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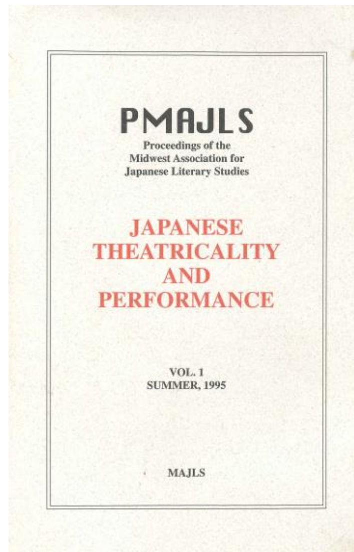

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TŌNO MONOGATARI AS PERFORMANCE: LITERARY REPRESENTATION OF TŌNO LEGENDS BY YANAGITA KUNIO

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The eighth episode of *Tōno monogatari* (1910) tells the story of the old woman of Samuto as follows:

> In Tōno, as in other regions in Japan, women and children being outside at dusk often disappear by "kamikakushi" (divine kidnapping). In a peasant household at Samuto in Matsuzaki village, a young girl disappeared leaving her straw sandals under a pear tree. One day about thirty years later, when relatives and acquaintances gathered at the house, she came back very old and haggard. When asked why she returned, she replied: "I just wanted to see everyone and came back. Now, I'm off again." Saying that, she disappeared again without leaving a trace. On that day the wind blew very hard. The people of Tōno even now, on days when the wind roars, say that it is a day when the old woman of Samuto is likely to return. [1]

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[1] Yanagita Kunio, *The Legends of Tono*, trans. and intro. by Ronald A. Morse (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, c1975), 16-17. All the quotations of *Tōno monogatari* in this paper are from *The Legends of Tono*. However, I have altered some parts of the translation, in order to convey a more literal sense of the original.

This short episode summarizes the ambiguous relationship between ordinary lives of villagers and the extraordinary world that surrounds them, which is told again and again in *Tōno monogatari*. The kidnapped woman is from a certain real village in Tōno, a daughter of ordinary people. However, she belongs to a different world now. She voluntarily reappears in front of villagers; nevertheless, she is to stay where she is now and not to come back to the village. Finally, the whole incident is understood by the villagers as *kamikakushi* , something which belongs to the world of extraordinary, awesome *kami*. The kidnapped woman is, therefore, situated between the world of village and the world of mountain. She belongs to both worlds and yet she does not belong to either. Although she is forever lost to the village, the villagers still remember her in the legend and they feel her existence close and real, when, for example, the wind blows strongly.

Tōno monogatari is filled with such stories of wonders that connect and separate the world of ordinary and the world of extraordinary, which gives a Japanese reader a certain kind of nostalgic sympathy. Probably, that is one of the major reasons why this book has been so popular and has remained the representative work on Japanese folklore. However, *Tōno monogatari* is no less a literary creation by Yanagita than a faithful record of the legends of the Tōno region. In this paper, I will examine how the peculiar atmosphere of the world of *Tōno monogatari* has been constructed by analyzing its episodes from three aspects: 1) stylistic characteristics of legends, 2) working of patterns, and 3) deliberate arrangement of legends by Yanagita. All the three aspects are inseparable from the original performance of Tōno legends, and *Tōno*

monogatari itself can be regarded as a performance of legends by Yanagita Kunio.[2]

At the beginning of his own preface, Yanagita tells us how *Tōno monogatari* has come into being.

> All of the tales and stories recorded here were told to me by Mr. Kyoseki Sasaki who comes from Tōno. I have been writing the stories down as they were told to me during his many evening visits since February 1909. Kyoseki is not a good storyteller but he is honest and sincere, and I have recorded the stories as I felt without adding a word or phrase.[3]

"Without adding a word or phrase" sounds like an appropriate method for a folklorist to collect the materials; however, it cannot be true. For Yanagita is using the style of literary

