READING AS RITUAL: DESIRE FOR TEXTUAL COMMUNITY IN WORKS BY
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AND ANNETTE VON DROSTE-HÜLSHOFF

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation proposes that reading non-religious, literary texts from modern Europe (Germany and Switzerland) and Japan through the interpretive lens of ritual provides a discursive method for linking premodern, subnational traditions and notions of what constitutes the literary to the emergence of a national literary culture identified as such. Studies of ritual texts or the ritual experience of reading have been conducted predominantly in the pre-modern religious context. The present study is concerned with modern secular texts and examines them from a sociological perspective. By focusing on four works spanning the period from the mid-nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth century, I consider how ritual experience is produced through an interactive process between the text and the reader. Specifically, I consider two Japanese texts (Kusa-meikyū by Izumi Kyōka and Tōno monogatari by Yanagita Kunio), one Swiss text (Die schwarze Spinne by Jeremias Gotthelf), and one German text (Die Judenbuche by Annette von Droste-Hülshoff).

The theoretical framework of the study draws on existing theories of reading, fiction, and ritual performance. Though theories of reading tend to emphasize the subjective experience of the individual reader, my study focuses on the communal aspects of reading. By attending to the major features of ritual—formality, performativity, symbolism, and group identity—I define the concept of ritual reading as inhering in a public act of prioritizing the textual world through the reader’s compliant subjection to its fictional order. Through an immersive experience of the text (i.e., by accepting its norms, beliefs, and worldview), the reader achieves a sense of belonging to the inter-subjective community of the text beyond spatio-temporal boundaries. Exploration into the social dimension of reading by integrating two central but seemingly incompatible
ideas—reading as an individual, private act and ritual as a collective, public event—I argue, opens a new possibility for understanding reading experience.

Through a comparative investigation of the four texts, I define what constitutes the ritual textuality of the books—the historical context, the cultural background, and the worldview underpinning the construction of each. The choice of these texts from different historical and cultural backgrounds is informed by the fact that they all constitute a critical response through the literary form to the impact of modernity—dissolution of local communities in the wake of industrialization and urbanization, emphasis on values of individualism, and a sense of social alienation. Through this research, I highlight a key feature common to all four texts: the instantiation of a textual community of shared values to counter the homogenizing/abstracting force of the modern nation-state. In essence, these works each constitute a modern ritual undertaking, as each refers to extraordinary experiences in the virtual space of the text while involving the physicality of each individual reader in the creation of community.
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INTRODUCTION

1. The Ritual Experience of Reading

“I wonder,” he said to himself, “what’s in a book while it’s closed. Oh, I know it’s full of letters printed on paper, but all the same, something must be happening, because as soon as I open it, there’s a whole story with people I don’t know yet and all kinds of adventures and deeds and battles. [...] All those things are somehow shut up in a book. Of course you have to read it to find out. But it’s already there, that’s the funny thing. I just wish I knew how it could be.” Suddenly an almost festive mood came over him. He settled himself, picked up the book, opened it to the first page, and began to read.

(Michael Ende, The Neverending Story 15)

The protagonist of The Neverending Story, Bastian, is alone in the school’s attic, embarking on reading a book he has just stolen from a used book store. His sense of anticipation is typical of the ritual reading that I am proposing in this project. Bastian regards the book as a kind of organic entity in which the whole world is contained: “But it’s already there, that’s the funny thing. I just wish I knew how it could be.” For him, reading is neither principally about the act of following printed letters nor about a cognitive process. Instead, it is an immersive experience in a fictional world. The “almost festive mood” that “comes over him” as he anticipates the extraordinary world of the book accords with the anticipation of one who is about to participate in a pleasant ritual ceremony.

Such a solemn, almost religious, attitude in engaging in the act of reading is precisely what Italo Calvino requires from the reader of his novel: “You are about to begin reading Italo Calvino’s new novel, If on a winter’s night a traveler. Relax. Concentrate. Dispel every other thought. Let the world around you fade. Best to close the door […]” (3).

Regarding this opening, Marie Laure Ryan points to the ceremonial aspect of reading for
Calvino: “The instructions to the reader that open If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler suggest the rites of passage through which various cultures mark the crossing of boundaries between the profane and the sacred, or between the major stages of life” (90).

Both the character of Bastian in The Neverending Story and the implied reader of If on a Winter’s Night a Traveler are alone with the text—perhaps in a quiet empty room, but certainly immersed in the textual world. This private, personal dimension of reading is not compatible with the idea of ritual, which generally presumes the sharing of time and space in a communal setting. Usually, ritual reading refers to public performance, such as recitations in temples, theatres, or imperial courts, or it refers to the communal reading of scriptures as part of a religious service. These all point to the shared experience of the time-space of performance in a religious or quasi-religious context. The connection between reading and religion is reflected in the fact that most studies on ritual reading (or reading as ritual) refer specifically to pre-modern European Christian practices (Bruce Holsinger, Caroline Walker Bynum, Jodie Enders, etc.) or to writing in the Buddhist context (Paul Copp, Stephen Teiser, and Charlotte Eubanks).¹

However, unlike these approaches, the present study explores ritualized reading from a more contemporary, sociological point of view, with specific reference to modern uses of what might loosely be termed “folklore” texts. In contemporary usage, the combination of the words “reading” and “ritual” may seem paradoxical, as the act of reading is generally

¹ Bruce Holsinger, Music, Body, and Desire in Medieval Culture; Caroline Walker Bynum, Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200–1336; Jody Enders, The Medieval Theater of Cruelty; Paul Copp, “Anointing Phrases and Narrative Power”; Stephen Teiser, Reinventing the Wheel; Charlotte Eubanks, Miracles of Book and Body.
considered to be a private individual experience whereas ritual is often referred to as a public event. Yet, by connecting, even integrating, these concepts, I will explore a dimension of reading that has received very little attention in research to date. Vigorous discussions have been held thus far on the matter of the reading experience. The complex relationship between text and reader has been explored from the semiotic, phenomenological, and psychological standpoints such that further study is not likely to be fruitful. With the idea of ritual reading, however, I will determine the significance of reading in the sociological context.

First, let us re-examine the concept of reading experience through the existing approaches in the discipline. Reception theory with its emphasis on the role of the reader came into being as a critique of New Criticism. Whereas New Criticism regards the literary text as an autonomous entity complete in itself, reception theory articulates the role of the reader as an active agent in constructing the meaning of the text. One of the most prominent reader-response theorists, Stanley Fish, for instance, refutes the notion of the text as existing independently of the reader’s subjective experience, arguing that the reader produces meaning by executing “interpretive strategies”:

What I am suggesting is that formal units are always a function of the interpretative model one brings to bear; they are not “in” the text, and I would make the same argument for intentions. That is, intention is no more embodied “in” the text than are formal units; rather an intention, like a formal unit, is made when perceptual or interpretive closure is hazarded; it is verified by an interpretive act, and I would add, it is not verifiable in any other way. (2082)

According to Fish, “intention” is not encoded a priori in the text—instead, it emerges only in the process of interpretation. Thus, he shifts the center of attention from the text to the reader.
Similarly, Wolfgang Iser argues for the significance of the reader as a producer of meaning. In his view, reading constitutes a site in which the consciousness of the reader encounters the aesthetic scheme of the text:

We place our synthetizing faculties at the disposal of an unfamiliar reality, produce the meaning of that reality, and in so doing enter into a situation which we could not have created out of ourselves. Thus the meaning of the literary text can only be fulfilled in the reading subject and does not exist independently of him; just as important, though, is that the reader himself, in constituting the meaning, is also constituted. And herein lies the full significance of the so-called passive synthesis. (150)

According to Iser, the act of reading is an “event” through which the reader is taken outside the horizon of his immediate consciousness to an encounter with an unfamiliar reality. And, it is through this interactive relationship between self and other that meaning is produced.

Reader response theory, as represented by Fish and Iser, marked a paradigm shift in literary criticism. Whereas the formalists consider the text a reservoir of meaning to be retrieved through the effort of interpretation on the part of the reader, Fish and Iser regard the reader as the ultimate source of meaning. Thus, despite the complexity of the issue, the distinction between the reader response proponents and the formalists can be reduced to the question of origin: Where is the agency of meaning properly located? Is it in the text or the reader? In shifting from a focus on the object (the text) to the event (reading), we move one step toward a theory of reading as a ritual activity. Yet, acknowledging only the agency of the reader, we could allow any arbitrary interpretation by the reader to stand as meaning, however improbable. To avoid such a situation and guarantee stability of interpretation, Fish advocates the concept of “interpretive community,” which he defines as follows:

Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for
constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. People who share the same culture and belief system, that is, “informed readers” thus determine the shape of what is read by employing the strategies of interpretation that exist prior to the act of reading. (2087)

His idea of reading as a communal experience of “[p]eople who share the same culture and belief system”\(^2\) is important to my argument. The readers reaffirm their group identity by acknowledging the “marks” encoded in the texts. What I find problematic, however, is that Fish sees the “interpretive community” as an entity that exists outside the text. He, therefore, posits the text as simply a means for affirming norms shared by members of cultural communities. My reading here is affirmed by an additional comment made by Fish: “The very existence of the ‘marks’ is a function of an interpretive community, for they will be recognized (that is, made) only by its members” (2089). Yet, if a text is written only for groups of readers who are already equipped with certain interpretive strategies, where outside the text should we locate the source of cultural norms or values that constitute the strategy per se? It seems to me rather that the meaning is produced in the interactive process between the text and the reader. Iser’s statement that “the reader himself, in constituting the meaning, is also constituted” (150) is exactly right on this point.

Nevertheless, I cannot fully agree with Iser’s argument, as his notion of experience, that is, the “encounter with the unknown,” is restricted to the domain of individual consciousness detached both from the body and the cultural matrix in which one lives:

> Meaning itself, then, has a temporal character, the peculiarity of which is revealed by the fact that the articulation of the text into past, present, and future

\(^2\) Influenced by Fish, Janice Radway conducted an ethnological study of a group of women in a midwestern suburban community. Based on its outcome, she argues that this group reads romance novels as a way to escape from their mundane lives, but that in doing so they effectively make a political gesture to resist the culture of patriarchy.
by the wandering viewpoint does not result in fading memories and arbitrary expectations, but in an uninterrupted synthesis of all the time phases. (149)

In Iser’s view, meaning is produced in the process of reading wherein the reader’s mental image is reconstructed as he proceeds to read. In this way, Iser grasps meaning in terms of temporality based on the Aristotelian concept of plot, the dualistic view of which conceives the reader as the subject of cognition. To be sure, it is this sort of reading experience that primarily brings us knowledge. On the other hand, however, another type of reading experience goes beyond the level of cognition. In such an experience, the reader is taken out of mundane reality to an immediate experience of the textual world. And, as a result of this extraordinary experience, the distance of time and space is dissolved and the subject and object are integrated into the whole. This, I would argue, is what is going on in the vignette with which I opened this introduction. Bastian is immersed in the fantastic world of the book so that the distinction between fiction and reality does not matter to him any longer: “In reading it, he had heard not only the creaking of the big trees and the howling of the wind in the treetops, but also the different voices of the four comical messengers. And he almost seemed to catch the smell of moss and forest earth” (27).

It is indeed this sort of unifying experience in reading that I am addressing with the notion of ritual reading. Certainly, the act of reading is a kind of mental process as Iser maintains. However, it also requires physical involvement on the part of the readers and as such elicits a range of emotional responses. Peter Kivy, for instance, considers the act of reading as constituting a performance and points out that the readers actually hear the narrative voice as if it were their own as they follow the printed letters with their eyes. Surely, reading is a performance in that the readers actualize what is written in temporal
space while subjecting themselves physically and emotionally to the order of the text. Thus, I take this performative aspect as an important point in my consideration of reading in terms of ritual experience.

Closely related to the performative dimension of reading, formal or normative features also characterize ritual reading. First, the act of reading is not a free intellectual play due to the physical restrictions to which the readers are subject. Furthermore, a literary text constitutes a symbolic mental space that is distinct from our daily living environments: it encodes particular norms and principles that define the ways in which it is to be read. The text requires readers to accept these rules in order to appreciate or even understand it, which is to say that an experience of the fictional world is accessible to readers only through their voluntary subjection to the encoded norms. This is an essential point, which I will elaborate by referring to Roy Rappaport’s theory of ritual in the discussion that follows.

Another important element of ritual reading points to its social and collective dimension. Certainly, the act of reading in modern times has largely been regarded as a solitary performance often conducted in a private space. Nevertheless, the intrinsic formality of the text signifies the very public nature of the experience, as the norms and laws encoded in the text are premised on the existence of a social body. A text is written for a reading public. In particular, the kind of text that places emphasis on norms has a strong orientation toward the public. It requires the readers to subject themselves to the fictional world, and through this immersive experience the readers attain a sense of belonging to the inter-subjective community of the text.
2. Theories of Ritual

How, then, might we move from the notion of an inter-subjective textual community to the concept of reading as ritual? In order to answer this question, which is at the heart of my dissertation, I will first elaborate the notion of ritual in the context of ongoing discussions by referring to some key theoretical frameworks. Although most of us have a vague idea about ritual, any attempt to provide an explicit definition of this term will immediately put us into difficulty. In the English language, the term “ritual” is used as both an adjective and a noun. The definition of ritual in nominal form according to The Oxford English Dictionary reads:

1.a. A prescribed order of performing religious or other devotional service. b. A book containing the order, forms, or ceremonies, to be observed in the celebration of religious or other solemn service.
2.a. Ritual observances; ceremonial acts. b. A series of actions compulsively performed under certain circumstances, the non-performance of which results in tension and anxiety.
3. The performance of ritual acts.

These definitions indicate that the word “ritual” has a somewhat negative connotation: it is considered to be something formal, rigid, and compulsive. It is taken negatively perhaps because it does not conform to the liberal individualist values of contemporary Western society. Another point suggested by these formulations is that ritual involves action of some sort. Ritual is not merely a structure of schemes. The orders or forms encoded in ritual need to be performed first and foremost. These two characteristics, the normative and the performative, are crucial aspects of ritual, and they are, as already suggested, germane to my discussion.
The idea of ritual as norm-constituting action is emphasized in Eastern philosophy. Confucian scholars established the theory of ritual as early as 200 B.C. In fact, a collection of three books on ritual\(^3\) constitutes one section of the five classical canons of Confucianism.\(^4\) The Chinese concept of *li* “禮” originates in the ancient practice of worshipping the gods. Although the term was initially used to signify liturgical decorum, it came to denote the principle of order underpinning external forms. Used extensively in classical texts, *li* can be summarized as (a) the order principle as the basis of political activities and (b) a concrete set of norms for bodily movements/human relations. In essence, *li* signifies what is taken as a universal morality for governing proper human relations in all contexts (Mizoguchi 230–32). Thus, characteristic of the Confucian idea of ritual is that it is directly connected to an individual’s personal cultivation through discipline and adherence to norms, as exemplified by Xunzi (ca. 310–230 BC), one of the most influential Confucian scholars, who considered it a way to control otherwise negative human desires.

In modern times, numerous Western scholars across a range of disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, religious studies, and psychology have attempted to elucidate the concept of ritual. For example, the sociologist Émile Durkheim considers ritual an indispensable part of human life. He divides human life into the two domains of the sacred and the profane. The sacred is the time-space set apart from mundane activities and in which group members conduct rituals in order to maintain or reproduce the community. For

\(^3\) These books are 禮記 *Li ji* [The Book of Rites], 周禮 *Zhōu lì* [Reites of Zhou], and 儀禮 *Yì lì* [The Book of Etiquette and Ceremonial].

\(^4\) These canons are 詩 *shi* (odes), 書 *shu* (documents), 礼 *li* (rituals), 易 *yi* (changes), and 春秋 *chunqiu* (spring and autumn annals).
Durkheim, who thinks of religion in terms of cult rather than of individual faith, ritual is an opportunity through which collective ethos is affirmed and reinforced.

Similarly, the anthropologist Victor Turner divides society into two modes: the indicative and the subjunctive. The indicative signifies the actual state of affairs represented by activities such as politics, law, and economics, whereas the subjunctive points to the world of “may be” such as dreams, art, and carnival. Turner draws attention to the social function of ritual as a means of meta-communication, which is to say that ritual in its subjunctive mode functions as a social critique in times of crisis. When he says that ritual is a symbolic form “consistent with the form of the society” (cited in Doty 87), he means that ritual expresses the conflicts of the real world in a symbolic way through the dramatization of that world: “R ritual for me […] is a transformative performance revealing major classifications, categories, and contradictions of cultural processes” (75). As is evident from this remark, Turner considers ritual primarily as an apparatus for resolving social conflicts and achieving communal unity.

This sort of idea—the dissolution of conflicts and the subsequent symbolic fusion of opposing parties through ritual—was further developed by Clifford Geertz. Basic to his understanding of culture is the distinction between two concepts, worldview and ethos, which roughly correspond to Turner’s notions of the indicative and the subjunctive. The former designates the cognitive aspect of a culture, our sense of how reality really is, whereas the latter indicates our underlying attitude toward ourselves and the world—through, for example, morals and ideals. To put it briefly, it is the distinction between the world as we live in it and the world as we imagine it. In Geertz’s view, ritual
creates a high order of uniformity through the resolution of conflicts between worldview and ethos (132–40). His theory is suggestive particularly in terms of determining the ritual effect of strongly “ethos-oriented” literary texts.

Although Geertz’s theory of ritual—conflicting schemes and their dialectic development—has had a significant influence on the anthropological analysis of society, Catherine Bell criticizes his methodology by problematizing the dualistic view that lies at the core of his theory. She argues that the conception of order (worldview) and dispositions for action (ethos) fundamental to Geertz’s approach are nothing less than the construction of a theorist-observer:

[...] theories of ritual which attempt to integrate thought and action in any guise simultaneously function to maintain their differentiation. This type of discourse on ritual not only constructs a model that integrates a thinking observer and an acting object; it simultaneously functions to distinguish them clearly. (32)

To emphasize the physicality of ritual, Bell argues, is nothing but to homogenize through theory, a reflection of the theorist’s own structural pattern. Yet, without noticing this fact, the theorist attempts to make sense out of the object of his study. She refers to such a circular act of generating meaning as “ritualization,” namely, “the orchestration of schemes by which the body defines an environment and is defined in turn by it” (220). Her concept of ritualization as the interplay between the subject (body) and the object (environment) is intriguing, and I will return to this issue later in my investigation of the relationship between the text and the reader.

For Bell, ritual is essentially the act of differentiation. This position brings up further questions: How do we differentiate between objects? What are the features that differentiate
ritual acts from other social acts? In respect to the third question, Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff’s list of the common characteristics of ritual is a useful reference:

1. *Repetition:* either of occasion, content or form, or any combination of these.
2. *Acting:* a basic quality of ritual being that is not an essentially spontaneous activity, but rather most, if not all of it is self-consciously “acted” like a part in a play. Further, this usually involves doing something, not only saying or thinking something.
3. “*Special*” behavior or stylization: actions or symbols used are extra-ordinary themselves or ordinary ones are used in an unusual way, a way that calls attention to them and sets them apart from other, mundane uses.
4. *Order:* collective rituals are by definition an organized event, both of persons and cultural elements, having a beginning and an end, thus bound to have some order. It may contain within it moments of, or elements of chaos and spontaneity, but these are in prescribed times and places. Order is the dominant mode and is often quite exaggeratedly precise. Its order is often the very thing which sets it apart.
5. *Evocative presentational style; staging:* collective rituals are intended to produce at least an attentive state of mind, and often an even greater commitment of some kind; ceremony commonly does so through manipulations of symbols and sensory stimuli...
6. *The “collective dimension”:* by definition collective ritual has a social meaning. Its very occurrence contains a social message. (7–8)

Not all these descriptions are applicable to all ritual acts, but they are interrelated and characterize what are generally perceived as rituals. First, I want to elaborate the feature of “acting.” It indicates the symbolic aspect of ritual as a form of “meta-communication” as articulated by Turner and others. Ritual is performed in a sacred space—not necessarily religious but in the sense that it operates on its own rules and principles—wherein the participants play their roles “seriously” yet with the awareness that what is happening is not a reality.

This idea of ritual as a symbolic act brings to mind its similarity to “play.” As Aoki Tamotsu points out in referring to the anthropologist Gregory Bateson’s work, both play and ritual constitute “framed” semantic domains: they are self-referential, closed forms of
communication (67–68). I want to explore this aspect more fully by introducing the theory of Johan Huizinga whose comprehensive study of “play” has made a significant contribution to our understanding of human culture. According to Huizinga, “Play is distinct from ‘ordinary’ life both as to locality and duration.” He considers this to be “the third main characteristic of play: its secludedness, its limitedness.” And, further, “It is ‘played out’ within certain limits of time and place […] [and] contains its own course and meaning” (9). His description of the characteristics of play holds true for ritual. Both play and ritual are symbolic acts performed within a specially demarcated arena. Quoting the anthropologist Don Handelman, Aoki argues that a palpable difference exists between play and ritual, as the former usually conveys messages regarding doubts, fallacies, and amorality, whereas the latter tells of truth, holiness, and morality (72–73). Yet, we cannot rest on this assertion insofar as his concept of ritual is limited to the religious category and does not anticipate a broader application of the category “ritual” to secular acts such as the reading of (non-sacred) texts.

