as *shinkokugaku* 新国学 (new nativism).[9] Affected strongly both by the Tokugawa nativists as well as by the work of the Grimm Brothers, throughout his career Yanagita consistently conceived of folklore and his work with it as something that had the power to catalyze Japanese unity and which could even serve, as he put it following World War II, as "one measure in the reconstruction of Japan" 日本再建の一つの手立て (Yanagita 1968b, 498). Yanagita picks up on the central ideas of the Grimms and the nativists, their organizing principles and their moral goals, and continues to rework and elaborate on their imagery as well.

Like the Grimms, Yanagita chose to provide some brief prefatory remarks to his first folklore collection, *Tōno monogatari* 遠野物語 (Tales from/of Tōno, a remote and mountainous farming district). Yanagita puts together a highly fragmented, quickly paced, imagistically packed series of reminiscences of his 1909 trip to the Tōno area, a sort of literary fugue that bombards the reader with a barrage of strange and somewhat frightening images. He describes what he sees on his solo horseback tour of several outlying hamlets and the open wilderness between them by flirting with the numinous and supernatural language of

the uncanny. In so doing, he addresses both the overt goals of his project—the creation of a folklore compilation as point of resonance with a fast-vanishing Japanese past—as well as his more covert and confused emotions regarding that project—especially as centering on his role as one who, though he searches for connection to the Folk, is nevertheless not one of the Folk, reduced to stealing away with the eggs from their nest, feeling, I would hazard, anything but the promised "innocent joy" of childhood encounters.

Things in the mountains are not totally unfamiliar, but are rather somewhat defamiliarized, described as being more animalistic, more primal, more supernaturally powerful, more solitary than similar, more domesticated objects and practices in the plains. Yanagita describes, for instance, stumbling across an eerie scene where

> people wearing masks decorated with the horns of deer danced around with five or six boys holding drawn swords. The tune of the flutes was high and the song so low that, though I was nearby, it was difficult to hear. The day was waning and the wind gusting, the drunken voices of those calling out to others were lonely and, though women laughed and children ran around, somehow or another I was unable to achieve a traveler's sense of loneliness. For Obon, those families with new Buddhas [i.e., recent deaths in the family] raised red and white flags high, and there was a wind, beckoning to the souls (Yanagita 1968c, 5–6).[10]

Recognizing in the odd deer dance of the mountains the more standard lion dance of the plains, Yanagita ultimately identifies the ritual he is seeing as the local Obon festival, the usual late summer festival of the dead. Through conscious literary reconstruction, Yanagita recreates for his readers that sense of other-worldliness, affecting the same shock of defamiliarization that he felt. Things that are familiar and even distinctly Japanese are presented in a wild, supernatural, eerie, and uncanny light, as if they are somehow substantially, emotively distant or different—calling to mind, but ultimately too strange to completely evoke in the author the normal feeling of loneliness that a traveler experiences when surrounded by the bustle of other people. Yanagita leaves his readers, as he himself was left, with the ghost of a feeling.

Leaving the festival, Yanagita's tired and mosquito-ravaged horse loses the trail and the rider finds himself entangled in a thicket. Dismounting, he encounters a straw doll, near life-size, lying on the ground: "As though it were a completely exhausted person, it slept face up" staring at the sky (Yanagita 1968c, 6). The doll, an effigy from a recent ritual aimed at reducing crop damage (coda to the Grimms' preface), has also been ejected from the circle, left to rot in the mountains as a supernatural barrier between the outside world of insects and

storms and the few, paltry rice fields that provide the hamlet with nourishment. The moment constitutes a weird and markedly uncanny scene of doubling and keys again the more somber, almost gothic, undertones that have established the preface's dominant mood.