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[2]Recently, there are various movements both in the United States and in Japan to re-evaluate the achievements of Yanagita Kunio. Since Yanagita's achievements virtually overlap those of Japanese folklore, which has discovered "Japanese folk" as its object of research, re-evaluation of his works is closely tied to the examination of the self-image of Japanese people. Therefore, various attempts to re-evaluate Yanagita's works seem to have a common agenda, that is, to show how the "Japanese folk" defined by Yanagita is influenced by historical, cultural, or personal background. *Tōno monogatari,* one of Yanagita's earliest and most famous works, has also been re-read from such viewpoints by contemporary folklorists. For example, Kikuchi Teruo, who comes from Tōno, searches for the meaning of Tōno legends based on the lives and experiences of the villagers, and thus refuses an easy universalization that the legends in *Tōno monogatari* reflect the common psyche of the "Japanese folk" (*Tōno monogatari o yuku,* Tokyo: Fukurōsha, 1991). Akasaka Norio, on the other hand, thinks that *Tōno monogatari* and other earlier works of Yanagita reflect plural voices of Japanese people, which would be neglected and eliminated from the folklore study in Yanagita's later works (*Yanagita Kunio no yomikata,* Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1994). Here, as a third approach to *Tōno monogatari,* I will analyze it as a written performance of Yanagita Kunio, which both inherits some characteristics of oral performance and re-creates the world of Tōno legends as Yanagita's own work. I would like to examine in the future how some of the images of "Japanese folk" were constructed in *Tōno monogatari.*

[3]*The Legends of Tono,* 5.

Japanese at that time, which is beautiful and refined but far from the spoken Japanese told in Tōno area. Moreover, there is a strange phrase, "as I felt" (*kanjitaru mama o*), not "as I heard." Here, it seems that Yanagita himself admits that the stories are his retelling created through his own emotions and reactions. Although such a rewriting of folklore is inappropriate if it pretends to be a faithful reproduction of oral performance, it may be possible to treat *Tōno monogatari* as a literary work re-created by Yanagita, who was inspired by the stories he had heard. In other words, if we take Yanagita as one of the numerous storytellers who have inherited the tales and legends, we can read *Tōno monogatari* as one of the multiple versions of narrative in tradition, which in this case happened to be written down. Regarding *Tōno monogatari* as a performance of Yanagita Kunio, we can discuss some of the elements of *Tōno monogatari* as inheritances from oral performance of Tōno legends, and others as Yanagita's own invention as a performer.

It seems that the title, *Tōno monogatari*, shows Yanagita's attitude toward his re-telling and editing of these stories. It is important that Yanagita chose the word *monogatari* with all its connotation in Japanese narrative tradition. Moreover, he mentioned *Konjaku monogatari* in his preface and suggested that he considered *Tōno monogatari* as an authentic successor of this 12th-century anthology of tales and stories. He called *Konjaku* "our 900-year-old predecessor" and said that these stories of Tōno are what "the candid and innocent Dainagon would surely come to hear."[4] In other words, *Tōno monogatari* was written to be a part of the Japanese literary tradition, specifically that of *setsuwa* . *Setsuwa-shū*, such as *Konjaku monogatari-shū* , are usually compiled from both

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[4] ibid., 7-8.

oral tradition and written records, with certain, often religious, purposes in editing. In reading *setsuwa-shū* , as Ikegami suggests, it is indispensable to ask what kind of stories were collected, how they were arranged, and what kind of interpretation and expressions were given to them by the compiler.[5] In other words, although each *setsuwa* is independent, it affects, and is affected by, other *setsuwa* and *setsuwa-shū* as a whole. The same interaction can be seen in each episode and the whole of *Tōno monogatari,* as I will discuss later. Both as a performer of orally transmitted legends and as an editor of setsuwa-shū , Yanagita plays an important role in creating the world of *Tōno monogatari.*

Most of the episodes in *Tōno monogatari* can be classified as legends; in order to understand the world of *Tōno monogatari*, it is necessary to examine what legends are. According to Max Lüthi, legends have their own peculiar style, which is "a mixture of elements of certainty and uncertainty." [6] Lüthi provides an example of this mixture from a European legend:

> Austrian legends tell how a *Fänggin* , a young forest-woman, serves as maid to a farmer. A man going through the mountain forest suddenly hears a hoarse voice call to him, "Tell the Stutzfärche, the Rohrinde is fallen and dead." In the house of the farmer the wanderer tells of his unusual experience; and then the maid rises, begins to howl and lament,

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[5]Ikegami Jun'ichi and Fujimoto Tokumei, eds., *Setsuwa bungaku no sekai* (Kyoto: Sekaishisō-sha, 1987), 9.