Another aspect common to both play and ritual points to the adherence of each to norms. As Huizinga describes it, play is conducted in the symbolic arena that is governed by the law of absolute order:

All play has its rules. They determine what “holds” in the temporary world circumscribed by play. The rules of a game are absolutely binding and allow no doubt. […] Indeed, as soon as the rules are transgressed the whole play-world collapses. The game is over. The umpire’s whistle breaks the spell and sets “real” life going again. (11)

Play and ritual commonly have rules applicable only for the space specifically demarcated for them and during the performance. The participants conform to these rules, and through
this adherence to norms identify themselves as members of the play or ritual community. However, this means that transgressing any rule is tantamount to spoiling the *illusion* (which literally means “in-play,” stemming from *inlusio illudere* or *inludere*) (Huizinga 11) of the community and may result in the loss of one’s place or identity in the community.

Like play, ritual as a symbolic act requires conformity to the encoded order. Rapapport refers to this kind of self-subjection as “acceptance.” In his view, acceptance is an explicit and public act not necessarily based on “belief,” the latter of which is invisible, ambiguous, and private. As a public and social act, he argues, acceptance is closely connected with morality:

> [T]here is no obligation without acceptance, and perhaps that morality begins with acceptance. We may also note that while the acceptance of conventional undertakings, rules and procedures is possible outside of ritual, the formal and public nature of liturgical performance makes it very clear that an act of acceptance is taking place, that the acceptance is serious, and what it is that is being accepted. In Austin’s terms (1962: *passim*) it is “explicitly performative.” (123–24)

Public order cannot be established based on belief, which is an inner state, unknowable and volatile. Acceptance, by contrast, is a public act and as such is socially and morally binding regardless of the performer’s private beliefs (Rapapport 122). It is for this reason that ritual performance, even when conducted by a single person, has a public character.

The attorney Andrew Cappel pays particular attention to the normative aspect of ritual and evaluates ritual’s constitutive role in creating social order. He addresses the concept of ritual in regard to explaining how it gives rise to informal social norms that cannot be grasped through cost-benefit theories. For Cappel, ritual norms differ sharply from formal laws in that the former are “publicly instantiated in the social sphere, and
thereby intersubjectively communicated” (408). The performance of ritual norms is thus far from the imposition of existing laws. Yet, due to the very fact that ritual norms form based on communal ethos, they have absolute binding force. Participating in a ritual means more than just affirming schematized models. By participating in a ritual, the performers lend themselves to the (re)creation of the order, thereby rendering authority to it. Thus, the binding force of the norms created through ritual derives from the process of inter-subjective communication.

In addition to performative, formal, and symbolic features, another feature is relevant to the concept of ritual reading: the “evocative presentation style” included in Moore and Myerhoff’s list. As researchers have argued, rituals are a distinctive form of communication such that they require the immediate physical involvement of the participant. In fact, rituals convey messages in ways that differ significantly from communications on the cognitive level. As Aoki says, “儀礼は、それが示すさまざまなコミュニケーションのレベルにおいて、参加者に対して、彼らの社会的役割、アイデンティティ、集合的場での接触による感興、他の人びとへの態度、などの点で人を‘巻き込む’ような効果を与える” (47; “Ritual, at its various levels of communication, has the effect of involving the participants in terms of their social roles, identities, interests evoked through contacts in a collective space, attitude toward others, and so forth”). The idea of “involving” here is inseparable from the performative and formative aspects of ritual. As Nick Crossley says, the ability of ritual to establish and maintain the order of society stems in part from its “power to tap into the deeper corporeal basis of human subjectivity” (3). Through the

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5 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.
physical commitment the participants make to the performance, messages conveyed through ritual have a great impact on them.

This is a crucial point for my argument, and I want to take a closer look at it by referring to the theory of Rappaport. Particularly important to my argument is his notion of ritual as consisting of two components: the canonical and the self-referential. The former has a durable and invariant form that is “concerned with enduring aspects of nature, society or cosmos, and is encoded in apparently invariant aspects of liturgical orders” (Rappaport 58). The latter, on the other hand, signifies the immediate physicality that is confined to the here and now of the performer. The interaction of the two components points to a particular way of conveying a message whereby the performers themselves embody the message encoded in the ritual:

Performance is not merely one way to present or express liturgical orders but is itself a crucial aspect or component of the messages those orders carry. […] A liturgical order is a sequence of formal acts and utterances, and as such it is realized—made real, made into a res—only when those acts are performed and those utterances voiced. This relationship of the act of performance to that which is being performed—that is brings it into being—cannot help but specify as well the relationship of the performer to that which he is performing. He is not merely transmitting messages he finds encoded in the liturgy. He is participating in—that is, becoming part of—the order to which his own body and breath give life. (118)

Indeed, the self-referential is the very way in which the performers “become part of—the order” to which they are subjecting themselves. Whereas ordinary discourse “privileges the underlying meaning of a statement (the signified) over the words used to express such statements (the signifiers)” (Cappel 425), ritual conveys the current state of the transmitters indexically through the process of the performance per se. It is to this particular kind of communication that ritual owes its integrating effect. Moreover, the canonical and
self-referential elements, according to Rappaport, are transmitted simultaneously, as the latter depends on the former for its validity and the former, for its part, attains persuading force by relying on the latter. Thus, the two components are inseparable.

3. Ritual Reading as a Social Act

As indicated, my notion of ritual reading is concerned with the specific aspects of ritual: the symbolic, the performative, the normative, and the public. Taking these features into consideration, I will further explore the act of reading from the viewpoint of ritual. First, reading, in the same way as ritual, is an experience in symbolic framing. It takes place only for the duration of the performance and only within the limited space of the text. Within their awareness of this framing, readers can have an extraordinary experience. As noted, a literary text as canonical representation is an autonomous entity: the readers are required to read the text in accordance with textually encoded norms. These norms comprise various levels of rules, ranging from syntactic conventions for interpreting the text, including the recognition of a series of symbols as a semantic unit, to the underlying epistemological assumptions. The act of reading, in this way, rests on the readers’ adherence to the rules. Despite this meta-communicative understanding, the experience of reading takes on a poignant reality beyond the cognitive level, thanks to the holistic commitment the readers make to the textual norms. As Nishimura Kiyokazu says about play, “ひとは、みずからが立つ状況ないしこれから立ちいろとする状況が要請する独自の存在関係、行動様式を、自身にもひきうけ、遂行しなければならない” (210; “One
must accept and perform the particular relations and the mode of action required by the very situation in which one stands or is willing to enter”).

Furthermore, as for the relationship between the text and the act of reading, Rappaport’s theory of the canonical and self-referential is useful. The text constitutes an autonomous domain of meaning, containing messages of universal credibility despite the temporal and spatial distance that exists between the text and the readers. Nonetheless, it is simultaneously by virtue of the physicality (the bodies) of the readers that these messages are actualized in the temporal space. Thus, the text as the canonical and the act of reading as the self-referential are mutually dependent. In my view, it is this complementary relationship that lies at the root of the problem as to the location of meaning that has been the source of so much concern on the part of the literary critics.

Bell’s theory of ritual may also be beneficial in this context. She considers ritual a circular “interaction of body and environment” “involv[ing] a deferral of signification that is not completed or resolved even in the emergence of the ritualized agent” (105). According to Bell, ritual is not a substantial entity to be defined conceptually but “a strategic arena for the embodiment of power relations” (170). It is, in other words, a strategy for creating a hierarchical structure whereby legitimacy is conferred upon the dominant scheme through the process of negotiation. Following her argument, any search for the source of the power of ritual either in the object (environment) or in the subject (participant) can only end in failure:

Essential to ritualization is the circular production of a ritualized body which in turn produces ritualized practices. Ritualization is embedded within the dynamics of the body defined within a symbolically structured environment. (93)
Bell’s notion of ritualization strategy is well-suited to attempts to grasp the complex relationship between the literary text and the readers, as the act of reading, in my view, is not simply an enactment of the canonical text wherein the readers only play a passive role as a performer of encoded orders. Rather, for Bell, significance is created through the interactive process in which the readers, by engaging with the text, give meaning to the text and in turn becomes defined by the text. In addition, what I mean by “subjective engagement” here goes beyond the cognitive level of experience in the sense proposed by Iser to address the total commitment to norms involving both body and mind:

To say that performers participate in or become parts of the orders they are realizing is to say that transmitter-receivers become fused with the messages they are transmitting and receiving. In conforming to the orders that their performances bring into being, and that come alive in their performance, performers become indistinguishable from those orders, parts of them, for the time being. Since this is the case, for performers to reject liturgical orders being realized by their own participation in them as they are participating in them is self-contradictory, and thus impossible. Therefore, by performing a liturgical order the participants accept, and indicate to themselves and to others that they accept whatever is encoded in the canon of that order. (Rappaport 119)

What is noteworthy about the experience of ritual reading is that the readers “become parts of the orders” (the text). Thus, the question regarding the agency of meaning is no longer meaningful.

By considering the act of reading as a ritual performance, we can explore the social dimension of reading. As theorists such as Marshall McLuhan have pointed out, the circulation of books to the general public and the subsequent spread of the practice of reading are paradigmatic phenomena of modernity, and as such contributed to a sense of alienation from the world. Nevertheless, we cannot conclude that the experience of reading
is restricted to the private sphere of the individual. As already observed, public messages contained in the literary text such as the ideals, values, and beliefs of the fictional world can be actualized as reality only when they are performed through the bodies of individual readers. The readers become a part of the textual community by making a commitment to the form of the text, and through this interaction between the text and the readers an inter-subjective textual community is produced in which the chasm between self and world as well as the present and the past dissolves. Thus, each individual attains a communal identity through the private experience of reading. The notion of ritual reading, in this way, creates a nexus between the individual (reading) and the collective (ritual).

4. Historical Background

The notion of ritual reading I am proposing does not cover all reading activities nor is it applicable to all types of literary texts. First, I have limited the focus of my research to the reading undertaken by the individual readers as a private endeavor—a mode of reading that is characteristic of modern times. Collective storytelling and the recitation of legends have their origins in primordial religious rituals, and so their obvious affinity to ritual does not need to be further explored. Rather, the significance of the present study, I think, lies in evaluating the ritual element of reading in modern times, in which the act of reading has turned into an individual experience in the wake of the disappearance of agrarian communities along with the development of media technologies. Another point I want to stress is that the ritual experience of reading does not rest on arbitrary decisions made by the readers but is instead closely connected to the content and structure of the text. As
already suggested, the messages encoded in the text concern public interest. However, many modern novels focus on the psychological description of an individual character. Because of this concentration on the self, such novels, in my view, are unlikely to generate a ritual effect and thus cannot be the object of this study.

The four literary texts from Germanic Central Europe and Japan that I focus on in this study provide materials from the viewpoint of ritual reading. Historically, Switzerland, Germany, and Japan, in each respective period in which the focal works were published, were in the process of transforming from a pre-modern political system, whether that of patriarchy, monarchy, or feudalism, into a centralized modern nation-state. This process of modernization entailed fundamental transformations of society and culture. In particular, it had a great impact on the context of book production and book reading. According to Ilsedore Rarisch, book production in Germany increased sharply at the end of the eighteenth century and continued at a high level until the first half of the nineteenth century, which also affected general reading habits, whereby the repetitive reading of the Bible gave way to the consumption of books of various kinds. Further, the invention of the Schnellpresse (high-speed lithographic press) spurred an increase in book production, which culminated between 1841 and 1845 (Rarisch 21–23), the period in which both Die schwarze Spinne and Die Judenbuche were published. In particular, it gave rise to a remarkable expansion in the number of journals published, which became “eine ‘neue Art von Gas,’ in dem jeder wie in der Luft atmen muß” (Sengle 1: 21; “a new ‘sort of gas,’ in which everyone must breathe just like in the air”). Along with the expansion of the book market, i.e., “Industrialisierung der Literatur,” the role of the publisher as an intermediary
between printers and authors as well as between booksellers and readers became more important than ever (Rarisch 35–39). Like Germanic Europe, Japan around the turn of the century went through a more or less similar situation, as will be elaborated in Chapter 2. As personal relations between the author and the readers diminished along with the spread of print media, authors had to grapple with problems pertaining to questions about how to restore communities through their literary works. Thus, changes in reading habits are part and parcel of a national transformation in both Germanic and Japanese contexts and this, more than any overt political situation, constitutes the frame of my work. Ritual is depicted as a mimetic representation of community in all the works I examine here. Chapter 1 considers *Die schwarze Spinne* [The Black Spider] (1842), written by the Swiss author Jeremias Gotthelf, followed by two Japanese texts in Chapters 2 and 3, Izumi Kyōka’s *Kusa-meikyū* [The Grass Labyrinth] (1908) and Yanagita Kunio’s *Tōno Monogatari* [The Tales of Tono] (1910). Finally, the last chapter examines *Die Judenbuche* [The Jew’s Beech] (1842) by the German poet and novelist Annette von Droste-Hülshoff. *Die schwarze Spinne* and *Die Judenbuche* came out in the same year during the Biedermeierzeit (ca. 1815–1848), the transitional period between Romanticism and Realism according to the standard classification of German literary history, whereas *Kusa-meikyū* and *Tōno Monogatari* were written at the beginning of the twentieth century, a half century after the European novels.

During the period in which *Die schwarze Spinne* and *Die Judenbuche* were published, Germany and Switzerland were each engaged in the long process of becoming a unified modern nation-state, part and parcel of which was shifting from a predominantly
agricultural economy to a predominantly industrial one—a situation that also brought about the emergence of a society of class in place of a society of status. Due to this social transformation, both countries encountered serious problems. Both were late-comers to modernization, given their respective histories as countries with a decentralized system, and both had a nationalist movement that threatened their political, economic, and religious stability. In Europe it was these nationalist movements which brought with them calls for national unification that effected the Revolution of 1848. Despite the eventual failure of the revolution, these political movements had the effect of bringing progressive liberal ideals, such as democracy, individual freedom, and empirical rationalism, to the fore. And, the promulgating of these ideals, bound up with the advancing capitalist economy, contributed to the secularization of life in both of these countries.

The trend of radical liberalism, however, was undesirable for both Gotthelf and Droste-Hülshoff, who sought to uphold traditional Christian values. Their conservative outlook seems to represent the characteristics of Biedermeier, a term that designates the literary and cultural style of Central Europe in the first half of the nineteenth century. It was originally used to allude sarcastically to petit bourgeois culture during the period of the conservative political regime between the Congress of Vienna (1815) and the May Revolution (1848). The typical features of Biedermeier include a sense of safety, affinity with family and home, and attention to detail. Although there is a debate over whether the Swiss writer Gotthelf should be regarded as a Biedermeier author, as the extraordinary and violent world of his work does not coincide with the ordinary and mundane images the term evokes, I include him in the group based on Herbert A. and Elisabeth Frenzel’s argument:
“Es sehnte sich nach Zurückzogenheit und Privatleben, und es fügte sich willig Ganzheiten wie Religion, Staat, Heimat, Familie” (350; “it [Biedermeier literature] yearned for withdrawal and private life, being willing to conform to totalities such as religion, state, home, and family”). Against the backdrop of a volatile social context, politically engaged authors of Junges Deutschland (Young Germany) such as Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) and Georg Büchner (1813–1837) expressed social criticism through their works, whereas other authors withdrew into the cozy isolation of an orderly home.

For the Biedermeier writers, their world was not a fragment of some vast world. Instead, their world was complete in itself, an idea captured by the term Ganzheit (wholeness, totality), to which they felt they belonged. It is indeed in this sense of harmony with the world that their communal orientation is evident. That the term Biedermeier refers to a lifestyle as a whole, including literature, music, visual art, furniture, and interior design, suggests that it tends toward the totality of a microcosmic world. In other words, Biedermeier writers regarded the literary text as a site at which an autonomous cosmos could be constructed within which everything is contained and complete. As we will see, both Gotthelf and Droste-Hülshoff thematized their protagonists’ connections with their hometowns, which they conceived as an isolated community in the framework of Christian theology. They were not interested in individual characters but in the community as a whole, including its beliefs and worldview. Both authors, especially Gotthelf, sought to create an ideal Christian community in the virtual space of the text to oppose the secularizing and homogenizing force of the modern nation. To put it differently, it was an attempt to create what Ferdinand Tönnies refers to as Gemeinschaft, an organic community based on the
unified will of the people as opposed to Gesellschaft, a public life that is abstract and mechanical in nature and connected with the market economy. Their orientation toward Ganzheit, the desire to restore organic unity, I want to emphasize, is important to the essential nature of ritual. As already suggested, one of the major purposes of ritual is to open an extraordinary symbolic space amid the mundane reality of everyday life—a space in which to construct a community based on shared values and principles. Ritual, in other words, aims to build a cosmos of its own vis-à-vis the chaos of given reality. On this point, M. L. Ryan highlights the “sense of belonging in a certain place” (122) as a characteristic feature of nineteenth-century novels, which makes for a sharp contrast with the works of postmodernism. By referring to the theory of the French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, she argues that in Bachelard, “space is sensorially experienced by a concrete, bounded body, while in postmodern literature its apprehension presupposes a dismembered ubiquitous, highly abstract body, since real bodies can be in only one place at one time” (123). The conceptualized, alienated space of postmodern literature, according to Ryan, precludes the readers’ immersive relation to a specific location. Taking this difference into consideration, we see that Die Judenbuche evokes contradictory feelings in readers, intimacy and alienation, simultaneously, and thus creates a tense ambivalent relation between text and readers.

The process of modernization, however, proceeded more dramatically in Japan than in Switzerland and Germany. Two Japanese works in Chapters 3 and 4, Izumi Kyōka’s Kusa-meikyū and Yanagita Kunio’s Tōno Monogatari, came out after the Russo-Japan War (1904), the period during which Japan underwent the major socio-political changes
whereby it became a modern nation-state. A brief, and, therefore, necessarily reductive and simplistic, account of modern Japanese history can be rendered as follows: Japan had enjoyed the peace and security of national isolation until the arrival of Commodore Perry in Edo Bay in 1853 with four heavily armed ships. This event swept Japan into the vortex of the great Western powers’ colonial imperialism, in the wake of which the Meiji Restoration (1868) came about, under which the feudalist system was replaced by a centralized government with the emperor at its center. The new government immediately embarked on the project of nation-building, promulgating the Imperial Constitution and establishing a parliamentary system. Furthermore, the government promoted industrialization and established a military system under the slogans of “殖産興業” shokusan kōgyo (encourage new industry) and “富国強兵” fukoku kyōhei (enrich the country and strengthen the military). Modernization for Japan at that time meant Westernization; the West as represented primarily by France and England. After Prussia’s victory in the Franco-German War (1870–1871), however, Prussia emerged as a new and powerful model for Japan to emulate. The German influence thus became ascendant in a number of fields, especially in the military and scholarly arenas, and many elite Japanese, including the military surgeon and the prominent novelist Mori Ógai (1862–1922), studied abroad in Germany.

The Westernization of the Japanese lifestyle brought with it a sense of crisis in regard to the cultural identity of the Japanese people. Furthermore, due to the country’s rapid industrialization and its developing capitalist economy, members of the agricultural population migrated to the cities in vast numbers, such that existing agrarian communities collapsed, which heightened the tension between the center and the periphery to an
unprecedented level. In this socio-historical context, a new literary genre took its place in the mainstream of the world of letters. A genre referred to as 私小説 shi-shosetsu (I-novel)—the purpose of which was to render in minute detail an individual’s private life—enjoyed its heyday under the strong influence of European Realism and Naturalism.

It was against the backdrop of this modernizing and Westernizing socio-cultural climate that both Kyōka and Yanagita published their fantastic tales. Kyōka’s Kusa-meikyū is a literary work based on the pre-modern Japanese literary tradition of monogatari bungaku (story literature) whereas Tōno monogatari is a collection of local legends (folklore). Despite the difference in genre, both authors sought to express resistance to the centralizing force of modernity, portraying the supernatural—such as ghosts, monsters, and goblins, those eliminated by the scientific discourse of modernity—as an alternative reality while connecting the country’s past to the province. Susan Napier argues that in modern Japanese literature the fantastic is an expression of political resistance to modernization. This holds particularly true for Kyōka and Yanagita, who were impelled by the sense of crisis that traditional values and practices were being threatened by modern ways of life.

5. Countering Modern Discourse through Ritualization

The four works examined in this project represent a current of modern literature that has not met with sufficient appreciation, in my view, as mainstream literary criticism has focused on works with the theme of self-alienation against the backdrop of modern urban life. The four authors from Japan and German speaking countries each counter the
discourse of modernity by creating a textual community through their work. It is true that no immediate relationship exists among these authors; the idea that Kyōka and Yanagita read the works of Gotthelf and Droste von Hülshoff is quite improbable. Indeed, Germany’s influence in the realm of literature was rather restricted compared to its influence on scholarship and the military. Nevertheless, I juxtapose German and Japanese texts in this study because of their common characteristics, which, in my view, constitute an important tendency in modern Japanese literature. As has often been discussed, the modern literary movement in Japan in its initial stages was strongly influenced by French and Russian Naturalism. The ideals of the Anglo-Franco Enlightenment that led to 自由民権運動 jiyū minken undō (the Movement for Civic Rights and Freedom) in the 1880s also exerted a profound influence on a Japanese Naturalism that emphasizes the modern sense of self and the emancipation of human nature. On the other hand, a more tradition-oriented group of thinkers tended to prefer German literature due to its romantic idealism and nostalgic gestures toward the past. This opposition manifested itself symbolically in the long-lived debate over the aesthetics of literature between two eminent literary figures, Tsubouchi Shōyō and Mori Ōgai.6 The dispute between Tsubouchi Shōyō, who translated Shakespeare’s works, and Mori Ōgai, who introduced Lessing, Goethe, and Schopenhauer to Japan, took on the aspect of a European proxy war in Japan (Kōshina 10–14).