Ending his reverie as suddenly as he had begun it, Yanagita then notes his desire that his collection of folktales eventually take up the same place in Japanese culture as the *setsuwa* collection *Konjaku monogatari shū* 今昔物語集, its predecessor by more than nine hundred years. Hoping that his collection will come to represent a sort of past that lingers on in the present, he invokes the near-magical transformation of time that opens most of the *Konjaku* tales, *Ima wa mukashi* 今は昔 ("Now is the past"), as if he were willfully bending time, creating a momentary and haunted portal between the past and the present, disturbed moment. He then concludes with a poem:

Okinasabi	Acting like old men
tobazu nakazaru	not flying off, not crying out
wochikata no	owls of the forest
mori no fukurō	on the verge of falling in --
warafu ran kamo	could it be they are laughing? (Yanagita 1968c, 6)

This is the language of the *bakemono*, the monster of transformation, the animal that takes on human shape, and it brings back into play the image of the dancing men in their deerskin masks. Are these the men, now in the form of forest owls, who laugh at him, the traveler lost and alone in the mountains?[11]

Yanagita is caught up in and actively cultivates here the language of narrative desire. Though he has taken the train to this remote corner of Japan, mounted a borrowed horse and set off to cross deep ravines, rushing rivers, and steep mountain passes, and though he has done all of this, presumably, to connect with the local people and collect their stories, when he finds them he recoils from them and their strange ways, wishing ultimately to remain apart, distinct, separate. He draws near only to push himself and his readers away again, so that the journey is not a linear progression to a named destination but an elliptical orbit around a desired experience, the experience of contact with the past, the essence, the supernatural. This is the structure with which Yanagita wishes to confront his readers; this introduction concerning Yanagita's travels into and out of the deep mountains is the reader's own entrance into and, eventually, ejection from the text.

In the very early days of his scholarship, before the publication of his seminal folklore collection *Tōno monogatari*, Yanagita's first help came from the short-lived travel magazine *Tabi to densetsu* たびと伝説 [Travel and tradition]. That the magazine itself soon went out of print serves as an ironic footnote to

the main point that Yanagita, like the Grimms, had not only sensed the value of folklore as a point of potential reconnection with, or reanimation of, some sort of national spirit or cultural identity, but had also recognized the place of his folkloric collections as consumable narratives of desire, or, to borrow a term from Marilyn Ivy, "discourses of the vanishing." Thus, he structures his introduction both to pull in his reader as well as to rebuff the reader, leaving him unsatisfied, perhaps even haunted. Yanagita's scholarly works, and especially his collections of oral folklore, present themselves as symbols arising from that gap between the textual summaries (what he often called *suji* 筋, or "sinews") of the oral folklore he collected and the endangered animating spirit (*kokoro*, or "heart") that they signified.[12]

In this connection, Yanagita harbored some seemingly contradictory hopes for his collections. In the preface to *Tōno monogatari*, discussed above, he explicitly claims that he compiled and published the collection with the aim of "frightening the people of the plains," that is, his reading public outside of the mountains (Yanagita 1968c, 5). And yet, elsewhere, he appears to have wanted to present his collections as a sort of balm to comfort these very same readers, to soothe their hearts. Yanagita describes, for example, how a certain evening when, "having headed out on a journey and stayed at a farmhouse…in the very far reaches of the countryside, in the peaceful, warm glow of the hearth," in order to encourage the locals to tell him more stories, he took out the collection he was working on and began reading from it (Yanagita 1968b, 496). Having "loosened them up a little" and "relaxed them," he is now able to listen to them tell their stories which, he says, represent "the only way, in the lonely life of the fishing or farming village, for people to comfort the heart of daily life" (平生の心を慰める) (Yanagita 1968b, 496). Looking back on his completed collection, he notes that, "not stopping at the pleasures of our own comfort" (自分等の楽しみ慰め), he began publication of his own folklore magazine, "having in mind a national undertaking" (Yanagita 1968b, 496). Having shifted focus to a nationally-syndicated magazine, rather than the rural, fireside storytelling, it is no longer the lonely heart of the isolated villager being comforted here, but rather "our" hearts, the hearts of those of us who, like Yanagita, search in the bushes and moss to rekindle that connection with the Folk, thereby both soothing a sense of loss or displacement and simultaneously evoking those nostalgic distances of narrative desire that will keep us coming back for more.

Marilyn Ivy describes this process, noting that "the disappearance of an object—whether newly imagined as the folk, the community, authentic voice, or tradition itself—is necessary for its ghostly reappearance in an authoritatively rendered text" (Ivy 1995, 67). She then refers to the "spectral status" of the text, indicating something that hovers between two worlds, like Yanagita's depiction of the souls of the recently departed (Ivy 1995, 67). I believe that this "spectral

status" is something that haunts the undercurrents of Meiji period literature in Japan, not necessarily so much in the mainstream writings of Naturalist authors, but certainly in many of the compositions of those minor writers—the Romantics and the Gothics—authors, such as Izumi Kyōka, who formed the undercurrent of Meiji letters.