[6]Max Lüthi, "Aspects of the Märchen and the Legend," reprinted in Dan Ben-Amos, ed., *Folklore Genres* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1976), 25.

runs swiftly to the mountain forest, and is seen no more. [7]

Lüthi argues that this legend consists of definite words, "the Rohrinde is fallen and dead," and subsequent concrete reaction of the maid; however, Lüthi points out, their meanings are unclear and vague. According to him, it is "the expression of that common experience of a hard-to-explain but strongly felt and unfamiliar world breaking open the borders of our profane existence." [8] In legend, unlike folktales or *mukashibanashi* , there are inexplicable but real feelings about the unknown world. The mysterious atmosphere in *Tōno monogatari* should be considered in this style of legends.

One of the episodes in *Tōno* records an incident resembling that which happened in Austria. The ninety-third story in the collection tells about Kikuchi Kikuzō of Wano. When his wife was visiting her parents' house in a different village, their son Ichizo became ill. Kikuzō went to call his wife back, crossing over Fuefuki Pass:

> This was a well-known ridge of Mt. Rokkoushi, and the mountain path was thick with trees. Especially in the area going down to Kurihashi from Tōno , there were steep cliffs on both sides of the path. The sunlight was hidden by the cliff and it was getting dark when someone called out, "Kikuzō !" from behind. He turned around and saw someone looking down from the top of the cliff. His face was red and his eyes were bright and radiant. . . The man said, "Your child is

[7] ibid., 28-29.
[8] ibid., 30.

> already dead!" . . . Kikuzō and his wife hurried home throughout the night but the child was, as expected, already dead. This happened four or five years ago.[9]

Again, what is clear in this legend is the ambiguity created by the combination of the ordinary and the extraordinary. The extraordinary suddenly invades the ordinary scenery and then disappears; however, it leaves the ordinary world with a vague sense of insecurity. How could a man calling out from the mountain forest know about the maid or about the dying boy? The solid and familiar life in the village abruptly changes its appearances. Also, the world of the extraordinary is no less ambiguous. What is the man, anyway? Nothing more is told in each episode.

Whoever these mysterious existences may be, *Tōno monogatari* is filled with the stories concerning contact between villagers and various extraordinary beings. These extraordinary beings may be gods associated with mountains (episodes: 2, 89, 91, 102, 107-108), mountain men (5, 6, 7, 9, 28, 30, 31, 92, 93), mountain women (3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 34-35, 75) or other mysterious objects in the mountains (32, 33, 49, 61, 63-64, 76, 95); or they may be the residents of the mountains like supernatural *tengu* (29, 62, 90), wolves (36-42), bears (43), monkeys (44-48), or birds that are metamorphosed villagers (50-53). There are also creatures that come closer to the village such as trickster foxes (60, 94, 100-101) and a mischievous water creature *kappa* , which sometimes lures a village woman away and has a baby by her (55-59). In the village, gods are enshrined in houses and on the road (14-21, 69, 70, 72-74, 110); the dead are sometimes seen by villagers (22-23, 54, 99) and dying men also appear

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[9] *The Legends of Tono,* 65-66.

in front of friends (78, 86-88); other mysterious and strange men are seen in households, or even "flat against the wall above the entrance" (77, 79-83); some villagers are also known to have supernatural powers (12,13, 69, 71, 96, 97, 107-108) and there is one insane mother murderer still living in the village (10,11); there are also stories about Westerners seen in the coast region, who are said "to hold and lick each other," and about a mirage of a foreign land (84-85, 106). As is the case with legends all over the world, these extraordinary beings are all said to be seen or encountered by some real person living in a specified village of Tōno.