All four authors in this study show an interest in the folkloric in the province, which they depicted as an ideal community in their fictional worlds. They commonly resisted the

6 This literary dispute, known as 没理想論争 botsu-risō ronsō (the debate on Submerged-Ideals), took place from 1891 to 1892 in literary magazines. While Tsubouchi insisted on the importance of realistic representation, Mori championed the notion of aesthetic ideals.
discourse of modernity through writing ritualizing (or anti-ritualizing) texts despite the differences in their socio-cultural backgrounds and ideas of community. The European authors searched for their ideals in Christianity whereas the Japanese authors addressed the nation’s past and connected it with the fantastic world.

Ritualization, according to Bell, refers to the strategy of differentiation by actualizing schemes of oppositions. In the act of reading, it is the fictional world that is differentiated from and privileged over the world of reality. Although many schemes could be used for ritualization, in the four texts considered herein it is the periphery that is consecrated vis-à-vis the center. The center signifies the centralizing force of the modern nation-state, whereas the periphery designates a symbolic locale associated with anti-modern orientations, such as collectivism, patriarchy, and a belief in religion and the supernatural. The periphery, thus, stands as a symbolic landscape around which the textual community is constructed. The readers, regardless of their own specific geographic location, identify themselves with this virtual community through the act of reading and so they feel themselves emancipated from the restrictions of daily reality. It is precisely this sort of extraordinary experience in the symbolically demarcated space that I address through the notion of ritual reading.

Chapter 1 offers a consideration of *Die schwarze Spinne*, which is about the disastrous introduction of black spiders into an agrarian community in medieval Switzerland. In reference to anthropological theories, I consider the role of taboo and transgression in creating occasions for communal ritual. The concept of women’s bodies as represented in the framework of Christian cosmology will also be touched upon in this
context. Chapter 2 considers *Kusa-meikyū*, evaluating how its narrative technique produces a ritual effect. My specific focus will be the complicated plot structure, by means of which fantastic stories are disclosed in a style that mimics that of oral storytelling. I argue that the narrative structure of the text plays a crucial role in connecting the readers with the fictional world while creating an inter-subjective textual community beyond temporal and spatial boundaries. Chapter 3 focuses on Yanagita Kunio’s *Tō no monogatari* and the methodology he used as a folklorist. Overall, the chapter considers his project of reconstructing the country’s past through a collection of local legends. I also pay attention to the way in which Yanagita’s folklore study became incorporated into the ideology of nation building. Finally, unlike the preceding chapters, Chapter 4 approaches the theme of ritual reading in terms of its opposite by considering *Die Judenbuche* as an anti-ritual text. The novel thematizes the issue of “judgment” and “tolerance,” which is raised through unsolved murder cases that take place in isolated forests. The story of *Die Judenbuche* shares the theme of Christian morality with *Die schwarze Spinne*; nonetheless, the transgression here does not provide an occasion for public ritual through which communal norms are affirmed. This is because morality is internalized as the individual’s private issue and, therefore, remains invisible. Thus, in this final chapter, my goal is to explore the limits of ritual reading.
CHAPTER ONE
Ritual Transgression in Jeremias Gotthelf’s *Die schwarze Spinne*

The present chapter considers the Swiss author Jeremias Gotthelf’s (1797–1854) *Die schwarze Spinne*, analyzing it as a ritual text that embodies an apocalyptic Christian vision. I am using the word “ritual” in the double sense of the word: the text is ritualistic first of all as the story revolves around the ritual events of an agrarian Christian community. Further, it is ritualistic in that the author’s creation of a fictional utopia connects with the form and content of the story, which as the textual strategy encourages readers to partake in ritual experience. Thus, in what follows I will investigate the ways in which the readers are tied to the fictional world through the motif of ritual by closely examining the tropes and narrative techniques of the text.

1. The Ideal Storyteller

Before proceeding with my analysis of the text of *Die schwarze Spinne*, I want to introduce Walter Benjamin’s essay, “The Storyteller” [Der Erzähler], in which Gotthelf is identified as a genuine storyteller. A careful examination of Benjamin’s theory will shed light on Gotthelf’s achievement in regard to his text’s effect on readers. Benjamin explicates his notion of the ideal storyteller and laments the disappearance of this storyteller from Europe as it was during the period between the two world wars. Benjamin’s theory of the storyteller should be read as part of his critique of modernity. This is evident in his analogy of the storyteller as a craftsman who “weaves” stories out of experiences, whether
his own or those of others, as opposed to, say, a factory worker engaged in technological reproduction. In Benjamin’s view, the genuine storyteller provides “[c]ounsel woven into the fabric of real life” (86) as wisdom. And he states that “[t]he art of storytelling is reaching its end because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out” (86–87).

Benjamin’s theory of the storyteller will become clearer when we turn to the notion of “die Erzählung” (short story), which he contrasted with “der Roman” (novel). The novelist, according to Benjamin, is a solitary individual who finds himself isolated from the world. For the author of a novel, the primary purpose of his work is to describe the inner experiences of the protagonist—often the writer’s alter-ego—which are not public, not shared with others. His idea of the novel was influenced by the Hungarian theorist Georg Lukács (1885–1971), whose theory grounded on a Marxist view of history takes the epics of ancient Greece as an ideal. That is, the epic provides a generic territory in which Geist and the world exist in harmony. In Lukács’s view, “transzendentale Heimatlosigkeit” (transcendental homelessness), the abyss between self and world, is the hallmark of modernity that is inseparable from the development of the novelistic genre.

Benjamin’s critique of modernity is manifested in his exaltation of the story vis-à-vis the novel:

The storyteller takes what he tells from experience—his own or that reported by others. And he in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale. The novelist has isolated himself. The birthplace of the novel is the solitary individual, who is no longer able to express himself by giving examples of his most important concerns, is himself uncounseled, and cannot counsel others. (87)

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7 The German word Geist has a range of meanings. It can be translated in English as “spirit,” “ghost,” “soul,” “mind,” “intellect,” etc. It designates a kind of self-motivating substance and as such can also be used as a synonym for “humanity.”
In his view, a story communicates the meaning of an experience to others through the network of storytelling. In contrast, a novel isolates the individual reader from the world whereby the author explores the thoughts and feelings of fictional characters. It is the awareness of the incommunicability of experience that underlies the psyche of both the novelist and the reader.

Benjamin’s description of the storyteller is most concerned with the practical role he plays in a community. Indeed, the notion of community or context is a key concept throughout his theoretical work. In his well-known essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” for instance, Benjamin discusses the definitive influence that new forms of art—products of modern mass technologies such as photographs and films—have exerted on the experience of appreciating art. By turning art into an object of mass consumption, Benjamin argues, reproductive technologies deprived art of its unique value, i.e., its aura. Thus, he attributes the decline of aura to this new form of art (reproduced art), which by definition is detached from its original context.

Of particular importance to the argument of this study is that Benjamin considers the matter of aura in connection with ritual:

Originally the contextual integration of art in tradition found its expression in the cult. We know that the earliest art works originated in the service of a ritual—first the magical, then the religious kind. It is significant that the existence of the work of art with reference to its aura is never entirely separated from its ritual function. In other words, the unique value of the “authentic” work of art has its basis in ritual, the location of its original use value. This ritualistic basis, however remote, is still recognizable as secularized ritual even in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty. [...] for the first time in world history, mechanical reproduction emancipates the work of art from its parasitical dependence on ritual. (224)
He evaluates artwork in its cult function, which is to say that the value of art is inseparable from its original context. The decline of aura means the demise of ritual. Underlying his theory of the storyteller and his related theory of artwork is his sense that the ritual context is disappearing. Drawing on Benjamin’s theory of art and ritual, I argue that storytelling is a kind of ritual performance that opens a space of unity by integrating individuals into the inter-subjective community of the story.

The picture of Gotthelf that emerges from his biographies more or less accords with Benjamin’s portrayal of the ideal storyteller. Albert Bitzius—Gotthelf was his pseudonym—was born to a middle-class pastoral family in Switzerland. Following in his father’s footsteps, Bitzius devoted most of his life to serving as a country pastor in his home canton, Bern. In his role as pastor, Bitzius wrote didactic tales for the local people. His engagement as a pastor, however, extended beyond the realm of spiritual concerns to other aspects at the foundation of community life, including farming, education, and politics. As Karl Fahr notes,

Pfarramt, Seelsorge und schriftstelerisches Schaffen waren ihm nicht Gegensätze, sondern lediglich verschiedene Ausdrucksformen seiner Wirksamkeit, die er vornehmlich als eine erzieherische auffaßte. (20)

[Ministry, spiritual counseling and authorial achievement were not opposed to each other for him. They were merely different forms of expression through which to have an influence which he understood primarily as educational influence.]

Gotthelf was a writer, a pastor, and an educator at the same time, roles that all served the single purpose of improving life in the agrarian community in accord with Christian ideals. His involvement in practical activities was more or less related to the congregational system of the Bernese state church. The Protestant state church of Bern during Gotthelf’s
lifetime was divided into seven capitals, and pastors were sent to these in order to supervise the local education administration (Göttler 26–27). Gotthelf became a school inspector for eighteen communities, in which he engaged in social and political issues.

Yet, despite the fact that Gotthelf appears to have behaved consistently in his various roles, it is necessary to distinguish between Gotthelf as a cultural figure and the historical Albert Bitzius. As Fahr points out, it was only after his business as a practitioner went awry that he started to engage passionately in his literary pursuits. In the canton of Bern where Gotthelf served in a pastoral ministry, aristocratic conservatives affiliated with the Catholic Church and Protestant liberals were in fierce conflict with one another. Although Gotthelf initially supported the liberal progressive group, his attitude changed as the political influence of the latter grew. The liberal state leaders who came to power after the Regeneration (1814–1847) became radicalized, and as they did so, Gotthelf became disillusioned. In particular, he was outraged by their attempt to eliminate religious influence from politics. Gotthelf’s politics—he was pressing for social justice while aspiring to the realization of social ideals based on Christian morality—were compatible with neither the liberals nor the conservatives (Thomke 228). He, thus, became an isolated figure in the community. This isolation appears to have been an important impetus driving his publication of didactic tales.

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8 The reference is to the period of the liberal movement in the wake of the July Revolution. The reformative government accepted a range of progressive ideas, including the separation of church and state, the freedom of the press, and free trade and industry.
Pertaining to the discrepancy between image and reality, there is a significant difference between the teller of an oral story and the author of a written story. As the phrase, “[e]xperience which is passed on from mouth to mouth” (84) suggests, Benjamin considers the *Erzählung* to be a kind of oral performance, which makes for a sharp contrast with the *Roman*, which rests on written expressions. Despite this understanding on which his theory is based, no in-depth discussion is given as to the impact the book form exerts on the experience of an artwork. All the storytellers mentioned in this essay—Gotthelf, Nikolai Leskov (1831–1895), Johann Peter Hebel (1760–1826), and Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849)—published their works in book form. It was, therefore, through the medium of printed texts that Benjamin encountered their stories. As this fact suggests, there is a subtle slippage in his equating of the narrative voice of the text, which is nothing less than a construction by the author, with the physical voice of the actual storyteller. To be sure, there is an ontological difference between the experience of aural storytelling and that of reading. If sound has a unifying function as opposed to sight, which works to dissect objects, as Walter Ong claims, it is the dissemination of books as a product of reproductive technologies that facilitated the decline of a communal aura, and thereby fundamentally changed the nature of artistic experience. The ambiguity in Benjamin’s terminology and usage, in fact, is not without foundation. In German-speaking countries, the term *Erzählung* usually designates both oral and written forms given that the oldest form of storytelling disappeared as early as in the medieval period. When Benjamin enunciates the cult aspect of storytelling, he apparently means the original form of narrative, or what Robert Petsch refers to as “*Vorformen der Erzählkunst*” (the preform of narrative art).
In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Benjamin seems to consider aura as originating only from the object rather than from inter-subjective experience, an argument which, however, contradicts his view of textualized storytelling as capable of performing a ritual function despite the fact that printed literary texts are mass-produced (allographic, rather than autographic) art forms. Hence, by examining Benjamin’s critique, I explore the possibility that aura, i.e., religious force inhering in the object per se, can be produced by means of the book as a product of modern reproductive technologies. For this purpose, I also examine the ways in which the image of Gotthelf as a storyteller character ingrained as a part of the fiction is constructed through textual strategies. In essence, the chapter will consider Die schwarze Spinne as a paradoxical form of art: ritual on the page.

2. Studies on Die schwarze Spinne

Die schwarze Spinne constitutes a part of the first volume of Zyklus Erzählung [Cycle of Short Stories] that Gotthelf published from 1842 to 1846 under the title Bilder und Sagen aus der Schweiz [Images and Legends of Switzerland] with the Swiss publisher Jent und Gassmann. Each story in these volumes is to be read not as an isolated piece but as a part of a loose cycle, “dessen Motive aufeinander verweisen und einander gegenseitig kommentieren” (Holl 58; “whose motifs mutually annotate and refer to each other”). The publication of the cycle was based on Gotthelf’s plan, “von seinem Lande reden […] wie es war, wie sie ist, wie es werden sollte?” (Gotthelf, Sämtliche 445; “to talk about his country […] how it was, how it is now, and how it should be in the future”). He sought to depict the
history of Switzerland from an internal perspective, namely, under the ideology of Christian republicanism as opposed to the notion of the national history of the modern nation state. What drove him to this enterprise was his sense of crisis about the contemporary situation of his country, and thus the work should be read in this socio-historical context.

A large number of studies have been published on *Die schwarze Spinne* to date. However, only a few analyze the work from the standpoint of reading experience. Most studies focus on connecting Gotthelf’s life as a preacher and educator directly to his literary work. Although some studies evaluate the novel in regard to its formal construction, its tropes and narrative techniques, little attention has been paid to the aspect of ritual. Studies of *Die schwarze Spinne* fall roughly into four groups: explorations of (1) the text’s narrative structure (Godwin-Jones), (2) metaphors and symbolic expressions in a mythical/theological context (Pape, Hahl), (3) social critique in the context of the Biedermeierzeit (Bauer, Gallati, Sengle), and (4) kinship with folklore and myth (Riedhauser, Muschug). Among these, Werner Hahl conducted a detailed analysis of the narrative of *Die schwarze Spinne*, referring to the text as a “Ritualisierung des Erzählens” (“ritualization of the narrative”). Hahl’s research is valuable insofar as it sheds light on the ritual dimension of the text. Yet, he does not explain the organic correlation between the ritual as portrayed in the tale and the ritualization of the reading experience of the text.

3. Ritual Text and Reading Strategy
Through the numerous literary techniques it deploys, the text of *Die schwarze Spinne* encourages readers to imagine that they are members of the fictional community even as they engage in the solitary act of reading. The question is this: How and to what extent do the form and the content of the text determine the readers’ experiences of the fictional world? Further, what are the underlying norms and principles of this fictional utopia (or dystopia), and how are they connected to the author’s creation of a patriarchal Christian community? In keeping with these points, the present chapter has three major purposes: First, to consider the function of ritual in the Christian agricultural community by highlighting the role of the christening, the central motif of the tale. Second, to elucidate the ways in which community is regenerated through the ritual transgression of taboo, drawing on the anthropological theory of Mary Douglas. And, third, from the reader’s point of view, to illustrate the ritual experience of reading as an imaginative event enabled through a range of textual strategies. Because of the realistic—in the sense of physical involvement—yet simultaneously symbolic nature of the experience, ritual reading has the social function of creating an imaginative community that counters the reality of the material world.

4. **Storytelling as Public Ritual**

The story opens with a description of the idyllic scenery of Sumiswald, an Emmentaler village in the canton Bern. In the center of the landscape is a grand house where people are preparing a meal for a christening and outside of which others are gathering. One of the people asks about a dark window post. In response, the grandfather of the house tells the secret of the village, disclosed in the form of a framed narrative.
A classical, structuralist summation of the embedded tale would recognize nine major scenes. In the first scene, the peasants of Sumiswald are subject to the unreasonable demand of a knight whereby they must deliver one hundred full-grown trees to the castle within a month. The peasants are in distress over this demand, and the devil takes advantage of their plight by offering his help in exchange for an unbaptized baby. The peasants cannot decide how to respond, but Christine, one of their wives, steps forward to make a pact with the devil. A few of the peasants protest her decision, but the vast majority of them comply. These are the narrative units identified as interdiction, violation of interdiction, trickery, villainy, testing, counter action, struggle, and victory. The first stage consists of interdiction and violation of interdiction, according to the structuralist analysis of Vladimir Propp. In the second stage, the peasants attempt to defeat the devil (trickery), which invites the devil’s wrath and his subsequent horrific revenge. In the third stage, the poisonous spider attacks the people and thus terrorizes the entire village (villainy). Meanwhile, Christine feels a burning pain on her cheek where the devil kissed her to seal their pact. She tries to cooperate with the devil, but a village priest prevents her from doing so. In unbearable pain, Christine turns into a ghostly spider and gives birth to numerous little spiders. In the fifth and sixth stages, a terrible battle between the priest and the ghostly spider ensues, in which the priest, though he defeats the spider, dies heroically (testing and counter action). And, in the seventh and eighth stages, the furious spider rampages through the village, slaughtering people and livestock indiscriminately. A pious woman fights the devil to protect her child: she seizes the spider, locks it in a hole in the window post, and dies with the blessing of God (struggle and victory). Finally, in the ninth stage, peace is
restored to the village (resolution). A few centuries later, however, the spider emerges from the hole at a time when the people, who no longer fear God, are living in vanity and arrogance. The village finds itself in the grip of another nightmare, which is finally brought to an end by a young man of faith who sacrifices his own life for the safety of the village.

The narrative structure of the embedded tale demonstrates the typical pattern of the Western folktale, which is represented by the sequence of temptation by evil and a subsequent dilemma, followed by confrontation with evil and a final victory. It is constructed on a series of events experienced by the hero, extending from his deviation from the right path to his eventual return to it. This archetypal pattern gave rise to the narrative structure of the Western novel, which crystalized in several versions, including the *Bildungsroman*, a form that focuses on the spiritual growth of the protagonist. Despite the qualities that *Die schwarze Spinne* shares with the overarching Western narrative tradition of which it is a part, however, the tale differs significantly from a typical modern Western novel. It is rather an attempt to perform a storytelling ritual in a novelistic form.

By referring to the modern novel, I primarily mean the *Novelle* in German, i.e., a narrative of relatively short length, in contrast to the *Roman*, which designates a long narrative that seeks to depict the whole universe via a gradual development. Although the *Novelle* has its origins in Italian *novella*, it developed independently and established itself as a literary genre specific to German literature. The definition of the *Novelle* is ambiguous despite Goethe’s well-known statement: “Denn was ist eine Novelle anders als eine sich ereignete, unerhörte Begebenheit” (“For, what is a *novella* other than an unprecedented event that occurred”). Nonetheless, there is a widespread agreement in regard to the general
characteristics of the Novelle as opposed to the Roman. Specifically, the Novelle concentrates on a few critical incidents or situations. Each incident within the story is bound together tightly according to the plotline, to which the personalities of the characters are also subject. In other words, the Novelle has a strong propensity for entertainment thereby bringing the narrator’s subjectivity to the fore\textsuperscript{9} vis-à-vis the Roman, which describes something typical and universal in an objective way.

The Novelle, which approaches the reader through the economy of narrative and description, is related more closely than the Roman to pre-modern oral storytelling. Die schwarze Spinne can also be categorized as a Novelle due to its tight narrative style and gestures toward oral storytelling. Nevertheless, we need to be careful about equating the Novelle with Benjamin’s notion of the Erzählung, which he regarded as contrary to the Roman. As will be observed in Chapter 4, not all Novellen produce a ritual effect. A ritual text primarily concerns the creation of a closed textual community based on the affirmation of its shared norms, whereas the quintessence of the Novelle lies in its pursuit of individual characters’ inner experience. Seeing the depiction of one’s inner world as the primary purpose of literature is a deep-seated idea among German literary critics. Petsch, for instance, argues that the art of storytelling (Erzählkunst) became true literature (Dichtung) when it removed itself from immediate practicality and gained symbolic meaning. That is to say, the extent to which the art of storytelling steps is considered a pure art form is

\textsuperscript{9} In this context, Werner Hoffmeister, for example, considers the genre of the tale—by authors such as Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and Edgar Allan Poe—to be equivalent to the Novelle. One feature common to both genres, according to Hoffmeister, is an epistemological orientation toward what is marvelous and supernatural within the scope of rational/empirical validation.
measured by its distance from its original cult context. Petsch’s “*Gemeinschaft*” (community) differs in a fundamental way from my notion of textual community:

> Damit geht die Persönlichkeit des Erzählers in seinen Bericht mit ein; [...] also als Vertreter einer überindividuellen Menschlichkeit, auf deren Boden allein ja auch die Dichtung gedeihen kann. (12–13)

[Thus, the personality of the narrator influences his report; [...] as a person who, being taken deeply in a mood, speaks from/for a community, namely, as a representative of a supra-individual humanity, on the ground of which alone literature can flourish.]