Understanding Modernity as a Supernatural Force

Yanagita and Kyōka became acquainted in early 1896, fourteen years before Yanagita published *Tōno monogatari* and just about the time that Kyōka began work on a short story entitled "Kechō" 化鳥 ("monstrous bird" or "transforming bird"). Yanagita's main contact with the Tōno area was a young man named Sasaki Kizen, a would-be author who adopted his pen name Kyōseki in admiration of the works of Kyōka and who had traveled to Tokyo at least partly in hopes of meeting with him. It is uncertain whether Kyōka had read the Grimm Brothers, but he had spoken with Yanagita about his budding interest in folklore studies and was certainly well aware of the continuing influence of Tokugawa nativism and recent elaborations of the agrarian myth on the developing Meiji ideology. I do not wish to assert that he got his central image of the monstrous bird for his story from Yanagita or the Grimms. In fact, as Charles Inouye suggests (1998, 123–24), Kyōka probably first encountered the image from one of his mother's illustrated Tokugawa-period *kusa zōshi*.[13] I wish only to assert that the story and its images fit in rather nicely with the discussion at hand and thus provide a convenient site for considering some of the inter-relations between the Meiji sociopolitical climate and Meiji period Gothic and Romantic literature.[14]

In much criticism of Kyōka's work, he is usually discussed as a minor author, a somewhat erratic writer who is most closely identified, when he is attached to any school at all, with the Romantic, or sometimes the smaller Gothic, school of literature. Even in works, such as that by Charles Inouye, that argue for a reconsideration of Kyōka's writings and a repositioning of his works vis-à-vis the literary canon, most argumentation is carried out in terms of his relation to (actually rebellion against) the more mainstream Naturalist schools of writing which dominated the literary scene in Meiji Japan. Writers of the Naturalist school, then regarded as the clearly dominant branch of literary production, were very concerned with the importation of and active experimentation with Western European and North American modern writing techniques, often actively deriding Tokugawa-period writing styles and practices. Particularly, they championed the idea of what, in Japanese, was called *genbun itchi* 言文一致 (the unification of colloquial and written speech). Originally a political platform of the Meiji government—some of whose proponents went so far as to suggest the abolition of Chinese characters and the use of romanization to write Japanese—

the *genbun itchi* campaign was aimed at increasing literacy skills and making publications, such as newspapers, more fully accessible to a larger readership.

For the Naturalist writers, however, this necessitated soul-searching, and often dogged, attempts to document in an oddly-stilted colloquial language the inner workings of their own minds and consciousnesses. Framing this as an inherently modernist project, most authors, including Futabatei Shimei, widely credited as the first author of a *genbun itchi* novel, shunned the use of provincial language in favor of the dialect of the capital. Similarly, the general attitude of such authors towards the countryside and its folklore was generally like that of the Meiji medical and educational campaigns: that is, actively derisive. In situating their stories most often in the capital or other urban centers and focusing on the inner workings of their protagonists' consciousnesses, they very seldom accessed the supernatural, folkloric material that had been so routinely employed in Tokugawa-period writings in Japan. Not so for that stream of Romantic and Gothic writers, such as Izumi Kyōka, who were often viewed as second-rate, minor authors by the literati at the time, but who have come to prominence now, when so many contemporary authors point not to the Naturalists but rather to the Romantics as their source of inspiration.

The young protagonist of Kyōka's story "Kechō" is a boy by the name of Ren'ya. Despite the rather large cast of characters, he is one of the very few who are actually named, thus making his name a rather important detail of the story. The character for his Ren'ya (廉や) indicates someone who knows how to distinguish between right and wrong, bringing to mind the earlier Nativist philosophy of the *magokoro* (pure heart). Unlike the Nativists, however, Ren'ya does not spend his days poring over ancient Japanese verse. In a pattern that should be familiar by now, he instead passes most of his time in conversation with his mother, who entertains him by telling him stories based directly on Japanese folklore. Kyōka hints throughout the narrative that Ren'ya himself may in fact be one of those interspecies children that populate folkloric stories throughout the archipelago. His father is mentioned only once in the text, as having been a rich man who owned a good bit of land. For some unexplained reason, Ren'ya's father is now absent and the wife (or at least mother of his son) and child he left behind have fallen into financial straits, making their meager living by collecting a toll from those who wish to cross their bridge into the city. The bridge that Ren'ya and his mother operate connects Kanazawa city proper with the mountainous terrain beyond, a geography occupied in the story by various outcasts (such as participants in freak shows, monkey trainers, and the like) and Buddhist priests. Traditionally in Japanese folklore, liminal places such as mountain passes, marshes, and borders between provinces tend to give rise to the presence of supernatural or interspecies (half-human) beings.