The relationship between villagers and these extraordinary beings, especially the mysterious people in the mountain, have been discussed often by folklorists as the relationship between "us" and "other". The term *ijin* ("different person") has been used to categorize the concept of such strangers in Japanese folklore. Komatsu, for example, defines *ijin* as "people who live outside the folk society and make contact with the residents of the society through various opportunities."[10] *Ijin* are not only mountain people but can be travellers, wandering woodcarvers, travelling priests, foreigners, or supernatural beings. They do not belong to "our" world; they are excluded from the network of relationships and hierarchies. Therefore, they are ambivalent figures, both above and below us.[11] Yamaguchi Masao also positions *ijin* in the structure of "us" and "other," but he puts more stress on the ambiguous status of *ijin* between these two worlds. According to Yamaguchi, *ijin* is "other" within the world of "us"; they are a source of light to highlight the incongruity or difference inside of the

[10] Komatsu Kazuhiko, *Ijinron: minzoku shakai no shinsei* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 1985), 11.
[11] Carmen Blacker, "The Folklore of the Stranger: A Consideration of a Disguised Wandering Saint" in *Folklore* 101 (1990), 162.

community. He argues that men create the boundary between "us" and "other," because they desire to make the incongruous part within themselves visible and external, and thus to expel it to the outside of the boundary. [12] Thus, Yamaguchi argues that *ijin* or the stranger has the ambiguity which seems to be almost necessary for a village system (or society or culture) to function.

What kind of significance do these strangers or extraordinary beings have in *Tōno monogatari?* As we saw in the episode of Kikuzō, the stories do not make any clear comment on them. Their significance and the meaning of each episode have to come from a wider context. Some folklorists who studied the performance of legend-telling argue that legends owe much of their existence to the circumstances of their performance, which include the reaction of the audience and connected episodes brought about by the storyteller or the audience.[13] In other words, it is not enough to analyze individual legend but it should be observed how the legend was told in the narrative context. In the same way, once legends are written down and edited as a collection (just like individual *setsuwa* in a *setsuwa-shū*), each episode must be read in the context of the collection, especially when it is edited by a literary-minded writer such as Yanagita. Yanagita himself must have been aware of how a good storyteller performs in the narrative context of his audience.

In performance, interactions between the performer and the audience are crucial. On the one hand, the audience is

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[12]Yamaguchi Masao, *Bunka to ryōgisei* (Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, 1975), 81-85.

[13] See numerous works by Linda Dégh, especially Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi, "Legend and Belief," in *Genre* 4 (1971), 281-304. Rpt. in Dan Ben-Amos, ed., *Folklore Genres* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1976), 93-123.

under the creating power of the performer; on the other hand, without the emotional involvement of the audience, the performer loses his power. Various techniques, forms, and motifs in oral tradition can be explained as means to create interactions between the performer and the audience. One of the basic techniques is patterning. In order to create a successful performance, the performer works with patterns. Patterns produce the rhythm of the story, create the predictability, and help the audience to become emotionally a part of its movement. Bateson, in his argument on so-called primitive art, stresses the importance of patterns in figuring out the meaning of a work or a performance of art. According to him, pattern or redundancy is "the essence and raison d'être of communication." [14] This function of patterns is, of course, not only seen in oral narrative but also in written stories.

As we have seen, contact between the ordinary and the extraordinary is the major pattern of *Tōno monogatari;* through the repetitious image of such encounters, however, what are supposed to be ordinary come to acquire extraordinary qualities as well. For example, the world of *ijin* , the world of *kami* , and the world of animals are easily mingled and give a deeper and wider significance to each other. As a result, human encounters with them also take on a special meaning. On the one hand, a wolf is just a wild animal that attacks horses and dear, but on the other hand, it has a supernatural power comparable to that of *kami* far beyond the understanding of human beings. The following episode takes place in story 38:

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[14] Gregory Bateson, "Style, Grace, and Information in Primitive Art," in Anthony Forge, ed., *Primitive Art and Society* (London: Oxford UP, 1973), 236-237.

A master of an old household, who is still living in Otōno village, heard the howling of vicious old wolves on his way back from town one day, and being drunk he tried to imitate their call. The wolves seemed to come howling after him. He became frightened and hurried home. He went inside, secured the front door and hid. The wolves continued to howl around the house throughout the night. At daybreak he found that the wolves had dug a tunnel under the stable and had devoured all seven horses he had. This family fell into ill fortune from that time on. [15]

There is no proof that the family's ill fortune is brought about by the wolves, but there is no way to deny it, either. This looks like a story about the folly of a drunken old man, who enticed wolves and wasted his horses. However, the last sentence abruptly brings in a different meaning to this encounter. Wolves as animal and wolves as supernatural are mixed without any explanation, and this ambiguity is the power of this story. In the same way, the image of old monkeys that become men-like-monsters is a fascinating mixture of the ordinary and the extraordinary: "When old and vicious, monkeys resemble people. They become desirous of females and often steal off the village women. They coat their fur with pine-resin and then sprinkle sand on it. This makes their fur and skin like armor and even bullets cannot penetrate it." [16] There is nothing extraordinary in each of the ingredients: old monkey, pine-resin and sand. However, once they are mixed and given a context, they become an extraordinary presence in the mountains.