He uses the term *Gemeinschaft* in a broader sense. It is a community of “supra-individual humanity” and as such goes beyond the boundaries of spiritual orientation. It is to be based on the recognition of universal human values, which, however, is possible only through rigorous examination of one’s morality. In other words, the creation of a human community through novelistic experience is predicated on the individual’s isolation from the world. In this way, a typical modern novel gives universal validity to an individual’s unique experiences, in contrast to a ritual text in which the individual is submerged in the experience of the whole.

I regard *Die schwarze Spinne* as a ritual text because of its public and communal character. As Benjamin and Lukács also suggest, the underlying scheme of the modern novel is the conflict between self and world: the novel’s work is to explore the psyches of isolated individuals. *Die schwarze Spinne*, by contrast, has little interest in individual characters. In this sense, it shares in Lukács’s notion of the epic vis-à-vis the novel. In his view, the epic hero is “never an individual,” and he points to the essential characteristics of the epic thus: “its theme is not a personal destiny but the destiny of a community” (66). *Die schwarze Spinne* takes the entire community as its protagonist.
The public character of the tale is also manifest in its structuring of space. In *Die schwarze Spinne* on the occasion of a christening, the village’s secret past is revealed in the manner of a detective story. Yet, unlike a typical modern novel wherein the protagonist’s private life is disclosed to readers as to one peeking into a room through a hole in the wall, nothing separates the viewer from the viewed, as exemplified by the open-air space in which the grandfather tells his tale. In the cosmology of this fictional world, no distinction exists between the world (the exterior) and the individual (the interior) and so the individual consciousness dissolves in the sense of unity generated through the ritual performance of storytelling.

5. The House at the Center of the Universe

In the Christian cosmology of *Die schwarze Spinne*, the house is located at the center of the universe. The opening paragraph portrays the landscape of the valley and the house as follows:

Über die Berge hob sich die Sonne, leuchtete in klarer Majestät in ein freundliches, aber enges Tal und weckte zu fröhlichem Leben die Geschöpfe, die geschaffen sind, an der Sonne ihres Lebens sich zu freuen. Aus vergoldetem Waldessaume schmetterte die Amsel ihr Morgenlied, zwischen funkelnden Blumen in perlendem Grase tönite der sehnsüchtigen Wachtel ein Minnelied, über dunkeln Tannen tanzten brünstige Krähen ihren Hochzeitreigen oder krächzten zärtliche Wiegenlieder über die dornichten Bettchen ihrer ungefiederten Jungen. In der Mitte der sonnenreichen Halde hatte die Natur einen fruchtbaren, beschirmten Boden eingegraben; mittendrin stand stattlich und blank ein schönes Haus, eingefaßt von einem prächtigen Baumgarten, in welchem noch einige Hochäpfelbäume prangten in ihrem späten Blumenkleide; halb stund das vom Hausbrunnen bewässerte üppige Gras noch, halb war es bereits dem Futtergange zugewandert. (3)
[The sun rose over the hills, shone with clear majesty down into a friendly, narrow valley and awakened to joyful consciousness the beings who are created to enjoy the sunlight of their life. From the sun-gilt forest’s edge the thrush burst forth in her morning song, while between sparkling flowers in dew-laden grass the yearning quail could be heard joining in with its love-song; above dark pine tops eager crows were performing their nuptial dance or cawing delicate cradle songs over the thorny beds of their fledgling young.

In the middle of the sun-drenched hillside nature had placed a fertile, sheltered, level piece of ground; here stood a fine house, stately and shining, surrounded by a splendid orchard where a few tall apple trees were still displaying their finery of late blossom; the luxuriant grass, which was watered by the fountain near the house, was in part still standing, though some of it had already found its way to the fodder store (3).]

The symbolism is evident. The sun is a symbol for God, the creator of the world. It throws its majestic light on the world in which all life—whether flora or fauna—live full of joy in praise of their creator. Nature here is signified as part of the Christian cosmology, the ideological foundation of the fictional world. At the center of the world stands the house. It is built “mittendrin” (“in the middle”) of the earth “[i]n der Mitte der sonnenreichen Halde” (“[i]n the middle of the sun-drenched hillside”). The description goes further: “Nicht umsonst glänzte die durch Gottes Hand erbaute Erde und das von Menschenhänden erbaute Haus im reinsten Schmucke; über beide erglänzte heute ein Stern am blauen Himmel, ein hoher Feiertag” (4; “Not for nothing did the earth built by God’s hand and the house built by man’s hand gleam in purest adornment; today, a festal holiday, a star in the blue sky shone forth upon them both” 3). What draws our attention are the parallel phrases, “die durch Gottes Hand erbaute Erde” (“the earth built by God’s hand”) and “das von Menschenhänden erbaute Haus” (“the house built by man’s hand”), which reveal the view of the house (and the family) as a microcosm of the kingdom of God. The house here exists
not only for blood kin but for the entire community. In Gotthelf’s view, this house embodies the idea of the church as representing the kingdom of God on earth.

The house in *Die schwarze Spinne* functions as a symbol of the universe and as such constitutes a site for a communal ritual. In terms of the symbolism of myth, the house is a sacred place of unity and harmony. When one is “at home,” one feels in harmony with the universe, whereby the distinction between the interior and the exterior dissipates. Bachelard regards the house as a psychic space that symbolizes the image of our inner world:

> I must show that the house is one of the greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. […] In the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being. It maintains him through the storms of the heavens and through those of life. It is body and soul. It is the human being’s first world. (6–7)

As Bachelard notes, contingency does not exist in the cosmological order of the house, where everything has meaning and is bound together by necessity. It is a perfect world, existing in its own right. The house in the text is marked as a sacred place. It conceals and reveals the secret of the community. Bachelard emphasizes that the house functions as the most intimate of places—one that affords shelter and we surmise protects secrets. The house in *Die schwarze Spinne* literally enshrines a secret: the existence of the black spider, which is disclosed on the occasion of a christening.

Now, let me return to my claim that *Die schwarze Spinne* differs distinctly from the typical modern novel. I will discuss this claim by comparing the paragraph quoted at length above with the opening of *Irrungen, Wirrungen* [Diversions and Entanglements] by Theodor Fontane (1819–1898), a representative novelist of the German Realism of the late nineteenth century:
The paragraphs convey respective impressions that are strikingly different. In Fontane’s novel, a little house stands inconspicuously behind a large park, some distance back from the main streets of the metropolitan Berlin. Sitting in a little corner of the vast world, the house is likely to be noticed only by chance by passers-by. The statement, “trotz aller Kleinheit und Zurückgezogenheit von der vorübergehenden Straße her sehr wohl erkannt werden konnte” (“Despite compactness and seclusion [the dwelling] could nevertheless still be made out quite easily from the passing street”) exactly expresses the very way in which the entire narrative of the novel is structured; the private life of the resident family is disclosed to a random reader as if it were a secret view into a house happened upon by a passerby. A sense of reality in regard to the portrayal of the landscape is afforded by objective/measurable phrases and adjectives such as “schräg gegenüber,” (diagonally opposite), “groß” (large), and “dreifenstig” (with three windows), which contrast with the frequent use of subjective/aesthetic adjectives in Die schwarze Spinne, such as “freundlich” (friendly) “fröhlich” (joyful), “stattlich und blank” (stately and bare), “schön” (beautiful), “prächtig” (splendid), and “üppig” (exuberant). The world rendered through these...
adjectives is a perfect one: because it is governed by divine law that denies the notion of contingency. In this regard, Hahl argues, *Die schwarze Spinne* is a “ritualizing text” because it represents the divine order through its religious symbolism and highly structured narrative. Indeed, this normative aspect of the text constitutes an important part of ritual reading.

If Gotthelf’s house is a microcosm representing the kingdom of God, childbirth is the mimetic act of the divine creation. Thus, christening is regarded as an important initiation ritual whereby new-born babies are welcomed into the sacred community. In *Die schwarze Spinne*, christening not only provides a festive occasion for the act of storytelling to take place but it is the central motif of the tale. In the tale told by the grandfather, the newborn baby promised to the devil is saved through baptism, and another baby escapes the devil because the priest sprinkles him/her with holy water. As illustrated by these examples, baptism is considered capable of providing protection against evil. In the community prescribed by Christian patriarchal ideology, the symbolism of ritual performance gives meaning to and endorses the birth of a child as a matter of public interest.

Nonetheless, such an emphasis on the role of ritual, it appears to me, contrarily points to the very fact that ritual has lost its substance. That the peasants in their predicament are willing to sacrifice a baby (by leaving him/her unbaptized) with the rational calculation, “wieviel mehr wert sie alle seien als ein einzig ungetauft Kind” (47; “how much more worth they all were than one single unbaptized child” 42), reveals the fact that religious faith has lost its meaning. Obsession with superstitions and religious formality, in this way, testifies to the absence of a living faith. We can observe here a sense of crisis that the true
faith has given way to a secular rationalism. The spiritual foundation of the community is in jeopardy.

6. The Role of Women

The decline of religious faith and morality is directly connected to the collapse of traditional family values. The family is the basic unit upon which the Christian agrarian community is founded. The established system of the patriarchal family prescribes gender roles in strict terms. Thus, in the Christian cosmology of Die schwarze Spinne with the family at its center, women are acknowledged for their childbearing and nurturing role. The ideal farm family, in Gotthelf’s view, is characterized by “Arbeitsamkeit” (diligence), “Häuslichkeit” (domesticity), “Ehrbarkeit” (respectability), and “Frömmigkeit” (religiousness) (Riedhauser 75). This ideal is represented by a proper farmer’s wife who is religious, hardworking, and content with a life of genteel poverty. Gotthelf problematizes the role of women in Die schwarze Spinne—whether they adhere to or transgress societal norms—and through this dramatization, he facilitates reflections on moral values on the part of the readers.

Gotthelf’s conservative views regarding gender were very much in accord with the emerging gender discourse in Germany and other European countries. According to Friedrich Kittler, the system of equivalents, which is deeply rooted in modern Western society, Woman = Nature = Mother, is a product of nineteenth-century Europe, a period during which the idealized image of the mother was created as the role of women was transformed in the context of the middle-class family. This new socio-cultural
understanding was reflected especially in the Swiss educator Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi’s (1746–1827) educational theory. Pestalozzi insisted on the necessity of Christian-based education for the purpose of improving the situation of the impoverished, and thereby considered the family as the basic unit in which a child learns to develop a loving relationship to God. Thus, he emphasized the role of parents, particularly that of mothers as the primary teacher. He wrote in the preface to “Das Buch der Mütter” [The Mothers’ Book]:

Mutter! Der Geist und die Kraft der Vollendung liegt in ihnen, und den sollen sie für dein Kind zu deinem Geiste und zu deiner Kraft machen. Das sollen sie, und das können sie, oder sie taugen nichts, sie taugen dann unbedingt gar nichts. (xi)

[Mother! The spirit and power of perfection lie within you, and for the sake of your child you should develop them into your spirit and your power. You can and should do this, otherwise you are worth nothing, nothing at all. (Translation cited in Kittler 54).]

Gotthelf, who admired Pestalozzi for his “gewaltige religiöse Kraft, die Hingabe an einen Menschheitsdienst und das Gefühl reiner Liebe (Marti 107–108; “massive religious power, the devotion to human service, and the feeling of pure love”), also highly regarded his “Besinnung auf die Rolle der Mutter, auf die Familie und auf die in engstem Kreise sich entfaltenden natürlichen Beziehungen rein menschlicher, geistiger Art” (119; “reflection on the role of the mother, the family and the natural, purely human and spiritual kind of relationship that unfolds in an intimate atmosphere”). Thus, we can observe here a Christian view of the family that ties both educators together.

According to Kittler, women were excluded from public scenes and events because of the “sacred reasons” that tie women to family and home: “women, ‘as mothers of
helpless children, constitute, I should say, an end in itself in the state, without ever having to become, like men, a means for the state” (Kittler 58). That is, in the discourse network of Mother = Nature = Truth, the woman is the embodiment of the communal order per se. Hence, any behavior that has the potential to jeopardize this order may be met with punishment. It is for this reason that the patriarchal grandfather denounces the women of his day: “Sie haben nur Narrenwerk und Hoffart im Kopf, ziehen sich an wie Pfauen, ziehen auf wie sturme Störche […]” (23; “All they can think about is foolery and showing off; they dress up like peacocks, strut about like daft storks […]” 20).

Against this recognition of women in reality, the virtue of the young mother in the embedded story is enunciated. She is a woman endowed with piety and maternal love, ready to sacrifice her own life in order to protect her child. Her death blessed by God is depicted in stark contrast with the painful deaths suffered by others as a result of the spider’s poisonous bite. By applying the institutional logic by which the faithful are saved and the unfaithful punished, the ethical narrator guides us to read the text in line with a Christian morality that emphasizes the importance of maternal responsibility.

7. Christine’s Pact with the Devil

If the young mother is an ideal woman in Gotthelf’s view, Christine is portrayed as her antithesis. Not native to the village, Christine is described as having wild, black eyes, and “fürchtete sich nicht viel vor Gott und Menschen” (37; “had little fear of God or man” 33). The way in which Christine makes her appearance is indicative of her strong personality: “Da kam rasch, daß es fast pfiff, wie der Wind pfeift, wen er aus den Kammern
entronnen ist, ein Weib daher, einen großen Korb auf dem Kopf” (40; “Then a woman came along with a great basket on her head, moving so rapidly that there was almost a whistling, like the wind when it has been let loose out of closed spaces” 36). Christine transgresses the gender boundary by appearing to the circle of men, moving rapidly in a way that is reminiscent of the devil—“fast pfiff, wie der Wind pfeift.” She reproaches the men for their indecisiveness: “mit Schaffen und Weinen, mit Hocken und Heulen werde man keine Buchen auf Bärhegen bringen” (41; “They would bring no beech trees to Bärhegen, whether they toiled and wept or sat down and cried” 37). Unlike other wives whose concerns appear to be restricted to domestic matters, Christine does not hesitate to show her vast curiosity. “Sie ergrimmte in der Seele, daß sie einmal den Teufel gesehen und auch wüßte, was er für ein Aussehen hätte” (38; “She was enraged at heart because she had not been there, even if only that she could have seen the Devil himself and known what he looked like” 34). Unable to resist her desire for knowledge, Christine infringes the communal norms by coming into contact with the devil.

The narrator repeatedly calls for caution in the face of curiosity. An example is found in the case of the young godmother at the christening who must refrain from asking the baby’s name because “sobald eine Gotten ach des Kindes Namen frage, so werde dieses zeitlebens neugierig” (17; “as soon as a godmother asked about a child’s name, this child would become inquisitive for his whole life” 15). Another example is the villagers who attempt at look at the devil’s work and as a result encounter a poisonous wind that leaves their faces swollen. Fearless, energetic, and decisive, Christine in her Faust-like character would be celebrated as an ideal figure, worthy of admiration in the literary works of Sturm.
und Drang and Romanticism. In the patriarchal Christian frame of Die schwarze Spinne, however, her transgression is considered nothing more than a vicious undertaking that undermines the raison d’être of the community.

The tale with its motif of the devil’s seduction can be read in an inter-textual context. In particular, transgression in search of knowledge leads to punishment in the form of a trope as old as the story of Adam and Eve’s ejection from the Garden of Eden. Certainly, Christine conjures the image of Eve giving in to temptation. The devil, disguised as the green huntsman, is a figure akin to the Green Man of Germanic pagan worship. The color green symbolizes nature and so it is associated with the devil in the medieval Christian context. Furthermore, in the medieval English romance, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, the Green Knight—whose body is green and who even rides a horse of the same hue—proposes a beheading game to the hero to test his chivalry. In view of this inter-textual relationship between Die schwarze Spinne and Genesis, folklore and medieval tales, the text evidently takes part of its motif—the deal with the devil—from the traditionally inscribed tension between Christians and pagans.

What is significant about the seductive scene of the tale is that it involves the issue of sexuality. The author describes Christine’s response to the green man as follows:

Sie blieb stehen wie gebannt, mußte schauen die rote Feder am Barett und wie das rote Bärchen lusting auf- und niederging im schwarzen Gesichte. Gellend lachte der Grüne den Männern nach, aber gegen Christine machte er ein zärtlich Gesicht und faßte mit höflicher Gebärde ihre Hand. Christine wollte sie wegziehen, aber sie entrann dem Grünen nicht mehr, es war ihr, als zische Fleisch zwischen glühenden Zangen. Und schöne Worte bagann er zu reden, und zu den Worten zwitzerte luster sein rot Bärchten auf und ab. So ein schön Weibchen habe er lange nicht gesehen, sagte er, das Herz lache ihm im Leibe; zudem habe er sie gerne mutig, und gerade die seien ihm die liebsten, welche stehenbleiben dürften, wenn die Männer davon liefen. (42)
She stood as if transfixed by magic, compelled to stare at the red feather on his cap and to watch how the little red beard moved merrily up and down in the black face. The green huntsman gave a piercing laugh as the men disappeared, but he put on an amorous expression towards Christine and took her hand with a polite gesture. Christine wanted to withdraw it, but she could no longer escape the green huntsman; it seemed to her as if flesh were spluttering between red-hot tongs. And he began to speak fine words, and as he spoke his little red beard gleamed and moved lustfully up and down. He had not seen such a handsome little woman for a long time, he said, and it made his heart glad within his breast; what is more, he liked them bold, and in particular he liked those women best who could stay behind when the menfolk ran away (37–38).

Christine’s impression of the green man—“wie das rote Bärtchen lusting auf und nieder ging im schwarzen Gesichte” (“how the little red beard moved merrily up and down in the black face”)—implies that there is sexual tension between the two. Christine is unable to move as though spellbound by terror and/or fascination. As the green man reaches for her hand, she tries to pull it away, “aber sie entrann dem Grünen nicht mehr, es war ihr, als zische Fleisch zwischen glühenden Zangen” (“but she could no longer escape the green huntsman; it seemed to her as if flesh were spluttering between red-hot tongs”). Her body, touched by the devil, experiences a burning pain that reaches its climax when he kisses her on the cheek: “Somit spitzte er seinen Mund gegen Christines Gesicht, und Christine konnte nicht fliehen, war wiederum wie gebannt, steif und starr.” (45; “At this he pursed up his mouth towards Christine’s face, and Christine could not escape; once more she was as if transfixed by magic, stiff and rigid” 40–41). The devil’s mouth, described several times as “spitzig” (pointed) symbolizes the male genitalia. Touched by the “pointed mouth,” Christine experiences a sensation “als ob von spitzigem Eisen aus Feuer durch Mark und Bein fahre, durch Leib und Seele” (45; “as if some sharp-pointed steel were piercing
marrow and bone, body and soul” 41). There can, then, be little doubt that the relationship between Christine and the devil is rendered as a metaphor for sexual intercourse. Although she keeps her deal with the devil secret, the mark on her cheek grows over time and takes on the shape of a black spider. It is a living stigmata imprinted on her body:

Je näher der Tag der Geburt kam, desto schrecklicher ward der Brand auf ihrer Wange, desto mächtiger dehnte der schwarze Punkt sich aus, deutliche Beine streckte er von sich aus, kurze Haare trieb er empor, glänzende Punkte und Streifen erschienen auf seinem Rücken, und zum Kopfe ward der Höcker, und glänzend und giftig blitzte es aus demselben wie aus zwei Augen hervor. (61)

[The nearer the day of the birth came, the more terrible the burning on her cheek became, the more violently the black spot extended, stretching out legs visibly, driving up short hairs, while shining points and strips appeared on its back and the hump became a head out of which there blazed a poisonous brilliance as if from two eyes (55).]

The strong use of verbs such as “sich dehnte aus [ausdehnen]” (extended), “streckte aus [ausstrecken]” (stretched out), and “trieb empor [emportreiben]” (drove up), as well as of the adjective comparatives including “schrecklicher” (more terrible) and “mächtiger” (more violently) highlights the performative nature of the stigma. Thus, Christine’s body serves as a sort of performance stage, on which even the most private of events, sexual intercourse, is laid bare to the public.

The emergence of the black spider from Christine’s body is the antithesis of the Immaculate Conception, which is attested to by her metaphorical intercourse with the devil. She feels a sharp pain in her cheek “als drücke man ihr plötzlich ein feurig Eisen” (59; “as if someone were suddenly pressing a red-hot iron” 53) when the priest baptizes the new-born baby. Then the mark on her cheek “wuchs immer noch, und der schwarze Punkt ward größer und schwärzer, einzelne dunkle Streifen liefen von ihm aus, und nach dem
Munde hin schien sich auf dem runden Fleck ein Höcker zu pflanzen" (60; “became bigger and blacker, single dark streaks ran out from the spot, and down towards the mouth it seemed as if there was a lump planted on the round spot” 54). When the second baby is saved, the pain in her cheek becomes unbearable:

[...] draußen aber lag Christine, von entsetzlicher Pein zu Boden geworfen, und in ihrem Gesichte begannen Wehen zu kreifen, wie sie noch keine Wöchnerin erfahren auf Erden, und die Spinne im Gesichte schwoll immer höher auf und brannte immer glühender durch ihr Gebein.