Further, Ren'ya's mother, teaches him to believe in and value continuity

between the animal and human worlds, as opposed to the state-sponsored ethics lessons he receives at school, and to be aware and appreciative of times when those worlds may overlap. For example, when Ren'ya's teacher attempts to claim that humans are superior to animals because they can speak, the boy, citing his mother as an authority on the subject, responds with an argument that birds have their own language, which he will learn to speak as he grows older, just as his mother became fluent in it before him. He concludes his argument with the statement: "No, teacher, you've got it wrong. People, and cats, and dogs, and also bears, we are all the same, all animals" (Izumi 1991, 38). Clearly missing the point, the teacher calls him a *baka* 馬鹿 (jackass).

If the Grimms find solace and presence in an agricultural landscape, Yanagita and Ren'ya seem to feel most comfortable in that liminal space, that borderland between the modernity of the city and the ancient world of the mountains. Though Ren'ya journeys into the city several times a week to attend school, he is bullied constantly and has few human friends, spending much of his free time talking with his mother by the bridge or playing with an abandoned show monkey on the far bank of the river. Also like Yanagita, Ren'ya's relationship to the dual worlds he frequents is highly troubled. Bullied at school, he is nonetheless also afraid of being alone in the mountains. In a flashback to a scene from six months earlier, Ren'ya recalls how he was picking on a monkey. The monkey, having apparently finally had his fill, grabs Ren'ya's legs and pushes him over, so that he slips into the fast-flowing river. Swept under and about to drown, the boy thinks of his mother sitting calmly at home sewing, and just then something cold grabs hold of him, looking at him with big, beautiful eyes that shine behind its long, glossy hair. Recounting the story for his mother later, she replies that it must have been a "beautiful girl with five-colored feathers" who saved him (Izumi 1991, 38). He wants to know where he can find one of those creatures and his mother sends him off to look first at the bird shop in town, and finally in the forest.

In the narrative's climax—a scene that may have directly informed Yanagita's closing verse to his *Tōno monogatari* introduction—the boy finds himself alone in the forest at night. Terrified, he crouches down on the ground, trying to gather the courage to run home, when he hears a strange sound.

> What could it be crying out "hoo-hoo" from far off? In a clear, carrying voice, as if pushing against and stretching out the field's edge, crying, the echo knock-knocking as if rapping up against the rugged ravine, a bird's voice comes as if from far away—an owl.
> And not just one.
> Two. Now three. What are they saying to me, what do they want to say to me? When the birds spoke, I shook with fear and the hair all over my body

stood up on end.
I had honestly never been so frightened as I was that night….
(Izumi 1991, 42).

A wind blows up, rustling the leaves around him and exciting hundreds of tree frogs who join the owls in chorus. Afraid of all the eyes now watching him, the boy squats down on the ground and wraps his robe around his bare legs: "While trembling, gently, somberly, secretly, I drew back my wrists and thought to look at my own body, and when I drew apart my sleeves [and opened my robe], now, without a thought, I screamed out! I looked like a bird!" (Izumi 1991, 42). At this point, his mother grabs him suddenly from behind and the boy faints.