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[15] *The Legends of Tono*, 33-34.
[16] ibid., 36.

Some episodes suggest even a connection between humans and other beings. Etymological legends about various birds tell us that they were once either a girl looking for her boyfriend lost in the mountains, a servant looking for the missing horse of his master, or sisters who shared potatoes. Each episode communicates some kind of connection between humans in the villages and birds in the mountains. Gods, humans and animals are literally connected in one of the myths in *Tōno monogatari*. Episode 69 tells of the origin of a widely-worshipped god called Oshira-sama. A poor farmer who lived alone with his beautiful daughter learned that she loved their horse, went to the stable and slept with it, and they had finally become husband and wife; the father hanged the horse on a mulberry tree; his daughter clung to the head of the horse and lamented; abhorring the sight, the father cut off the horse's head. At once, the daughter, still clinging to the horse's head, flew off to the heavens. It was from this time on that Oshira-sama became a *kami* .[17] What is common in the stories about wolves, monkeys, birds, and the origin of Oshira-sama is their structure, in which two unlikely elements, ordinary and extraordinary, are juxtaposed and thus affect each other. Repetition of this juxtaposition brings about a dynamic change in the worlds of the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Moreover, this pattern of villager's encounter with the extraordinary beings is modulated in various kinds of settings, and therefore must be perceived in a context broader than the individual tales. For example, it first seems that the world of the village and the world of the mountains are two separate worlds. The repetitious encounters between the villagers and extraordinary creatures seem to underscore their differences.

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[17] ibid., 49-50.

However, through the modulation of patterns, a connection and merging happens between the village and the mountains. Episodes 9, 10, and 11 show an intriguing transition.[18] The ninth episode tells us of a villager called Yanosuke who, in his youth, used to lead packhorses. He was a good flute player and would play during the night while leading the horses. One slightly cloudy moonlit night, he was passing above a place called Ōyachi, which is in a deep valley, thick with white birch trees. Down below is a swamp with reeds growing. While playing the flute, Yanosuke suddenly heard someone calling from the bottom of the valley, "You play well!" Yanosuke and all his companions quickly ran from the place. The next episode, the tenth, tells about Yanosuke again hearing a strange voice in the mountain. The passage goes: "One day, this man (Yanosuke) went into the deep mountains to gather mushrooms and stayed in a small hut. Late at night he heard a woman scream out in the distance and his heart began to pound. Upon returning to his village he found that on that same night, at that same moment, his younger sister had been killed by her son." Then, in the eleventh story, this matricide in the midst of the village is narrated in the same matter-of-fact, dry voice: the daughter-in-law and mother-in-law in the household were having problems; one day around noon, all of a sudden the son said: "I can't let my mother live any longer, I have to kill her today"; and he began sharpening a hand sickle. In spite of the pleading of both his wife and his mother, he kept sharpening the sickle, and confined his mother in the house; when he had sharpened the sickle enough, he cut down at her shoulders twice and killed her; he was immediately arrested but released since he was considered insane; this episode ends, saying, "he is still alive in the

[18] ibid., 17-19.

village." Placed after the two episodes 9 and 10, this bloody incident gains a deeper meaning than a simple crime story; the repetition and resemblance between the eerie voice and the woman's shout in the mountains suggests the metaphoric sameness between these two incidents. An unknown power is at work both in the mountains and in the village, both on a moonlit night and in broad daylight, both in the deep forest and in the human mind.