Da war es Christine, als ob plötzlich das Gesicht ihr platze, als ob glühende Kohlen geboren würden in demselben, lebendig würden, ihr gramselten über das Gesicht weg, über alle Glieder weg, als ob alles an ihm lebendig würde und glühend gramsle über den ganzen Leib weg. Das sah sie in des Blitzen fahlem Scheine langbeinig, giftig, unzählbar schwarze Spinnchen laufen über ihre Glieder, hinaus in die Nacht, und den Entschwundenen liefen langbeinig, giftig, unzählbar andere nach. (63–64)

[[…] but Christine lay outside, thrown onto the ground by dreadful pains, and her face was seized by labour pains such as no woman in childbirth has ever experienced on this earth, and the spider in her face swelled higher and higher and burned ever more searingly through her limbs.

Then Christine felt as if her face were bursting open, as if burning coals were being born, coming to life and crawling away over her face, over all her limbs, as if her whole face were coming to life and crawling away red-hot over all her body. In the pale light from the lightning she now saw black little spiders, long-legged, poisonous and innumerable, running over her limbs out into the night, and after those that had disappeared there ran others, long-legged, poisonous and innumerable (57).]

This awful pain, “wie sie noch keine Wöchnerin erfahren auf Erden” (“as no woman in childbirth has ever experienced on this earth”), causes Christine to throw herself down.

Then “als ob plötzlich das Gesicht ihr platze, als ob glühende Kohlen geboren würden” (“as if her face were bursting open, as if burning coals were being born”), myriad spiders crawl out of her cheek. This is a multiple birth, with a plague of spiders erupting from her body vis-à-vis the singular birth of one healthy human body. Thus Gotthelf depicts the childbirth
of a peasant wife and Christine’s delivery of the spiders in parallel to enunciate the opposition between the divine and the diabolical world. If childbirth is a realization of the will of God, Christine’s birth is also the act of creation in the “verkehrte Welt” (reversed world) (Hahl 198) in which the devil reigns. It is the reversed world where chaos bursts forth into the daily order and takes control of it.

8. Ritual Punishment for Transgression

Christine’s deal with the devil constitutes a fatal transgression, as it violates a community taboo. Every community has a system of orders that it defines as taboo. According to anthropologist Mary Douglas, this community system is often represented through the body. She offers a compelling account of the role of taboo in a community while focusing on the concept of “dirt” by explicating its symbolic function:

As we know it, dirt is essentially disorder. There is no such thing as absolute dirt: it exists in the eye of the beholder. If we shun dirt, it is not because of craven fear, still less dread of holy terror. Nor do our ideas about disease account for the range of our behaviour in cleaning or avoiding dirt. Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment. (11)

In Douglas’s account, dirt does not exist a priori. It was originally a chaotic part of the world that was eliminated from the system. In light of her theory, we can understand Christine’s transgression as inhering in a contact with dirt. This is also attested to by the fact that the people and livestock that came into direct contact with the spider are burned to death. “Dirt”—which we can read more broadly here as “pollution”—is a result of physical contact. It is, in other words, the body that becomes the site for exhibiting the taboo.
Douglas considers the body as a communal boundary signified by dirt, which is to say that the body is a symbolic medium by means of which a social set of meanings becomes visible to the public.

Grounded on Douglas’s theory of body, Judith Butler developed her concept of “gendered body as performance.” She argues:

Her [Douglas’s] analysis, however, provides a possible point of departure for understanding the relationship by which social taboos institute and maintain the boundaries of the body as such. Her analysis suggests that what constitutes the limit of the body is never merely material, but that the surface, the skin, is systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions; indeed, the boundaries of the body become, within her analysis, the limits of the social per se. (2492–93)

According to Butler’s reading of Douglas, the skin as the limit of the body also signifies “the limits of the social per se.” That is, it is the body in/through which social heterogeneity becomes manifest as “the result of a diffuse and active structuring of the social field” (2492). “If the body is synecdochal for the social system per se or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment” (2493). On the basis of Butler’s theory of the body, Christine’s confinement as a result of her transgression can be seen as a social punishment, inflicted through her gendered body. Her guilt lies in her transgression of the role ascribed to her gender by the Christian-patriarchal ideology of the community, according to which women are associated with the divine creation through the act of childbirth. Moreover, she is condemned by the community en masse. This is in contrast with the typical adultery novels of the nineteenth century—such as Madame Bovary—in which the heroine’s guilt is treated as a secret revealed only to the reader in a private fashion.
The community’s condemnation of Christine is enacted via a public ritual punishment. Regarding the relationship between ritual and body, Douglas explains that the ritual “enact[s] the form of social relations and in giving these relations visible expression […] enable[s] people to know their own society.” And, further “rituals work upon the body politic through the symbolic medium of the physical body” (129). In her view, ritual is a public performance whereby symbolic meanings are attached to the body. In a similar vein, Hahl draws attention to the symbolism of ritual in Die schwarze Spinne by referring to the reign of terror brought by the spider as “rhetorisches Schaugericht und Bestätigungshandlung” (198; “a rhetorical tribunal show and an act of affirmation”):

Keineswegs aufgehoben, sondern bestätigt wird das Tabubewuβtsein dieser Sagenwelt durch die vielen Tabuverletzungen: Da wird mißhandelt, geflucht, mit dem Teufel paktiert, das Christfest entweiht, […] Anderseits gibt es freundliche und schützende Tabus: die Macht der heiligen Zeichen, Handlungen und Geräte, die Reinlichkeit des Hauses, die Ruhe des Feiertags, die Bewegungsschränke für die Wöchnerin.—Im ganzen überwiegt die Suggestion der Gefährlichkeit. Wo das Leben derart von Ritual und Tabu umgestellt wird wie in der Schwarzen Spinne, muß eine wirkliche große Furcht zugrundeliegen—oder das Bedürfnis, Furcht als Nährboden der Religion zu kultivieren. (221)

[The consciousness of taboo is by no means sublated but rather affirmed through numerous taboo violations in this mythology: one maltreats, blasphemous, deals with the devil, desecrates Christmas, […] On the other hand, there are also benign and protective taboos: the power of the sacred signs, actions and equipment, the purity of the house, the peace of the holidays, limited mobility for the women in childbirth—they as a whole outweigh the suggestion of danger. Where the life is rearranged by ritual and taboo as in The Black Spider, there must be a truly great fear lying at the bottom—or a necessity to cultivate fear as a hotbed of religion.]

Any act pertaining to a taboo, whether violating it or explicitly acting in accordance with it, is a symbolic ritual performance. To be conscious of what is taboo is to be in the grip of fear, whether entirely suppressed or rising to a level of consciousness. And, it is fear that
dominates the textual world and causes tension in narrative form. This is an anxiety about the possibility that the sacredness of the community, “die Reinlichkeit des Hauses, die Ruhe des Reiertags,” (“the cleanness of the house, the peace of the holidays”) could be defiled by pollution. This tension or anxiety is most evident in the opening scene in which the house is portrayed:

Um das Haus lag ein sonntäglicher Glanz, den man mit einigen Besenstrichen, angebracht Samstag abends zwischen Tag und Nacht, nicht zu erzeugen vermag, der ein Zeugnis ist des kostlichen Erbgutes angestammter Reinlichkeit, die alle Tage gepflegt werden muß, der Familienehre gleich, welcher eine einzige unbewachte Stunde Flecken bringen kann, die Blutflecken gleich unauslöschlich bleiben von Geschlecht zu Geschlecht, jeder Tünche spottend. (3)

[About the house there lay a Sunday brightness which was not of the type that can be produced on a Saturday evening in the half-light with a few sweeps of the broom, but which rather testified to a valuable heritage of traditional cleanliness which has to be cherished daily, like a family’s reputation, tarnished as this may become in one single hour by marks that remain like bloodstains, indelible from generation to generation, making a mockery of all attempts to whitewash them (3).]

The house, the symbolic center of the micro-cosmos, serves as a sacred temple. Like a human body, it is a site for ritual performance through which taboo is disclosed. The house is perfect and immaculate, and because this is the case, it reveals the slightest blot. Evincing a perfection demonstrative of neuroticism, the house exhibits the tension between resisting taboos and succumbing to desires.

The violation of a taboo evokes fear, which is essential in creating the ethos of the religious community. A public ritual, in this way, functions as a social apparatus by means of which the members of the community (re)affirm the norms of their community and in this process consolidate their group identity. The subsequent spider attack breaks the taboo,
which provides an occasion for affirming the values of Christian morality. The readers feel a sense of horror as the assault scenes unfold because the physical body, which demarcates the boundary of the sacred community, is targeted: “So war die Spinne bald nirgends, bald hier, bald dort, bald im Tale unten, bald auf den Bergen oben […]” (83; “Thus it was that the spider was now here, now there, now nowhere, now down in the valley, now up on the hills […] 75). Nobody, not even the elderly on their deathbeds nor the infants in their cradles, is spared from this attack. Possessing the attributes of God—“sie war nirgends und allenthalben” (83; “it was nowhere and everywhere” 75)—the black spider appears everywhere. The people have no way to protect themselves. Thus, the vulnerability of the body is laid mercilessly bare. No place is protected from the demonic force. The “body,” the most sacred space for each person, a representation of the temple of God, is degraded in such a way as to be swollen and charred beyond recognition.

If skin signifies the boundary between the individual and society as Douglas asserts, the violation of the body means the crisis of the community per se. What is at issue is the collective guilt resulting from the transgression of an individual. This causal relation between the individual and the collective can be apprehended in the biblical context, in a church. The church functions as a representation of the body of Christ, as one person’s wrongdoing manifested as a malady of the entire body. “For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ” (1 Cor. 12.12). Based on this assertion by St. Paul, Catholic theology developed the concept of the “Mystical body of Christ”—the idea of the body (Christians) and its head (Christ) as unified by means of the Sacrament, i.e., the ritual of the Eucharist.
The problem of communal taboo, furthermore, can be explained beyond the specifically Christian context. I want to introduce Freud’s theory here in which taboo is considered a psychological phenomenon ingrained in the collective life of people. Freud offers an illuminating explanation of the correlation between the violation of a taboo and the evocation of collective guilt, locating the origin of taboo “in a primaeval prohibition imposed at one time or other by some external authority” (“Totem and Taboo” 41). Freud’s idea, thus, moves us from a (specifically) Christian ritual to (a more generally) human one.

Further, the notion of the body as a symbol of community suggests the contagious nature of taboo. Freud acknowledges that the force of attraction intrinsic to taboo can be transmitted by contact. It is for this reason that any individual transgression must be severely punished in order to prevent the entire group from transgressing likewise. The analogy between the black spider and contagious dirt is corroborated by the footnote in the Reclam edition, according to which the tale of Die schwarze Spinne is the metaphor for the Black Death of 1343.

In relation to this issue, Rosemary Jackson’s discussion of contagion helps illuminate exactly what is at stake in the spider attack scene of Die schwarze Spinne. Jackson stresses the presence of otherness as a core constituent of fantastic literature. And, in support of this argument, she introduces two modes of fantasy grounded on Tzvetan Todorov’s definition. In the first mode, the Frankenstein type, the other originates from the subject; i.e., originally part of the self, the other is, produced by the splitting from the self. On the other hand, in the second mode, the Dracula type, the origin of the other is external to the subject; i.e., the other enters the subject and thereby transforming it. The influence of the other in
the Dracula type is “not confined to the individual subject: it involves a whole network of other beings and frequently has to draw upon a mechanical reproduction of religious beliefs or magical devices to contain the threat” (59). As an example of the other in the Dracula mode, the black spider demonstrates its power by piling up victims. The other exerts influence by establishing the “verkehrte Welt” of the divine. Bringing the story in line with the Dracula mode, the author suggests that evil finds its way into the self through human weakness.

9. Social Function of Ritual Transgression

Despite (or perhaps due to) the risk of undermining the stability of the existing order, ritual transgression functions as an integral part of community life. Ritual, in general, is not about the destruction of a community but about its rebirth and regeneration. It is through the experience of a ritual performance that a community restores its energy. As Douglas avers, dirt serves to create a new form of social relations by violating the limits of the system:

Ritual recognizes the potency of disorder. In the disorder of the mind, in dreams, faints and frenzies, ritual expects to find powers and truths which cannot be reached by conscious effort. (95)

This is to say that ritual regenerates the community by opening an extraordinary time-space, through the experience of which the participants become aware of their formerly unconscious desires, dreams, and fears.

Douglas’s view of ritual’s social function is shared by Victor Turner, who describes a process in which society restores its order through addressing a conflict—a process he
refers to as “social drama.” According to Turner, social drama consists of four phases: breech, crisis, redress, and reintegration. It is in crisis that liminal time-space opens up. The liminal, he argues, is a “state of limbo,” a transitional state—“betwixt and between” (101) in which “a society’s deepest values emerge in the form of sacred dramas and objects” (102). This is the society’s subjunctive condition, which he defines as “that mood of a verb used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, possibility, etc.” (101). It should be noted here that the ritual punishment of the spider attack is performed on the surface of the body, i.e., on skin, the liminal space separating the interior of the body from the exterior. Thus, skin blurs the boundary between the individual and the group as well as between the orderly and the chaotic worlds by disclosing the vulnerability of the body.

10. Reading as a Ritual Experience

Now, how does the content of the tale as examined above affect our experience of reading? In what follows, I will consider the ritual element of Die schwarze Spinne from the viewpoint of reading. First, the tale as an atemporal myth proposes a circular view of history, according to which the world returns to its primordial condition through the process of ritual renewal. This process is in direct opposition to the linear view of history wherein the world is understood as standing for a progression from the past toward the future. The narrator guides the participants, that is, the listeners within the story as well as the readers, to accept the moral norms of the textual community through a symbolic experience of terror. Further, as a literary work located in a specific time and space, the tale could be read as a criticism of the socio-political situation of Switzerland at that time, in which traditional
religious values were being threatened by advancing secularization. For contemporary readers in the time of Regeneration (1830–1848), the fable of the black spider may have been read as an allusion to the series of anti-Christian policies issued by the radical reformist government. Whatever the situation in which the readers find themselves, they come to see the given social situations in a new light by subjecting themselves to the norms and principles of the fictional community grounded in a patriarchal Christian ideology.

Nevertheless, it should be understood that a text about ritual does not necessarily evoke ritualistic reading. In order to generate a ritual effect, a text must deploy a range of literary devices. In particular, a carefully designed narrative works to convey to readers a sense of belonging to the community thereby involving them in the world of storytelling. Thus, the readers imagine themselves to be at the scene of the storytelling listening to the physical voice of the narrator, although they are, in reality, following the letters across the page alone, separated temporally and geographically from the fictional events. A paradoxical situation, in this way, is created for the readers: the spatio-temporal boundaries are transcended through the private act of reading.

Now, let us take a closer look at the text in order to explore how Gotthelf’s narrative technique enables the readers to transcend reality. The scene described next, for instance, depicts the peasants who are suffering under the exploitation of the knight:

Der Ritter fragte nach keinem von der Jahreszeit gebotenen Werk, nicht nach dem Heuet, nicht nach der Ernte, nicht nach dem Säet. Soundso viel Züge mußten fahren, soundso viel Hände mußten arbeiten, zu der und der Zeit sollte der letzte Ziegel gedeckt, der letzte Nagel geschlagen sein. Dazu schenkte er keine Zehntgarbe, kein Mäß Bodenzins, kein Fasnachthuhn, ja nicht einmal ein

10 The Regeneration refers to the period of a liberal renewal movement in Switzerland following the reactionary regime of the Restoration (1815–1830).
Fasnachtei; Barmherzigkeit kannte er keine, die Bedürfnisse armer Leute
kannte er nicht. (29–30)

[The knight was indifferent to what work might be demanded by the season,
whether it was haymaking time, harvest time or seed time. So many teams or
carts had to move, so many men had to labour, and at this or that particular
time the last tile had to be in place and the last nail knocked in. What is more,
he insisted on every tenth sheaf of corn that was due to him and on every
measure of his ground rent; he never let them have a chicken for Shrove
Tuesday nor even an egg; he had no pity, and knew nothing of the needs of the
poor (26–27).

What is remarkable here is the use of reiteration. The repetition of the phrase (“letzte
Ziegel,” “letzte Nagel”) and the sentence structure (negative form + “nach,” and “soundso
… mußten”) along with the rapid-fire juxtaposition of “kein” + nouns add a poetic rhythm
to the narrative. At the same time, the narrative also stresses in a hyperbolic fashion the
cruel way in which the knight treats the peasants. Gotthelf focuses on the sounds of the
words, such that the narrative attains an oral quality that draws the reader into the universe
of storytelling.

11. The Frame Narrative and Ritual Reflexibility

Another important device connected with the text’s ritual effect is the structure of the
frame narrative. The merit of the frame narrative is that it presents events in the form of a
coherent whole with a beginning, a middle, and an end. That is, individual experiences are
conveyed as a meaningful story worthy of being shared. Regarding the idea of sharing
stories, Maurice Halbwachs’s theory of collective memory is suggestive. For Halbwachs,
the framework of collective memory “confines and binds our most intimate remembrances
to each other” and, therefore, “we cannot consider them except from the outside—that is,
by putting ourselves in the position of others […]” (53). As these phrases indicate, our private experiences must be reflected through the frame of a social relationship in order to be remembered. An individual experience, in this way, turns into a communal one and is passed down in the form of collective memory.

By conveying the tale through the frame narrative, the author facilitates the readers’ reflections. As for Die schwarze Spinne, it is the motif of christening that connects the embedded tale with the embedding tale so that the readers are prompted to reflect on their own morality. The frame narrative has a function corresponding to what Turner refers to as a metapattern:

Metapatterns are akin to what some call “frames,” the metaphorical borders within which the facts of experience can be viewed, reflected upon, and evaluated, though some see frames on experience’s level as sorting out different types. A cyclical ritual is a frame within which members of a given group strive to see their own reality in new ways and to generate a language, verbal or nonverbal, which enables them to talk about what they normally talk. (103)

What is significant about ritual is that the participant experiences the event both physically and symbolically, that is, in a self-referential way. It is for this reason that the outrageous tale told by the grandfather leaves a strong impression on his fictional listeners: “Und jetzt brannte sie ihr [die Gotte] Rücken, sie drehte sich sie schaute hinter sich, fuhr mit der Hand auf und ab und kam nicht aus der Angst, die schwarze Spinne sitzt ihr im Nacken” (92; “And now her [the godmother’s] back was burning, she turned round, she looked behind her, felt over herself with her hand and could not escape from the fear that the black spider was sitting on her neck” 83). The godmother feels the presence of the spider with such reality that she is terrified. The grandfather’s storytelling is a kind of revelation ritual via
which the taboo is made known and so the continuity between past and present is felt. Yet, if the true meaning of an event is comprehensible only through the symbolic experience of it, a broader perspective is available to the readers who are further removed from the event at hand. That is to say, the readers are able to grasp the meaning of the whole story of *Die schwarz Spinne* by juxtaposing the reality of the framing story—where religion has turned into a mere shell—with that of the story thus framed.

**Conclusion**

This chapter evaluated Gotthelf’s *Die schwarze Spinne* from the standpoint of communal ritual, using Benjamin’s “The Storyteller” as a springboard. As we observed, *Die schwarze Spinne* creates a textual community as a way of resisting the discourse of modernity, and so evokes readers’ moral awareness against the backdrop of social secularization. The textual community of *Die schwarze Spinne* is complete and autonomous, operating based on its own norms and principles. I illuminated how the transgression of the communal norm, i.e., taboo, provides an occasion for the ritual affirmation of shared significance, drawing on Douglas’s theory of taboo. The readers, for their part, also experience the tale in a self-referential way by subjecting themselves to the textual community. They are, thus, brought into the extraordinary ritual space beyond the horizon of their daily consciousness.

Gotthelf created the ritual event in the virtual space of the text to refute the totalizing effect of secular rationalism. His sense of crisis over the growing influence of modernity was also shared by Japanese authors of the early twentieth century. Both Japanese authors
in the following chapters, Izumi Kyōka and Yanagita Kunio, attempted to create a textual community, which they conceived as an idealized past before Japan’s modernization. By bringing together texts from different cultural traditions, we can compare the respective modern literary discourses in cross-cultural terms. Further, the juxtaposition of German with Japanese writing throws into relief the ideological underpinnings of both literary currents. The impetus for the German texts—*Die schwarze Spinne* and *Die Judenbuche* in Chapter 4—is the idea of religious morality in the form of which the relationship between the individual and the community is rigorously questioned. Unlike this, the impetus for the Japanese texts, as we will see, is a yearning for an imagined past as the origin of the nation. Including both German and Japanese texts in this research project, therefore, will allow us to see the notion of ritual reading in a broader perspective that transcends any schematic opposition between modernity and tradition.
CHAPTER TWO

Textualized Orality: Izumi Kyōka’s Kusa-meikyū

1. Nation Represented through Vision

From TV to newspapers, from advertising to all sorts of mercantile epiphanies, our society is characterized by a cancerous growth of vision, measuring everything by its ability to show or be shown and transmuting communication into a visual journey. It is a sort of epic of the eye and of the impulse to read.