The story, portentously gloomy and frightening throughout, is the very definition of Gothic. Organized stylistically along the same lines as Yanagita's preface to *Tōno*, the story's jumble of images and folkloric motifs is also nostalgic, and not in a simplistic sense. I believe it is an over-reduction of Kyōka's work, and the work of other authors like him, to claim that his writing style represents merely a critical rejection of modernity and an embrace of the past, for the nostalgic relationship to times past is in fact much more complicated than that surface reading would suggest. Instead, I would agree more with Nina Cornyetz's revisionist readings of Kyōka's work as an "attempt to work through the schisms inherent in modernity" (Cornyetz 1999, 44). I believe that Kyōka, in his work, was attempting to occupy and describe that liminal space that was the Meiji period, caught between a desire on the one hand to look back to some mythified pure age of identity and cultural essence, and a desire on the other to move forward into an age of enlightenment (*bunmei* 文明). Kyōka conceived of his monsters as "the concretization of [his] emotions," as symbols for the conflicting feelings and reactions that arose from his persistent haunting of that gap between rural past and urban present (Inouye 1998, 219). Reflecting this continued desire for liminality in his form, Kyōka refuses to provide a conclusive interpretation for Ren'ya's experience, ending the story with Ren'ya's open-ended and grammatically incomplete musing: "Because my mother is here; because my mother was there" (Izumi 1991, 44). This revisionist reading of Kyōka's work is not dependent on a comparison with the Naturalist school, a comparison which seems inevitably to end with him being cast as an inherently anti-establishment writer. True, he may well have been writing in disharmony (even active cacophony) with the more established mainstream school of literary production, but, in the broader picture, he was composing in harmony with some of the larger currents of the ideology of his times. In particular, Kyōka's work is in dialogue with important developments in the fields of ethnology and

folklore studies, both of which schools understand the value of story-telling in the creation of identity, whether that identity be national or local.

Conclusions

In her book *On Longing*, Susan Stewart proposes a working definition of narrative as "a structure of desire, a structure that both invents and distances its object and thereby inscribes again and again the gap between signifier and signified that is the place of generation for the symbolic" (Stewart 1993, ix). Her definition is helpful in locating some of the nodes of resonance and points of interconnection between Japanese nativist (*kokugaku* 国学) philosophy,[15] the ideology of enlightenment (*bunmei*), and the foundation of ethnology (*minzokugaku* 民俗学) as an academic discipline—forces which combine to create powerful undercurrents that haunt Meiji literature. Stewart's definition highlights the slippery nature of narrative as a structure that, while it draws attention to and mourns that which has been lost, also emphasizes the distance to that lost object and frames it as an object of perpetual desire. Considering the desiderative value of narrative also provides some indication that literature itself may, in fact, function as a commodity for the mediation (though certainly not the cancellation) of loss, figuring its own textual construction as a window to, or perhaps remnant of, the lost object. This conception of narrative's structure privileges the past over the present, imagining the past as a lost place of primacy and authenticity, and it conceptualizes narrative production as a nostalgic attempt to regain (or at least gesture toward) a Benjaminian "presence" or "aura" of presence, an authentic authority that is threatened by that storm that "we call progress" (Benjamin 1969, 258). And yet the privileging of past over present is neither simplistic nor untroubled, for there is recognized within it a concurrent desire to always attempt the recuperation of that idealized past in the present moment, a recuperation that is, nevertheless, distanced, never allowed completion, lest, in the attainment of the object of desire, the pleasure of desire itself be nullified.

The background for this larger understanding and placement of Kyōka's work that I have outlined in the latter portion of this paper could be useful in analyzing not only his literary oeuvre, but also that of many of his younger colleagues. I am thinking particularly of the work of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke and Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, though useful connections could also be made to works by Yumeno Kyūsaku and Edogawa Rampō, and should additionally shed light on the prevalence of *irui kekkon* 異類結婚 (interspecies marriage) themes in the modern fiction of Ōba Minako, Tsushima Yūko, Tawada Yōko, and Kurahashi Yumiko. The appearance of supernatural, romantic, and folkloric elements in these authors' stories, instead of being viewed as simple rejections of modernity,

might be more profitably considered in terms of the larger ideological picture of modern Japan and considered as artistic attempts to mediate those perceived storms of progress that we call Meiji. In short, rather than reading their works as the literary expression of rejection, we might read them instead as narratives of desire. These are complicated narratives that, while they are haunted with the ghosts and monsters of lost "presence" or "spirit," also publish and present themselves as spectral stand-ins for those vanishing objects, those narrative products of Japan's "lost home."[16]

NOTES

1. Benjamin 1969, 91. In consultation with Benjamin 1977, 446. Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are my own.

2. As quoted by Kobayashi 1995, 47.

3. For a full treatment of the various social ills of the early 1900s, and the Meiji state's inability to deal effectively with them, see Gluck 1985, 157–77. Kobayashi Hideo also remarks on the ways in which erratic political ideologies find expression in literature in his 1932 essay "The Anxiety of Modern Literature" (1995, 35–45).