This kind of implied interaction between two seemingly different images and worlds is abundant in the stories of *Tōno monogatari,* especially when the episodes are read in succession. Reality and fantasy are juxtaposed but not opposed; one shifts into another so smoothly that it is difficult to tell where the threshold between the ordinary and the extraordinary exists. The first section of *Tōno monogatari* is a purely realistic description of the geography of Tōno , which cannot be a part of Tōno legend. It continues in the second section as well, portraying Tōno 's markets and three major mountains. Suddenly, then, the story of a female goddess and her three daughters begins without pause, and explains how the youngest daughter acquired the most beautiful Mt. Hayachine by trick. The section ends with a phrase, "the females of Tōno are told, even today, not to climb these mountains lest they arouse the jealousy of these *kami* ."[19] Thus, the focus returns to the real lives of village people again. Factual and objective description of Tōno landscape, a myth concerning the three mountains of Tōno, and a belief which still controls the lives of the actual villagers -- the nature of these three accounts are quite different from each other; but since they are related in such a natural succession, the reader begins to question whether these three accounts should

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[19] ibid., 11-13.

be differentiated as separate accounts. Juxtaposed images thus affect each other, and imply the sameness between seemingly different images.

It is very difficult to decide whether such a transition is a faithful record of the legend-telling by Sasaki Kyoseki or a literary creation of Yanagita Kunio. Probably both parties have contributed to the present structure of *Tōno monogatari.* In either case, it is apparent that Yanagita, or his storyteller Sasaki, first sets up the pattern of villager's encounter with the extraordinary beings and then modulates it in various kinds of setting and contexts.

This relationship among connected episodes, or the relationship between the pattern and its variants has a significant narrative function. Rhythm is first created through patterns, and then something blurs the rhythm; however, thanks to the already set up pattern, this change becomes a variant, a part of the rhythm. The purpose of this variant is to give a new meaning to the rhythmic frame of the story and thus expand the breadth and depth of its repeated theme. In *Tōno monogatari*, patterns and variants work to break down the solid outlines of images and objects such as a human or a wolf or a mountain woman, and to allow an unimaginable connection between these separate beings.

Such a connection may exist only in the context of *Tōno monogatari*. It is an issue to be investigated in the future whether such a world is the true reflection of the world of *Tōno* legends or it is somewhat a creation of Yanagita through his deliberate editing and arrangement. Such an investigation is becoming possible, as some of the original notes of Yanagita have become open to the public and more direct and accurate records of legends with their narrative context have been accumulated from the field. For example, Akasaka

points out that Sasaki Kizen (Kyoseki) has written down another version of the story on the old woman of Samuto with a different ending. In this version, villagers are said to have asked mediums to block the village boundary by a spell, so that the woman of Samuto would not come back again.[20] With this ending, the meaning of the episode would change drastically from the yearning to the connection with another world to the refusal of the connection. This is an example which shows how powerful the context can be in understanding the meaning of a performance, whether oral or written. Therefore, it is important to recognize that *Tōno monogatari* is situated between Yanagita's peculiar re-creation and the tradition of Tōno legend-telling, and that it must be read as one performance of the Tōno legends.

The attractiveness of *Tōno monogatari* may be found in the creation of an ambiguously undivided world, which does not show a clear separation and confrontation between "us" and "other." The boundaries between human, god, and animal, between the villages and the mountains, or between fantasy and reality are blurred through the stylistic characteristics of legend, working of patterns, and deliberate arrangement of legends by Yanagita. The significance of legend lies in its creation of ambiguity in the ordinary world by the mixture of certainty and uncertainty. In *Tōno monogatari,* moreover, this ambiguity is expressed both in the description of "other", such as the stranger (*ijin*), the supernatural, animals and gods, and further in the structure of patterns and their variants. *Tōno monogatari* is constructed in such a way that does not divide the worlds, but breaks the boundaries between them. The peculiar atmosphere of *Tōno monogatari,* in which the ordinary and the extraordinary are mingled with each other,

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[20]Akasaka Norio, *Tōno monogatari kō* (Tokyo: Takarajima-sha, 1994), 20.

should be explained through the tradition of oral performance and its equivalent in a written form.[21]

[21] Patterns and their variation are only a part of the interactions in performance. The emotional effects on audience, one of the goals of performance, are not created only by structural devices such as patterning. For example, in the case of oral performance, various non-verbal elements, such as facial expressions, body movement, tone of voice, music, and dance, are utilized. It is necessary to study what substitutes for these elements in written performance. In the case of *Tōno monogatari*, the presence of Yanagita in the preface, headnotes, and the main text has an indispensable role in the performance of the book, especially in arousing certain specific emotions in the audience.