(Michel de Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life 21)

The burgeoning presence of the written character in people’s daily lives constituted an important phenomenon characterizing the period of Japanese modernization. The cultural enlightenment (文明開化 bunmei kaika) of Japan was, as the literary critic Nagamine Shigetoshi puts it, “何よりも庶民生活への文字文化の急激な浸透” (36; “nothing but a rapid permeation of literate culture into the life of commoners”). Kōno Kensuke endorses this view, commenting based on his detailed study of the media-culture in modern Japan as follows:

[…]明治政府が民衆の前に、圧倒的な印刷文字として現れたことは覚えておくべきだろう。地方、身分、性差によって分離されていた人々に、具体的なかたちで「国家」の存在を示し、彼らに「臣民」としての意識を刷り込むこと、それは税、教育、徴兵に関する通達、法制度の整備、貨幣の切り替えといった文字の形で伝えられた。(22)

[...] it should be noted that the Meiji government appeared before people overwhelmingly as printed letters. The government demonstrated the presence of the “nation” in a concrete form to the people, who had been separated from each other by region, social standing, and gender; it inculcated in people the
consciousness of being a “subject” of the nation, which was accomplished by means of letters, including notifications pertaining to tax, education, and drafting as well as the consolidation of the legal system and the conversion of currency.]

Official notifications were handed down to the public from the government in its indisputable authority, a situation made possible by the new system of education and the consequent growth of a reading populace. Along with the development of the media, the new socio-cultural situation brought about a fundamental change in the relationship between the writer of a text and the readers, thus transforming literature itself in ontological terms.

It was indeed the modernizing project of the nation-state that facilitated the spread of letters throughout the entire populace. In fact, the Meiji government focused on three areas: education, the armed forces, and industry. First, a standard Japanese language was established, and elementary education was made mandatory throughout the country in order to fulfill the purpose of creating a powerful centralized state. The penetration of compulsive education resulted in widespread literacy, which, along with the mass circulation of print and Westernized life styles, wrought significant changes in people’s reading style. Consequently, books and newspapers became an important site for communication.\textsuperscript{11}

Whereas primordial communities were defined in accordance with the reach of sound/voice, the new community generated through reading gained a spatio-temporal expanse beyond the limit of physical access. This situation went hand in hand with the emergence of a new literary genre: the modern novel.

\textsuperscript{11} See Kōno Kensuke, \textit{Shomotsu no kindai}; Maeda Ai, \textit{Kindai-dokusha no seiritsu}; Nagamine Shigetoshi, \textit{Zasshi to dokusha no kindai}.
In regard to the crucial role of the novel in the formation of the modern nation, Benedict Anderson provides a compelling explanation. According to Anderson, the fictional space constructed upon the fixity of “homogeneous, empty time” measured by clock and calendar requires a linear mode of reading, which paved the way for the “imagined community”: “The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation, which also is conceived as a solid community moving steadily down (or up) history” (26). In this way, the novel served to create a national consciousness by inculcating in modern readers the idea of the nation as an organic whole.

Researchers have pointed to the impact of the spread of books on modern human lives. For instance, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan argues that reading enabled people to systematize abstract time and space. That is to say, by isolating sight from the other physical senses, books facilitated the development of a sense of identity by emancipating people from the boundaries of pre-modern shamanic communities. On the other hand, books also served as a matrix for lonely individuals who felt isolated from the world. Under the influence of Western Realism or Naturalism, the new current of Japanese literature came into being based on the modern view of the world and of mankind. It is for this reason

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12 Recently, there have been a number of critiques of “Imagined Communities” from different theoretical perspectives such as postcolonialism and gender studies. One of the most voiced criticisms is from Partha Chatterjee, who states that Anderson’s concept of nationalism is limited by European colonialism, “Whose Imagined Community?” Also, Linda McDowell criticizes his theory for being based on the abstract male vision of unity, in *Gender, Identity and Place*. 
that studies of modern Japanese literature have centered on the conflict between the self and the world.\textsuperscript{13}

In Japan, it was around the turn of the century that the development of the social network system and widespread literacy facilitated the circulation of books to a broad range of people in society. According to Nagamine and Maeda Ai, the habit of reading aloud was still prevalent at the beginning of the Meiji era, although reading gradually shifted to become a silent, private, and individual endeavor in the wake of the propagation of general education and the transformation of the family structure:

明治維新にひきつづく約四半世紀は、日本人の読書生活が大きな変革を迫られた時期であった。その変革の過程をつらぬく契機は、ほぼつぎの三つに要約されるのではないかと考える。1. 均一的な読書から多元的な読書へ（あるいは非個性的な読書から個性的な読書へ）。2. 共同体的な読書から個人的な読書へ。3. 音読による享受から黙読による享受へ。この三つの契機は分かちがたくからみ合っているけれども、その根底には飛躍的に増大する情報量（木版印刷から活版印刷へ！）と、共同体のきずなから解き放たれて自我にめざめて行く近代人とのダイナミックな相互作用がある。

[The quarter century following the Meiji Restoration was the period in which the reading life of the Japanese went through a major transformation. The moments running through this process of transformation can be summarized roughly: 1. from uniform to pluralistic reading (or, from non-individual to individual reading); 2. from communal to personal reading; 3. from reception by means of oral reading to reception by means of silent reading. Underlying these three moments, which were intertwined indistinguishably, was a dynamic interaction between the tremendous growth in the amount of information available (from woodblock printing to letterpress!) and the modern people who, being liberated from communal ties, were developing their sense of self.]

\textsuperscript{13} The Japanese critic Karatani Kōjin, for instance, associates the Japanese Naturalist authors’ obsessive exaltation of nature, “the discovery of landscape,” with the discovery of the interior self. He, thus, attributes the new literary tendency to the awareness of separation between the interior and the exterior.
This process of transformation, Maeda notes, signifies the replacement of a tradition-oriented people with individuals who established their identities through the medium of letters.

The new socio-cultural situation was inseparable from the need to reform the received literary tradition. The 言文一致 genbun itchi (unification of spoken and written languages) movement inaugurated by Tsubouchi Shōyō (1859–1935) denied the value of pre-modern Japanese didactic novels that upheld the moral credo of “勧善懲悪” kanzen chōuaku (reward good, punish evil) while taking models from Western Realist and Naturalist novels:

さまざま小説の作者たる者は専らその意を心理に注ぎて、我が仮作たる人物なりと、一度篇中にいでたる以上は、之を活世界の人と見做して、その感情を写し得ずに、敢ておのれの意匠をもて善悪邪正の情感を作り設けることをばなさず、只傍観してありのままに模写する心得にてあらるべきなり。(54)

[The novelist, then, should concentrate on psychological realism. Once his characters make their appearance in the story, he should think of them as living people. In speaking of their feelings, he should stand by as an onlooker and describe things as they really are, rather than superimposing his own ideas of emotion, good or bad, upon them.]14

The objective of the movement lies in rendering “realistic” representations of human emotions and customs. Consequent to this ontological transformation of literature, the act of reading intensified its private character and experiences attained through reading became more individualized in nature.

The modern reading style divested of any public character is now separated from its original context. However, in a public oral reading, such as was common in Japan before its

14 Translation by Nanette Twine.
rapid modernization in the late 1800s, people used to gather together to listen to stories told by a literate narrator. The custom of oral reading persisted into the Meiji era, and Nagamine presents examples of this including references to people reading newspapers aloud to others and to the practice of giving *etoki* for children (37–40). In contrast, the new readers experience the story in a solitary way through the medium of letters. They are temporally and spatially dislocated from the original context: the voice of the storyteller. If a community in its original sense is to be defined through “a body of people or things viewed collectively” (*Oxford English Dictionary*), how is it possible to attain a communal identity through the act of reading, given that the relationship between the author/narrator and the readers and among the readers themselves remains invisible? In other words, how does the author create a textual community for the readers by means of literary devices?

2. *Kusa-meikyū* as Ritual Text

In what follows, I will investigate Izumi Kyōka’s (1873–1939) *Kusa-meikyū* [*The Grass Labyrinth*] (1908) in an effort to restore the pre-modern community in the space of the literary text. Unlike typical modern Japanese novels, *Kusa-meikyū* denies the notion of the sense of self, of abstract time, and of space, which constitute the core of the modern novel. As will be examined in detail, the text encourages readers to become immersed in

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15 *Etoki* literally means interpretation of/through illustrations. It originally had the didactic purpose of explaining Buddhist teachings through the use of illustrations. In the Edo period (1603–1867), the practice was used in a secular context such that popular books called *kusazōshi* [picture books with narratives and dialogues] were published for children and adults. Kyōka refers to his own childhood memory of *etoki* with his mother. For a discussion of the influence of *kusazōshiletoki* on Kyōka, see Charles Inouye’s *The Similitude of Blossoms*, 13–18.
the inter-subjective community of the fictional world. This kind of experience cannot be explained through the theory proposed by Iser. In his view, the sole purpose of reading is to obtain “meaning,” which is to say that he understands meaning as something produced by “the reading subject” occasioned by encountering an “unfamiliar reality.” Therefore, the idea of the “unfamiliar” is inseparable from the plotting of a novel in which new events unfold along the time axis: “The time axis articulates the meaning as a synthesis of its various phases and shows that meaning arises out of a demand for fulfillment which the text itself produces” (149). Thus, Iser considers temporality as an essential constituent of meaning; *Kusa-meikyū*, however, does not recognize such notions of self and novelistic time. Whereas typical modern novels, according to Anderson, provide depictions of “imagined communities” in the abstract space constructed in homogeneous linear time, Kyōka attempted to create an “imaginative community” based on circular time. The story is grounded on multiple frame narratives in which, without a clear plot, similar images appear recurrently. The text allows the readers to experience the dissolution of the gap between past and present, as well as that between self and others. It is just such an experience of unity in the textual space that I refer to as “ritual reading.” Religious historian Mircea Eliade defines ritual as a means of recovering the sacred time of myth (138–39). Indeed, the meaning of ritual reading lies in restoring a sense of wholeness, considered lost in the process of modernization. Thus, understanding *Kusa-meikyū* in terms of ritual will provide a vantage point from which to reevaluate the discourse of the modern novel that has predominantly been formed via the logo-centric perspective.
3. Naturalism and Modernization of Japan

*Kusa-meikyū* was published in 1908 by Shunyō-dō, one of the major publishing houses at the time. Like many of Kyōka’s works, the book was beautifully bound, and it was accompanied by a frontispiece by the famous painter, Okada Saburōsuke. The book was by no means intended as a mass consumer product but in its entirety it was a piece of art embodying Kyōka’s aesthetic ideals. Shunyō-dō handled most of the literary works by the writers of Kenyū-sha, a literary coterie started by Ozaki Kōyō (1867–1903), a popular novelist noted for his elegant pseudoclassical writing style. As an ardent adherent and obedient disciple of Ozaki, Kyōka became a popular writer in the circle. To take a quick glance at the literary situation, the period around 1900 marks the heyday of European-influenced Naturalist literature in Japan. Shimazaki Tōson’s (1872–1943) *Hakai* [The Broken Commandment], which explores the plight of *burakumin* (social outcastes) through the exigency of a father–son relationship, came out in 1906, followed by Tayama Katai’s (1872–1930) *Futon* [The Quilt] (1907), a semiautobiographical novel about a middle-aged man’s agony of sexual desire in regard to his female disciple, which caused a sensation in the contemporary literary world due to its unvarnished descriptions of the author’s private life. Other Naturalist novels, including Shimazaki’s *Haru* [The Spring] and Tokuda Shūsei’s (1872–1943) *Arajotai* [The New Household] were also published in the same year as *Kusa-meikyū*.

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16 *Haru* [The Spring] is the author’s autobiographical account of his troubled youthful days.
17 *Arajotai* [The New Household] is a description of a young couple’s daily life filled with disillusionment and resignation.
Historically, the years around 1908 mark a transitional period for the country that, having achieved victory in the Russo-Japanese War three years back, was in the midst of transforming into a modern nation-state capable of standing with the great Western powers. Under the slogans of *fukoku kyōhei* (enrich the country and strengthen the military) and *shokusan kōgyō* (encourage new industry), the military system was rapidly organized along the lines of a Prussian model, including the establishment of a draft system in place of the previous reliance on a hereditary warrior class, the *samurai*. And, overall, great effort was made to move the nation’s economy toward modern capitalism. It was also during this initial stage of nation building that newspapers and novels played a crucial role in forging a national consciousness.

The Japanese Naturalist novels had the primary purpose of disclosing the “truth,” conceived exclusively as the revelation of one’s private life. In the realm of literary criticism, vigorous discussions were taking place on the topic of Naturalism in major literary magazines. For instance, Hasegawa Tenkei (1876–1940), a journalist who wrote for the general magazine *Taiyō* and an ardent advocate of Naturalism wrote as follows in his article “*Genmetsu-jidai no geijyutsu*” [Art in the Age of Disillusion] in 1906:

> 幻想の勢力を有したる時代に生れたる芸術の遊芸的分子を排除して、真実其の物に基礎を定めたるもの、これ将来の芸術たらざるべからず。幻滅時代の世人が欲むる物は、真実を描きたる無飾芸術なり。絵画、彫刻をはじめ、小説、戯曲等皆な此の方向に進まざるべからず。

[The artwork of the future must rest on the very truth, thereby eliminating the entertaining element of artwork that was born in the time when illusion was flourishing. What people in the age of disillusion prefer is plain art that describes the truth. All art, including paintings, sculptures, novels, and drama must advance in this direction.]
Hasegawa is arguing that morals, ideals, and aesthetic values, which used to be the principal purpose of literature, have lost their validity in modern times in which scientific knowledge has laid bare their true nature as illusion. His view was more or less shared by other contemporary authors and literary critics.

It was against the backdrop of this cultural current that Kyōka wrote his fantastic tales, inheriting their forms and content from pre-modern Japanese literature. Because of his anachronistic writing style and motifs, however, Kyōka fell out of the literary mainstream, and it was only in 1970s that he began to receive renewed attention as a modern, and even an avant-garde, writer. One of the contemporary critics, Susan Napier, for example, highlights the fantastic aspect of his works, seeing it as an expression of resistance against the discourse of modernity. It is also in this line of thought that I acknowledge the modernity of Kusa-meikyū.

4. The Storyline of Kusa-meikyū

As the title of the work suggests, the narrative structure of Kusa-meikyū is intricate and labyrinthine. The basic storyline, although it is hardly possible to summarize the work’s multiple plot lines effectively, is as follows: an itinerant monk Kojirō is asked by a teahouse hostess to visit a local house and say a prayer for those who have died there. At the house, the monk becomes acquainted with a university student, Akira, who relates his search for the temari-uta (thread ball song) that his deceased mother used to sing for him. Akira tells the monk that having been led to the house by a thread ball, he found that strange things had occurred one after another. When Akira falls asleep, his childhood friend, Ayame, a girl
considered to have been spirited away, appears and tells the monk where Akira’s mother can be found. Ayame then performs the thread ball song with her supernatural companions and leaves the house before Akira awakes.

The central motif of the tale is the thread ball song, through which individual stories are tied together. *Temari-uta* is a traditional Japanese folk song that girls sing as they play with a colorful thread ball. According to the folklorist Yanagita Kunio, “此歌の如く章句の離合集散が常なく、意味が不可解になって、しかも永く記憶せられて居るものは他に無いのである” (“Kōshō” 410; “No other songs have been remembered for so long a time as their lyrics were fused and fragmented so frequently that they no longer make any sense”). It is a kind of ritualized language, one in which the grammatical sense of the words is lost, the syntax is opaque, and the point is mostly to provide a way for girls to create a shared rhythm of sound, a beat to which to play together. In that sense, the *temari-uta*, as a genre of language, provides a useful metaphor for understanding the story as a whole.

5. **Narrative Devices and the Magic of Hearsay**

The mythical narrative style of the tale draws on linguistic tropes and constructions designed to produce a ritual effect on readers, delivering them from daily consciousness and leading them into the fantastic world of the fiction. In addition, the structure of the frame story as a narrative device facilitates the ritual affirmation of communal identity. Attracted to the fantastic world of the fiction through the narrative voice of the storyteller, the readers imagine themselves to be listening to the tale. At first, it appears that this effect
can be explained by drawing on Ong’s theory of orality and literacy, which stresses the integrating function of sound/voice. Yet, the issue here is more complex, as it is the narrative voice textualized within the written work that generates the ritual effect. Through a variety of narrative devices, the readers of Kusa-meikyū can transcend spatial as well as temporal boundaries.

We do not know the extent to which Kyōka was conscious of his own artistic methodology. His work does not appear to be based on any particular theoretical frame work. In responding to an attack on his work made by Naturalists, however, Kyōka offers a remarkably unsophisticated defense of his art:

[Romanchikku” 684]

In Kyōka’s view, literature should “please and entertain readers and involve them in a sense of beauty or some kind of feeling.” He saw the purpose of artwork as inhering in an appreciation of both beauty and the extraordinary. It is this l’art pour l’art stance that distinguishes him significantly from his contemporary Naturalist authors. As a means of
achieving his primary goal, Kyōka was glad to use rhetorical devices castigated by the Naturalists.

In order to consider the rhetoric that characterizes the narrative of Kusa-meikyū, let us first take a look at the language of the opening paragraph. Preceded by the mysterious thread ball song at the outset, the framing story begins with the sentence: “三浦の大崩壊を、魔所だと云う” Miura no ōkuzure o ma-sho da to iu (2; “They say that the Great Cliff of Miura is a magic site”). This short, quite simple sentence provides a clue to understanding the fantastic quality of the entire tale. What draws our attention primarily is the word “魔所” ma-sho (magic site). Although translated as “magic,” “魔” ma in Japanese denotes a mysterious force in general that lies beyond our ken. Thus, it could mean “magic” or “sacred,” depending on one’s standpoint. Confronted by this word, the reader is required to adopt a fantastic mode of reading. The word ma-sho, thus, serves as a signpost that prompts the readers to accept what Kendall Walton refers to as the principle of generation of the fictional world. A question arises regarding the identity of the subject “they” who claim that the Great Cliff of Miura is a magic site. By resorting to the style of hearsay, the narrator refuses to take responsibility for the statement as his/her own. Who disclosed the knowledge to the narrator? Moreover, does the source of this knowledge matter? Through a consideration of these inquiries, we can gain insights into the linguistic differences between the English and Japanese languages. Although the English rendering provided here bears the grammatical subject “they,” there is no subject in the original Japanese sentence. Such omissions occur frequently in Japanese when the context is deemed to be apparent. It is noteworthy that the verb clause “と云う” to iu (“say that—”) marks the hearsay form, and
so the subject of the verb “say” is dropped. This is because the identity of the communicator is considered less important than the content of the statement. Although the sense of hearsay is maintained in the English translation, the grammatical subject “they” makes us conscious of an agent. In the original Japanese, by contrast, our attention focuses on the content of the subordinate clause, and so the presence or non-presence of the subject is not taken into consideration. In addition, I want to point out another significant feature about the hearsay style here. The grammatical construction of the sentence does not indicate a time. [To iu could be translated as “so they say,” “it has always been said,” “I have heard it said,” “apparently,” “it seems,” “local belief maintains that.” The sense is that these words “魔所だ” masho da (“—is a magic site”) have been uttered by countless people through countless ages; they are, thus, more an invocation attached to a place than an utterance attached to a speaker. Taking advantage of these linguistic features, the narrative of Kusa-meikyū enables the readers to immerse themselves in the shared experience of the fictional world, without being distracted by the notions of agent and time.

The style of hearsay is the crucial feature that runs through the entire narrative and is closely connected with the ritual effect of the text. Let us look at the paragraph that immediately follows the sentence we have just considered:

一夏激い暑さに、雲の峰も焼いた霰のように小さく焦げて、ぱちぱちと音がして、火の粉になって覆れそうな日盛に、これから湧いて出て人間になろうと思われる裸体の男女が、入交りに波に浮んでいると、赫とただ金銀銅鉄、真白に溶けた霄の、どこに亀裂が入ったか、破鐘のようなる声して、「泳ぐもの、帰れ。」と叫んだ。この呪詛のために、浮べる輩はぶくりと沈んで、四辺は白泡となったと聞く。(3)

[In the scorching heat of summer, at high noon when the ridges of clouds are likely to burn into small pieces like roasted snow pellets and, making crackling
noises, turn into fire sparks as if falling out of the sky, naked men and women floated together in the waves, seemingly getting ready to get out of the water to take on human shapes, when—where on earth a crack was made in the blue heavens in which gold, silver, copper and iron sparkingly melted into the white?—a thunderous voice roared, “Swimmers, get out of here!” Due to this curse, those floating, they say, sank into the water leaving only trails of white bubbles behind them.]