4. H. D. Harootunian (1988) argues in this direction in his *Things Seen and Unseen*.

5. The story of Ruth and Boaz can be found in The Book of Ruth, Chapter 2. Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi both return as destitute widows from the land of Moab. With nowhere else to turn for sustenance, they look to the kindness of their kinsman, Boaz, who allows Ruth to glean from the harvest of his corn, wheat, and barley fields.

6. Here I am drawing on imagery used by Walter Benjamin in his essay "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1969, 258). Both in this essay and in his more well-known "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Benjamin works through the loss of "presence" in the modern age, a concern at the heart of Meiji-period interpretations of the value of folklore.

7. Much of the foreword to *Deutsche Sagen* is devoted to parsing the differences between folk tales, legends, and history—a subject that I will not pursue here. For the Grimms, legends have a specific connection to place and cannot survive beyond the ken of their native place, whereas folklore is more versatile and can "find its home anywhere" (Grimm 1981, 1). In the discussion that follows, I have been careful to only discuss passages from the text where it is fairly clear that the Brothers' writing is inclusive of folk tales, notably the first and last paragraphs of the foreword.

8. The editor, Ben-Amos, includes a phrase, omitted here and indicated by ellipses, that is more overtly nationalistic: "who has been bestowed upon him in the name of his homeland." In all of the German versions I consulted, the phrase does not appear and I am uncertain of Ben-Amos's reference for it.

9. See, for example, his article "Aratanaru kokugaku" (1968a).

10. Though I consulted Ronald A. Morse's 1975 translation of *Tōno monogatari*, I decided to use my own translations in order to maintain the lyrical flow of Yanagita's thoughts.

11. Operating on the assumption that the subject of the Japanese poem is singular rather than plural, Ronald A. Morse offers a very different translation of the poem: "Knowledgeable,/ Yet pretending to be old,/ Motionless and quiet,/ Off in the forest, the owl/ Is probably laughing" (Morse 1975, 9). In the sentences leading up to the final poem, Yanagita does compare himself to a great horned owl, whose oversized eyes and upright

ears observe the world with great care. Given Yanagita's consistent use of uncanny images and haunting language in the preface, however, I think the poem remains open to wider, and more suggestive, interpretations.

12. Yanagita uses the terminology of "sinew" and "heart" throughout his essay "Mukashi banashi no koto." For instance, he mentions that in his notebook he "recorded only the sinews" *suji dake wo kaita* 筋だけを書いた. Referencing these "sinews," he could tell the story anew and affect the "hearts" *kokoro* 心 of his listeners (Yanagita 1968b, 496).

13. Charles Inouye defines *kusa zōshi* (草草子) as "densely illustrated works of fiction that, because of their visual nature, were ostensibly written for women and children" (Inouye 1998, 13). Popular as a kind of "low fiction" (*gesaku* 下作) throughout the 1600s and 1700s, *kusa zōshi* dealt with romantic, folkloric, and theatrical themes and their accompanying illustrations grew more sophisticated over time. For a discussion of the various types of *gesaku* literature, see Miner et al, 1985, 98. For a brief consideration of the impact that these visual narratives may have had on Izumi Kyōka's fiction, and particularly on his short story "Kechō," see Inouye 1998, 123–30.

14. Though often posthumously identified with the Romantic and Gothic schools, Kyōka himself disavowed connections to any particular school of literature.

15. The English translation "nativism" actually embraces a number of Japanese terms, of which *kokugaku* 国学 is by far the most prominent. Yoshimoto Taka'aki prefers the term *dochaku* 土着 because it avoids the use of the symbol for "nation" *kuni* 国, which he sees as an intrusion of national politics into what is, for him, an essentially provincial and individual issue. For more information on Yoshimoto's choice of terminology and for a list of relevant articles by Yoshimoto, see Olson 1992. Alternatively, more conservative philosophers tend to prefer the term *Nihonjinron* 日本人論, a term that means something more like the "philosophy of Japanese-ness." All three terms stem from the work of a group of Tokugawa-period philosophers who were concerned with looking to Japan's distant, imperial past as a golden age of pure Japanese culture and as a model for contemporary moral development.

16. This phrase is taken from the writing of turn-of-the-century literary critic Kobayashi Hideo, particularly his article "Literature of the Lost Home."

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