Following this description of the familiar summer landscape of a resort beach, an unknown voice breaks out and curses the sea bathers; the auditory effect of the voice makes for a sharp contrast with the vivid visual description of the landscape heightening its uncanny effect. The narrator states positively that the voice “roared,” as if he were present at the scene of the event. In the next sentence, however, he immediately abandons any responsibility for the preceding statement by resorting to the hearsay form “と聞く” to kiku (“they say—,” “I hear—”). The narrator here is merely a vessel, the most recent conduit for the communication of timeless information.

The narrative then intensifies its mythical quality by doubling its structural pattern in the fable-like anecdote beginning with the connector “また” mata (“also”):

[Also, a boy of about seventeen who, had suffered from pleurisy, was visiting the place to recuperate. The boy was terribly concerned about his physical well-being, and so he taught himself physiology. He compounded medicines minutely to the degree of 0., took his own temperature with a thermometer every morning and evening, and ate his meals out of a scale. One autumn
evening, he took a walk, tiptoeing barefoot at the water’s edge along the empty beach with his kimono tucked up high to reveal his thin pallid legs. While doing his daily physical exercises, apparently feeling unhappy, he clicked his tongue haughtily and grumbled at the sea: “Ah, I’m so bored.” At that moment, a strange voice shouted to him out from the top of the cliff high above: “Do your filial duty—” Due to this incident, the boy, they say, became severely ill.

At the beginning of this paragraph, the narrator seems omniscient, knowing every detail of the boy’s private life, yet he/she abandons this position by offering the concluding sentence in the form of hearsay. Additionally, I want to draw attention to the verb “喚いた” wameita (“shouted”): by saying “shouted to him out from the top of the cliff high above,” the narrative suddenly leaves the perspective of the boy to become a free-floating voice. This shift in perspective may leave a strange impression on the reader, as in order for the narrative to maintain a consistent perspective, the predicate of the sentence has to be kikoeta (sounded, was heard) instead of wameita. Such peculiar diction seems to be a deviation from the grammatical syntax of Japanese to the contemporary readers for whom “the fixed point of view” in McLuhan’s term has become an ingrained part of reading culture. The free-floating hearsay, thus, creates a temporal space in and through the text. The landscape in the text, seemingly a description of the scene right before one’s eyes, is in fact a product created by an unspecified number of voices over time. It is, in other words, a landscape constructed by (indeed, consisting of) words and phrases.

The uniqueness of the narrative is also manifest in the structural arrangement of the sentences. The original Japanese is characterized by distinct patterns in the juxtaposed paragraphs. Each paragraph consists of two sentences; the first sentence covers the whole descriptive phrases (from “In the scorching heat of summer” to “get out of here!” in the
first paragraph, and from “Also” to “Do your filial duty—” in the second), followed by a short concluding sentence beginning with *tame ni* (“due to”) and ending in the hearsay form *to iu* (“they say—”). Thus, we start each paragraph firmly rooted in the concrete details of the physical world. By the time we reach the end of each paragraph, however, the narrative has shifted us to an unattributed world of hearsay in which the “fabric” of the world is disconnected from any particular “weaving” voice: a communal product. It is through this narrative effect, the hypnotism of parallelism and metaphorical words shaping a physical world that the text encourages the readers to experience the text in terms of ritual.

6. The Narrative Labyrinth

I imagined a labyrinth of labyrinths, a maze of mazes, a twisting, turning, ever-widening labyrinth that contained both past and future and some implied the stars. (Jorge Luis Borges, “The Garden of Forking Paths” 122)

Another important narrative device is the complex temporality created by the technique of the frame story, which is also implied in the title of the work. That is, the word “labyrinth” evokes the image of a building with an intricate structure of rooms and corridors, a space filled with mysteries and in which one loses one’s sense of direction. In Greek mythology, it is the palace in the center of which a half-man, half-bull creature, the Minotaur takes his residence, and out of which Theseus finds his way out with the guidance of Ariadne’s thread. In Kyōka’s tale, conversely, Akira is led into the center of the labyrinthine world through the guidance of a thread ball. This happens as he reaches Akiya house after following the thread ball along the river. Surrounded by grass and water, the
house, the center of the labyrinth, is built on an extremely complex structure: “第一要害が全然解りません。真中へ立って彼方此方瞻しただけで、今入って来た出口さへ分らなくなりましたほどです” (73; “First of all, I have no clue about the fort of the house. Standing in the middle and looking around here and there, I’ve already lost the entrance I just came in”). The comparison of the two stories from East and West brings into sharp relief the difference in the orientation of each. Whereas the hero of Greek mythology seeks to return from chaos to the orderly world, the protagonists of Kusa-meikyū, Akira and Kojirō, see the goal of their journeys in the blurry world of fantasy.

Furthermore, in addition to the geographical implications, I want to draw attention to the word “labyrinth” (迷宮 meikyū) in the title as a metaphor. It is embodied in the intricate narrative structure with its complex temporal arrangement; labyrinth indicates the temporal concept of the tale in addition to the spatial. It is, indeed, this kind of temporal complexity that differentiates the idea of ritual reading from Iser’s notion of (cognitive) reading. The typical Western novels that Iser has in mind require logical interpretation on the part of the reader based on the linear arrangement of tempos from the past to the present (or variations of this). And, this idea has its origin in Aristotle’s concept of a plot consisting of a series of actions: a beginning, a middle, and an end.

The story of Kusa-meikyū, on the other hand, cannot be encapsulated in a single plot line, as the entire story unfolds with multiple frame narratives interwoven within it. If we seek to plot the story focusing on Kojirō’s experiences, we find that a strong motivation for his actions is absent. On the other hand, an attempt to summarize the story as Akira’s quest will result in the elimination of all the other characters and the side stories. Thus, the tale
rejects any kind of reductive reading because the interpolation of multiple stories into the main story opens another temporal axis. In this way, the story line continues to develop such that a single integrated plot/time cannot emerge. Rather, time is represented here as circular, moving toward the original time or no-time while including the past, the present, and the future. And, this is a notion of time reminiscent of what Borges describes through Ts’ui Pen’s grand project: a labyrinth of a book, i.e., “an infinite series of times, a growing, dizzying web of divergent convergent, and parallel times” (127). Yet, Kyōka’s literary purpose lies not in the spatialization of time within/through the text per se, but in producing what I would call “non-present time” by means of the technique of storytelling. In this conception of time, all the temporal distinctions dissipate and the past emerges in the narrative present.

7. Creation of Extraordinary Time and Space

Ritual performance gives rise to sacred time and space in daily life. Of these two dimensions, time and space, I will first examine the ways in which sacred space is created in the text. In *Kusa-meikyū*, it is travel that provides an occasion for experiencing sacred space. Since ancient times, the Japanese monks and poets have taken wandering trips for the purpose of getting away from daily life. The Japanese cultural tradition emphasizes the spiritual aspect of traveling (*tabi*).¹⁸ As Paul Varley describes it, “To the medieval Japanese,

¹⁸I have translated “travel” as *tabi* to distinguish it from *ryokō*. Whereas *tabi* has the connotation of an extraordinary experience apart from everyday life, *ryokō* usually signifies a trip to a
traveling symbolized the Buddhist sense of impermanence (mujiyō) that was felt so deeply during this age; and travelers, conceived as men who leave society behind to wander to distant, lonely places, were thought to experience more fully the true nature of life itself” (96). Major literary works, from the poetry of the Buddhist monk, Saigyō (1118–1190) to Bashō’s (1644–1694) famous travel journal, *Oku no hosomichi* [The Narrow Road of Oku], explore the theme of traveling. The status of Kojirō as a traveling monk is grounded in this cultural tradition. The idea of traveling held an irresistible appeal for some; Bashō, for example, expressed his obsessive passion for traveling in the opening of *Oku no hosomichi*:

“Everything about me was bewitched by the travel-gods, and my thoughts were no longer mine to control. The spirits of the road beckoned, and I could do no work at all” (363). If home represents the cosmos, travel brings the chaotic part of life. Herbert Plutschow also states, “Home means ‘being,’ a consciousness of self as part of the order, whereas travel means ‘not being,’ and may bring about a potential ontic disintegration” (88). A traveler’s departure from the order of daily life points to entering the universe beyond the horizon of his/her own consciousness: a magical space.

The relationship between travel and ritual plays out most symbolically in Japanese Noh theatre, one of the major influences on Kyōka’s writing. In typical Mugen Noh (dream Noh), the *waki* figure, usually a traveling monk, visits a famous historical site, where he encounters a ghost of a fictional or historical person associated with the place. This place, which does not appear to be of any special interest to others, signifies an extraordinary world for the monk. In other words, sacred symbols concealed in the space become distant place for the purpose of sightseeing, shopping, etc., and often by public transportation. See Marilyn Ivy, *Discourses of the Vanishing* 36–38.
manifest through the body of the traveling monk. Miura Beach, one of the geographical backdrops for *Kusa-meikyū*, is merely a scenic refuge from daily life. Only to a solitary traveler like Kojirō, its magical force is apparent. Accordingly, in what follows, I will examine the way in which the space becomes sacred by means of the narrative device.

8. Sacralization of Space

How can hidden signs come to be known to our consciousness? And, what is the role of the narrative in bringing the hidden into consciousness? The casual conversation between Kojirō and the teahouse hostess at the outset of the tale refers to the sacred signs that mark the surrounding space:

あの、岩一枚、子産石と申しまして、小さなのは細螺、碁石ぐらゐ、頃あひの御供餅ほどのから、大きなのになりますと、一人では持つすべぬやうなのまで、こつとり圓い、些平扁味のあります石が、何処からと無くころころと産まれますでございます。

[That piece of cliff is called *koumi-ishi* [the birthing stone], God knows how, but round-shaped stones, all somewhat flattened, roll out of it; the stones range in size from that of a button top, a *go-ishi*,19 or a rice-cake to be offered to a deity, to ones so large that we cannot carry them alone.]

The topic of her narrative jumps freely from the *dango*20 of the tea house, which Kakichi, a local blackguard, mocks as an inedible stone, to a local site of interest *koumi-ishi*, to the visitors who suffer from infertility. She continues by referring to a supernatural woman whom Kakichi encountered, as well as to a glittering green ball the woman bestowed upon

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19 *Go-ishi* is a stone used in the game of *go*, a Japanese board game in which the players try to capture territory.
20 *Dango* is a skewered rice dumpling.
him. Despite the randomness of her story, which links seemingly irrelevant topics together, it relies, in fact, on symbolic meanings that point to the narrative’s central motif and is captured in the image of a round shape: the womb. What is noteworthy is that the motifs such as *dango* and *koumi-ishi* are incorporated into the narrative by virtue of association. Such linking by means of association brings to mind the Japanese linked verse (*renga*), the aesthetic merit of which lies in creating a fresh and surprising effect by joining one stanza to another in an unconventional way (Ueda, 37–54). Whereas logical connections work at the level of the conscious, linking through association acts directly on the unconscious and thus expands our conventional worldview. In other words, the meanings of an individual phenomenon or event in the external world remain concealed insofar as they are observed from one’s daily perspective; they do not point to beyond what they signify. It is through the traveler’s body that the hidden meanings of sacred signs are disclosed. In this moment of epiphany, the narrative integrates individual objects and events and presents them as a symbolic whole.

The narrative of *Kusa-meikyū* proposes to liberate readers from the bounds of daily consciousness by guiding them into a sacred time-space. In regard to the notion of time specific to ritual, Eliade offers the following explanation:

> As we have repeatedly seen ritual abolishes profane, chronological Time and recovers the sacred Time of myth. Man becomes contemporary with the exploits that the Gods performed *in illo tempore*. On the one hand, this revolt against the irreversibility of Time helps man to “construct reality”; on the other, it frees him from the weight of dead Time, assures him that he is able to abolish the past, to begin his life anew, and to re-create his world […]. (139)

According to Eliade, man returns to the primordial, sacred time-space by virtue of ritual experience, leaving the daily world apprehended in the linear concept of time. In this way, a
community recovers its original force of reproduction by means of ritual experience. The regenerated utopia is often envisioned in the symbol of the womb, the origin of life, and the source of creation. The return to the womb, accordingly, means the recovery of creative power that humans were supposed to have possessed before civilization. Although the mention of the womb might suggest a reading informed by a psychoanalytical theory such as those of Freud and Lacan, my reading focuses on its ritual aspects. I am reading “womb” not as a symbol of a psychological stage, but as an actual organ of fertility, a place of conception, the biological details of which are the province of unseen spiritual forces.

In Kusa-meikyū, the womb is signified by the image of the house surrounded by grass and water. Yet, it is a symbol of sterility given that two women died there in childbirth. It is also prefigured by the teahouse hostess, herself childless, who tells how infertile women make the pilgrimage to the birthing stone. The matter of sterility is furthermore the symbolic indication of Akira’s lost memory of his mother. Regarding Akira’s quest, Takakuwa Noriko remarks accurately that the thread ball song is not merely a “circuit,” a way of connecting with his mother but it is the symbol of “生誕の場に働いていた促しや牽引のすべて” (120; “every force of tugging and prompting that worked at birth”). It is in this regard that Akiya house as the final goal of Akira’s quest connects the spatial and temporal dimensions to each other: the house is located at the crossroads of the spatio-temporal boundary. Thus, Akira’s arrival at the house guided by the thread ball means his return to the past (the original time), and Ayame’s appearance along with her thread ball performance is the materialization of the past (the epiphany of the sacred).
The return to the primordial time-space is one of the major themes of Western quest narratives as well. According to Paul Ricoeur, the typical quest narrative is constructed of two structural patterns: quest and confinement (118). Whereas the quest is narrated in accordance with linear chronological time, the confinement has no sense of time. It is simply “recession.” The hero is confined in a dark womb-like place in which he loses his sense of time. The contrast between the time-space of the extraordinary and the ordinary is highlighted by the hero’s final return to this world. Unlike this structure, in Kusa-meikyū the distinction between the two worlds remains ambiguous at least in part because the elaborate narrative device makes it impossible for the reader to follow the story in a strictly chronological way.

This kind of dechronologization is enabled by the flexible relationship between the narrator and the listeners, that is, the indeterminate narrative perspective produces an indeterminate time sequence. Due to the shifting of the time axis, which is effected through the complex narrative structure, the readers are unable to engage in a story of one-dimensional temporality. Gérald Genette, in his analysis of narratology, divides the time of the narration into four categories: subsequent narration, prior narration, simultaneous narration, and interpolated narration (217). In a genuine frame story, the narrator relates a past event from the transcendental perspective of the present, which enables the listeners/readers to maintain a stable view on the narrated story. In Kusa-meikyū, by contrast, the multilayered narrative structure leaves the perspective of the narrator in flux thereby making the distance between the two temporal axes, namely, the time of narration and the narrative time, in Genette’s term, blur.
One example of this narrative device is found in the description of the riverside landscape. In this scene, Saihachi, the teahouse hostess’s husband, tells his companions about his encounter with Akira:

村を賞められたが憎くねえだし、またそれまでに思わっしゃるものを、ただわかりましたねで放聁しては、何か私、気が済まねえ。そこで、草原へ蹲込んで、信にはなさりますめえけど、と嘉吉に蒼い珠授けさした……」しばらく黙って、「の、事を話したらばの。先生様の前だけん、嘘を吐け、と天窓からけなさっしゃりそうな少え方が、（おお、その珠と見たのも、大方星ほどの手毬だろう。）と、あのまた碧い星を視めて云うだ。けちりんも疑わねえ。（なら、まだ話します事がございます。）とついでに黒門の空邸の話をするとの。川はその邸の、庭か背戸を通って流れはしないか。）と乗出しけよ。……（流れは見さっしやる通りだ）……」(60–61)

[Not feeling bad that he spoke fondly of our village, besides, I couldn’t cast him away just by saying “I don’t know,” as he was being so positive. So, I crouched on the grass and said, “You won’t believe this, but … the lady who gave a green ball to Kakichi…” There was silence for a while, “so I told that story. Then—though it’s awkward to tell this in front of you, the school teacher—the young gentleman, who would likely condemn me out of hand for telling a lie, surprisingly said, staring at the green stars, “Oh, that which seemed to be a ball was probably a thread ball like a star.” He didn’t doubt me in the slightest. “Actually, I have more to tell …” so, in passing, I also told the story of the empty house of Kuromon. He then leaned toward me, apparently interested, and asked, “Doesn’t the river run through the garden or rear gate of the house?”—“It runs just like you see—”]

At this point, the narrative takes a sudden leap to provide a description of the riverside landscape from the present perspective:

今もおなじような風情である。—薄りと廂を包む小家の、紫の煙の中も繞れば、低く裏山の根にかかった、一刷灰色の霧の間も通る。[…] 口につけると塩気があるから、海潮がさすのであろう。 (61)

[Even now it has the same old charm—the river runs through the blue cloud of the little house, which dimly envelopes its eaves through a gray haze—as if drawn by one brush stroke, hanging low at the foot of the mountain behind.]
From the salty taste of the water, one can tell that the ocean flows into the river.

Which “now”? Is it the “now” in which the omniscient narrator tells the story of Saihachi and his companions, or in which any random reader experiences the story of Kusa-meikyū?

The ambiguity of this temporal adverb destabilizes time instead of determining it. The readers who have been following the story from the narrator’s viewpoint are likely to be perplexed by this sudden shift in perspective in that they must recognize the temporal distance that exists between the narrated story and themselves. Through this temporal adverb, the continuity between past and present is enunciated: the landscape has not changed over time. In this fashion, the narrative frame subverts the very frame of the story by nullifying the stable temporal axis.

Such a border-crossing also occurs in the physical dimension. An example is found in the scene in which Akira, in talking with Kojirō, relates his experiences with the supernatural at the house:

「その怪しいものの方でも、手をかえ、品をかえ、怯かす。—何かその……畳がひとりでに持上りますそうでありますが、まったくでございますか。」熟と視て聞くと、また俯向いて、「ですから、お話しも極りが悪い、取留めのない事だと申すんです。」「ははあ、」と胸を引いて、僧は寛いだ状に打笑い、「あるいはそうであろうかにも思いましたよ。では、ただ村のものが可い加減な百物語。その実、嘘説なんでございますので？」「いいえ、それは事実です。畳は上りますとも。貴僧、今にも動くかも分かりません。」「ええ！や、それは。」(77)

[“Those strange creatures, for their part, try every means possible to threaten you. —I mean, … like … the grass mat lifts itself into the air, right?” the monk asks while staring at the student. The latter replies with his eyes cast down again, “As I said, it’s an embarrassing, worthless thing to tell you.” “Oh, I see,” the monk, now recovering his posture gives a relaxed smile, “That’s something I expected. It’s just the villagers made up an obscure ghost story. It’s a fiction,
right?" “No, it is truth. Of course, the grass mat lifts itself ... you know, it could move at this very moment.” “What! That’s ...”]

Kojirō is startled to know that the unearthly incidents of Akira’s story could happen in his presence. All of a sudden, the time-space of the narrated story merges into the narrative present. The boundaries separating time, space, and individuals collapse.

This sort of spatio-temporal border-crossing constitutes the essential part of kaidan (kai =怪 strange, mysterious; dan =談 talk, tale), ghost or horror tales originating from the Buddhist didactic literature in the medieval period. Kyōka, in fact, based Kusa-meikyū on the Edo kaidan story Inō Mononoke-roku [The Account of the Inō Monster Disturbance].

For kaidan storytelling occasions, it is of great importance to create an appropriate setting and atmosphere. The storyteller’s job is to relate a ghostly experience, his/her own or somebody else’s, to an audience that has gathered in the darkness. But the storyteller’s is not the only voice creating the tense atmosphere; occasionally, a random voice breaks out: “I just saw the desk move by itself!” or “Something white just crossed in front of me!” Then, the audience is expected to respond with horror and fascination. In this way, the audience typically experiences unearthly occurrences physically and collectively in the here and now of the storytelling. The fascination of kaidan storytelling, in short, lies in the disclosure of a continuation between the past and the present as well as between this world and the other world.

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21 These are the records of a kaidan story in the form of documents and picture scrolls from the nineteenth century. According to their accounts, a young samurai, Inō Heitarō, chastised the monsters and goblins that had turned up at his house over a period of thirty days. Heitarō received a mallet from the Lord of Darkness as a reward for his brave deed (ed. Yoshinobu Sugimoto, Inō mononoke-roku emaki shūsei).
9. Story Literature and the Chains of Hearsay

Such ambiguous boundaries derive from the heterogeneous nature of the anonymous narrative. As noted in the previous section, what is unique about the tale is the narrative voice devoid of individual personality. Instead, the voice mingles with others beyond individual boundaries to create a communal voice. This border-crossing becomes possible by means of hearsay, a literary device that Kyōka inherited from the traditional Japanese prose narrative, 物語文学 monogatari bungaku (story/tale literature)—a term and genre that combines two ontologically diversified forms of work. Monogatari (story, tale) has its origins in katari-goto, an oral tradition associated with Shinto rituals. Constituting a sacred record of ancient times, the oral tradition developed into the form of monogatari (Mitani 268). Further, monogatari roughly corresponds to the German word the Erzählung (story) vis-à-vis the Roman (novel), as Walter Benjamin elaborates on their difference. The distinction between the two forms of narrative exists in the Japanese literary tradition. According to Noe Kei’ichi, the essential element that distinguishes shōsetsu (novel) from monogatari is the idea of originality:

「紙と文字」を媒体にして密室の中で生産され消費されるのが近代小説であるとすれば、物語は炉端や宴などの公共の空間で語り伝えられ、また享受される。小説（novel）が常に「新しさ」と「独創性」を追求するとすれば、物語の本質はむしろ聞き古されたこと、すなわち「伝聞」と「反復性」の中にこそある。独創性（originality）がその起源（origin）を「作者」の中に特定せずにはおかないので、物語においては「起源の不在」こそがその特質にほかならない。(67)

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22 According to Benjamin, what distinguishes the novel from the story is its essential dependence on the book (“The Storyteller” 87).
[If the modern novel is to be produced and consumed behind closed doors through the medium of “papers and letters,” monogatari is something to be received and passed down in a public space such as by the fireside and at banquets. Whereas the novel constantly pursues “novelty” and “originality,” the essence of monogatari lies in no other than clichés, that is, in “hearsay” and “repetition.” In contrast to “originality,” the concept that impels us to locate the “origin” in the “author,” monogatari can be identified through this very “absence of origin.”]

The concept of story literature is diametrically opposed to the concept of the novel, the impetus for which lies in the desire to create something new and original, as the etymology of the term “novella” (new story) indicates. Furthermore, as another important point, Noe draws attention to the fact that the novel is a material medium, communicated through the paper-and-ink of the book-as-object, whereas the story is primarily an immaterial, auditory experience. Interestingly, Kyōka attempts to adapt a material medium, the novel, to the task of handling an experiential genre (monogatari/kaidan).

Auxiliary hearsay forms such as “とぞ tozo,” “となむ tonan,” and “とや toya” are significant technical devices in story literature, as Sasaki Hachirō shows by taking examples from Genji Monogatari [The Tale of Genji]. According to Sasaki, the purpose of the hearsay form is to impress readers with the idea that the narrated story is not the author’s invention but a record of what has been handed down for generations within the community. He avers that “作者は表面においては作者としての立場にあるのではなく、伝承された古物語を紹介する所の伝達者の立場を持っているのである” (17; “The author at the surface level does not stand as an author but takes her place as a transmitter, one who introduces ancient legends”). To put it another way, the author of story
literature abandons her responsibility for the claims she makes by concealing her individual identity in the inter-subjective narrative of hearsay.

As Sasaki also points out, the hearsay style is a remnant of the ancient oral tradition. It was a dominant trope in the story literature of the Heian period (794–1185), thanks to the particular circumstances that facilitated the formation of a unique community of writers and readers. The principal partakers of this literary community were ladies of the court who wished to listen to stories to while away the time. As Saigō Nobutsuna notes, “読み手と書き手、作品の消費と生産のあいだに […] 有機的なつながり [が] 存した” (167; “an organic relationship existed between the readers and the authors, as well as between the consumption and the production of the works”). It was a closed, self-contained community, a situation that gave rise to the concept of the author as an anonymous transmitter of shared stories instead of as a creative writer. The hearsay style, thus, serves as a linguistic device that supports the reading of a text in a communal context.

This account of the relationship between the hearsay form and the author’s standing as a member of the community, however, does not apply to Kyōka, who as a writer of the twentieth century lived a reality entirely different from that of the court ladies of the eleventh century. The development of publications/media brought with it a growing sense of distance between the author, the invisible creator, and the reader, the consumer of books. It was in these new technological conditions that the Naturalist novels acquired literary validity, whereas Kyōka wrote against the grain.
The tale’s communal narrative devoid of individual voice is created through a variety of literary devices, for example, the narrative of the teahouse hostess, which demonstrates the quality of oral storytelling:

山へ上ったというではなし、たかだか船の中の車座、そんな事は平気な野郎も、酒樽の三番叟、とうとうたらしたりらりには肝を潰して、（やい、此奴等、）とはずみに引傾がります船底へ、仁王立に踏ごたえて、喚いたそうにござります。騒ぐな。騒ぐまいてや、やい、嘉吉、こう見た処で、二歩と一両、貴様に貸のない顔はないけれど、引負をさせてまで、勘定を合わしようなんど因業な事は言わぬ。(18)

[It was just a circle on a shipboard, not something like a top of a mountain, that he found himself in; yet a treat of sake barrel was shocking enough even to the idiot who was used to such a thing. He finally got scared, dripping sweat drop by drop, stood firm on the lurching bottom of the ship, and shouted, “Hey, you bastard.” “Don’t make a fuss,” “How can I not make a fuss?” “Look, Kakichi, there is no one here who hasn’t lent you money, but we’re not so pitiless as to put you into debt by making you pay for the loss.”]

Although there is an unavoidable gap between the Japanese original and any English translation, the uniqueness of the narrative is evident. Idiomatic expressions such as “酒樽の三番叟” (“a treat of sake barrel”), the onomatopoeic phrase, “たらったりり” (“drop by drop”) as well as the comical dialogue interpolated in the narrative lend a sense of theater to the narrative style. This kind of narrative is reminiscent of 落語 rakugo and 講談 kōdan, traditional Japanese oral performances. In these performances, a solitary narrator depicts different characters and scenes through the art of storytelling; he/she changes his diction and tone of voice skillfully while using body language to portray fictional or historical figures. It is as though the body of the narrator belongs to a multiplicity of characters beyond individual limits. The narrator, thus, acts like a ventriloquist or shaman, becoming a vessel for the words of others. This trans-corporeal character of rakugo and kōdan
performance is also evident in the narrative of the teahouse hostess. She disappears from
the surface of the story, replaced by an impersonal narrator. Yet, she emerges again when
she concludes a sentence with the polite form of hearsay “そうにございます” (“so I
heard”). The heterogeneous narrative of multiple subjects is thus generated.

My idea of the narrative voice as a heterogeneous body draws on Ichikawa Hiroshi’s
theory of the body (shintai ron). Ichikawa understands the “body” as a linguistic metaphor,
and thereby introduces two ways in which we become cognizant of the world: subjective
synthesis and predicative synthesis. Subjective synthesis is oriented toward dissecting the
surrounding world through the self as center, whereas predicative synthesis integrates
objects through the state of affairs. That is, predicative synthesis takes “性質や関係やはた
らきといった述語的なものの類似性や近接性にもとづいて、主語的なものが受動的
にゲシュタルトとして浮き出してくれる類比的癒合の形式” (Ichikawa 192–93; “the
form of analogical conglutination from which subjective beings emerge as a gestalt in a
passive manner based upon the resemblance and approximation of what is predicative, such
as dispositions, relations, and workings”). Evidently, the ambiguous narrative of
Kusa-meikyū leans strongly toward predicative synthesis.

Predicative synthesis, moreover, is the principle applicable to structuring the entire
narrative of the tale. That is, the narrative is constructed metaphorically, linked through
associations, so that the central themes emerge through multi-layered storytelling, including
subtle variations, to forge the body of a communal narrative:

近代的自我は、それ自体関係化の一形態であることを忘れた自己中心化
によって、他の何ものにも依拠しない実体として自己を根拠づけ、力で
ある知によってものを操作しようとしました。こうした近代の自我が分離的直感と分別的判断にもとづく主語的統合を正統とし、癒合的な場的直感にもとづく述語的統合を排除し、あるいは非正統的なもの・非合理的なものとして卑しめたのは当然といえるでしょう。(Ichikawa 195)

[Forgetting the fact that self-centralization is merely one form of relationship, the modern sense of self has validated the self as an independent entity while seeking to manipulate things by the power of knowledge. It is natural that such a sense of self gives legitimacy to subjective synthesis that rests itself on the dissecting intuition and analytical judgment, thereby eliminating or devaluing predicative synthesis based on conglutinative and situational intuition as unorthodox and irrational.]

The movement of genbun ittchi (unification of the written and spoken languages) was an attempt to invent a style capable of expressing the inner voice of a person, which is possible only by separating the self from others and by objectifying the surrounding world. The narrative of Kusa-meikyū, on the other hand, obscures the syntactic correlation of semiotic relations. In this narrative labyrinth, the self becomes united with the world such that the individual submerges himself in the collectivity of heterogeneous and anonymous bodies.

10. The Role of Kojirō as Listener

It is the character of Kojirō that functions as an axis by means of which predicative synthesis is achieved. Or, to put it another way, multiple stories are integrated through the body of Kojirō. He remains a listener throughout the tale and as such is endowed with the crucial role of eliciting stories from others. As Komori Yōichi points out in reference to Takakuwa’s argument, in Kusa-meikyū three unrelated axes of narrative—those of the village of Akiya, Akira, and the thread ball song—are integrated through Kojirō’s presence. Kojirō’s function in the tale is analogous to the figure of the waki (bystander) in Noh
theatre. As the role of the *waki* is restricted to evoking the soul of the deceased (the *shite*), Kojirō, himself a Buddhist monk, acts as a medium, through which stories of individual characters are disclosed. As a traveler, he moves freely through a multiplicity of geographical locations and creates narrative situations in the process. If, as Halbwachs says, collective memory can be retained only “from the outside—that is, by putting ourselves in the position of others” (53), in *Kusa-meikyū* it is Kojirō’s body that lends itself to a space for collective memories to be stored. Kojirō acts as an outsider in both senses of the word: he exists outside the local community (as a traveler) and apart from the secular social system (as a monk). He is qualified to function as a listener because of this outsider status.

The fact that Kojirō is a listener suggests the possibility of his becoming a narrator, as he tells what he has heard. Komori explains this mechanism by emphasizing the function of the monk as a medium:

[Integrating the act of hearing and that of telling what one has heard (*kiki-tsutaeru*) is a kind of border-crossing possible only for those who, once having been a “listener,” have the possibility of becoming a “narrator.” Storytelling in *Kusa-meikyū* rests on such border-crossings. Hiding behind such border-crossings are subtle variations and shifts produced in the process in which the words that were heard (*tsutaekii-kotoba*) turn into the words]
transmitted by hearsay (kiki-tsutae no kotoba). It is in this very moment, it seems to me, that a fiction is born.

Kojirō as a “listener” is nothing less than an apparatus; by remaining a “listener” prior to becoming the “narrator,” he evokes through his very presence a way of storytelling just before the border-crossing, that is, the way in which the story is produced through the interaction between the “narrator” and the “listener.”

In the tale, the narrative situations are foregrounded by bringing to light the presence of the listener. The interchangeability of the narrator and the listener, enabled through the style of hearsay, is what defines monogatari (story, tale). Through the presence of Kojirō, individual experiences, including those of Akira, Ayame, and the teahouse hostess, are integrated to create the communal narrative. By bringing the presence of Kojirō to the fore, the tale gains a spatio-temporal expanse in which the readers are involved as partakers of the collective memory. In essence, Kusa-meikyū should be read as a generic hybrid. It is a modern novel, yet one with a foot firmly planted in the monogatari tradition of pre-modern Japan. The text, with Kojirō as the point of communication, encourages the readers to imagine themselves as participants in the ritual of storytelling.

11. Narrative, Memory, and Communal Identity

But by remembering it, he had made the story his; and insofar as I have remembered it, it is mine; and now, if you like it, it’s yours. In the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood.

(Ursula K. Le Guin 29–30)

One way to foster a sense of community is by sharing memories. In Kusa-meikyū the individual stories are transmitted and shared via the device of hearsay. Unlike many modern
novels that are typically read in a voyeuristic manner as if the readers are peeking into the private lives of others, the tale of *Kusa-meikū* is public in nature. The stories disclosed do not remain within the fictional frame. Instead, the readers experience them through the medium of Kojirō, and in this way they are incorporated into the inter-subjective community of the fictional world beyond temporal, geographical, and epistemological boundaries. Thus, the ritual experience of reading collapses the distance that separates the readers from the fictional world, and so they find themselves at the end of the chains of hearsay.

Regarding the particular way in which community identity is established, based on his own linguistic research, Neal Norrick identifies three central ways in which storytelling is integral to the formation of group identity: storytelling fosters group rapport, ratifies group membership, and conveys group values (217). Thus, he calls attention to the role of storytelling as transcending the function of information exchange. A narrative event provides the participants with an occasion for reinforcing feelings of affinity. It is for this very purpose of forming a group and reaffirming the identity of that group that familiar stories are told repeatedly in communal settings.

In *Kusa-meikyū*, Akira’s personal story is made public through its revelation to Kojirō. The boy’s yearning for his mother, a symbolic expression of the author’s nostalgia for the nation’s past, in this way, is shared by anonymous readers. As suggested by Le Guin cited above—“But by remembering it he had made the story his; and insofar as I have remembered it, it is mine; and now, if you like it, it’s yours”—the listeners make the story theirs by remembering it, and this remembrance is followed by the repetition of the same
process. A personal individual memory, in this fashion, turns into a shared one and through this process of interchangeable storytelling creates a sense of belonging to the community.

As Noe argues,

本人にのみ接近可能な私秘的「体験」は、言葉を通じて語られることによって公共的な「経験」となり、伝承可能あるいは蓄積可能な知識として生成される。「語る」という行為は、人と人との間に張り巡らされた言語的ネットワークを介して「経験」を象り、それを共同化する運動にほかならない。(80–81)

[An individual’s private secret “experience” [体験 taiken] approachable only for the person himself turns into a public “experience” [経験 keiken] by being told through the medium of words, and then becomes the knowledge that can be conveyed or reserved. The act of “telling stories” is nothing but a sort of movement that gives expression to “an experience” and makes it public through the medium of interpersonal linguistic networks.] (I have inserted the corresponding terms from the standard Japanese translation.)

The Japanese words taiken and keiken here—both rendered as “experience” in the English translation—correspond approximately to the German words Erlebnis and Erfahrung, respectively. Whereas the former refers to daily experiences and moments, the latter implies accumulated and communicative knowledge as a result of the former. As Noe suggests, the act of storytelling as Erfahrung offers a public occasion wherein individual experiences are shared as collective memory or knowledge. It is precisely because of this public and communal aspect that I emphasize the act of storytelling as ritual performance.

12. Modern Discourse of Vision
Toward the end of the story, Kojirō is appalled by the supernatural manifestation of one of Ayame’s companions, Akuzaemon, who has appeared to him. Akuzaemon speaks as follows:

およそ天下に、夜を一目も寝ぬはあっても、瞬をせぬ人間は決してあるまい。悪左衛門をはじめ夥間一統、すなわちその人間の瞬く間を世界とする——瞬くという一秒時には、日輪の光によって、御身等が顔容、衣服の一切、睫毛までも写し取られて、御身等その生命の終る後、幾百年にも活けるがごとく伝えらるる長い時間のあるを知るか。石と樹と相打って、火をほとばしらすも瞬く間、またその消ゆるも瞬く間、銃丸の人のを貫くも瞬く間だ。すべて一たびただ一人的瞬きする間に、水も流れ、風も吹く、木の葉も青し、日も赤い。天下に何一つ消え失するものは無うして、ただその瞬間、その瞬く者にのみ消え失すると知らば、我等が世にあることを怪むまい。

[In this world, there might be a person who never sleeps at night but nobody who does not blink. I, Akuzaemon, and my entire company exist in that moment in which humans blink—do you not know, in a second of blinking, that there is a long stretch of time in which everything including your countenance, every detail of your garment, and even your eyelashes by means of sunlight, is passed down vividly for hundreds of years even after you have died? It is in a moment that a stone and a tree strike each other to make a fire spark which then goes out; it is also in a moment that a bullet goes through a man’s body. Everything exists in the second of blinking; water runs, wind blows, leaves are green and the sun is scarlet. If you know the truth that nothing in this world really disappears but vanishes for a moment only for those who blink, you would not wonder about our presence in this world.]

By opposing the invisible fantastic world to the material world of reality, Akuzaemon calls into question the modern scientific outlook whereby only what is visible is believed. This attitude is embodied in the person of the school instructor who does not believe in the supernatural and ascribes the disturbances at Akiya house to plotting on the part of Akira and Kojirō. The confidence of the instructor, “苟も学校のある土地に不思議と云う事は無いのだから” (69; “it could happen anywhere but not in this place where there is a
school—nothing strange could happen here”), however, is shattered as the fantastic materializes.

Such a valorization of sight over sound, as exemplified by the school instructor, is a hallmark of modernity, which was particularly prominent in the literary discourse of Naturalism. Tayama, for instance, wrote in his essay titled “Inki tsubo” [The Ink Bottle] as follows:

書くといふことよりも見るといふことが肝要である。[...] 見るといふことにも、無数の度数がある。実際あるようにこの人生が見えるのは容易なことではない。芸術家の主観—むしろ気分といふような微細な空気でも、其レンズが或は分明したり或は曇つたりする。[...] 見るといふ所から、新しい芸術は生まれて来た。(401)

What is more important than writing is seeing [...]. There are, however, innumerable levels in the act of writing. It is not easy to see life as it really is. As for the subjectivity of an artist—or, a fine atmosphere such as mood—our lens clears up at one time and darkens at another time [...]. It is the act of seeing, out of which new art is born.

According to Tayama, it is of primary importance to describe reality exactly as it is seen. He likens the eyes of the author to the apprehension of a camera lens, and considers any subjective mood or feelings a hindrance to objectivity.

We can understand Kusa-meikyū as an attempt to restore orality against the discourse of modernity—a discourse that privileges vision above other forms of communication. The work, in other words, was undertaken to restore physical communities by means of the narrative voice of storytelling as a counter to the modern nation-state, which, according to Anderson, was created through words. Paradoxically, despite its appeal to the pre-modern oral tradition, the tale is conveyed to an unspecified public, namely by means of print
media. The readers become involved in the fictional world as they follow the letters, and thereby imagine themselves as listeners in the universe of oral storytelling.

**Conclusion**

If the modern novel serves the formation of the nation as an “imagined community” through the medium of a unified language and a linear sense of time, Kyōka, in *Kusa-meikyū*, attempts to portray the “imaginative community” of Japan’s past, conceived as an aestheticized utopia. Rejecting the notion of empty homogeneous time, the story is built on circular time—pluralistic and reversible. I referred to *Kusa-meikyū* as a ritual text because it provides a virtual ritual space to which the readers subject themselves as members of an inter-subjective community. By accepting the principles of the fictional world that refute the positivism and scientific objectivism of the modern nation-state, the readers of *Kusa-meikyū* are brought to the vision of an alternative reality as constituting a reflexive view of given social conditions.

As we observed, the author’s yearning for the past is a political gesture of resistance to the abstracting, homogenizing forces of modernity. Notwithstanding this, the notion of the idealized, aestheticized past, as Kyōka portrays it, has the potential to be seen as “the origin of the nation” in the context of a nationalist ideology, and as such to lend itself to the cultural propaganda of a growing nationalism. I will investigate this issue in the next chapter through a consideration of Yanagita Kunio’s *Tōno monogatari*. 
CHAPTER THREE
The Construction of a National Essence: Yanagita Kunio’s Tōno Monogatari

1. Yearning for an Imaginary Past

うたて此世はをぐらきを
何しにわれはさめつらむ、
いざ今いち度かへらばや、
うつくしかりし夢の世に、

[Alas! Gloomy is this world,
Why am I staying awake?
Now, I shall return once again,
To the dream world that was so beautiful.]

This brief poem captures much of the romantic, agrarian imagination of late
nineteenth-century Japan. Placed at the beginning of a collection of lyrical poems Nobe no
yukiki [The Comings and Goings of the Field] (1897), the verse’s rhythm and imagery work
together in a strongly nostalgic direction. Gently rocking along to the seven/five syllabic
rhythm, the hallmark of pre-modern vernacular verse, the poem frames the poet’s refusal to
“stay awake” in a “gloomy world.” The poem finds an inter-text in Izumi Shikibu’s (970–
1030) famous elegy for her dead child—“暗きより暗き道にぞ入りぬべきはるかに照らせ
山の端の月” (“Coming from darkness / I shall enter on a path / Of greater darkness. / Shine on me from the distance, / Moon at the edge of the mount”)—but opposes the
desire for awakening or enlightenment, whether conceived of as Buddhist or as the
modernist call to bunmei kaika (civilization and enlightenment). Instead, the poem praises
the comforts of returning to slumber, to beautiful dreams.

23 The translation is by Donald Keene, Seeds in the Heart 288.
The young poet is Matsuoka Kunio, better known as Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962), the “father of Japanese folklore studies.” As a young man, Yanagita enjoyed friendships with novelists such as Tayama Katai and Shimazaki Tōson, and he received recognition for his own literary talent. After graduating from Tokyo University where he studied agricultural administration, however, Yanagita broke away from the literary path in order to pursue a career as a government official. As a bureaucrat with the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce, he traveled to rural districts of Japan, and through his work he cultivated an interest in the old customs that many felt had survived in the provinces. Later, he left government work to devote himself to collecting and studying folktales. Thus, by establishing his own methodology, Yanagita laid the groundwork for Japanese folklore studies. According to his biographers, Yanagita avoided topics relating to his youthful foray into romantic subjects as if to claim that his standing as a folklorist had nothing to do with his past as a lyrical poet. Yet, the desire expressed in the poem above—the romantic yearning for the primordial world—seems to lie at the heart of his work as a scholar of folklore.

The object of yearning, for Yanagita, was not an abstract concept or an imaginary symbol, but the spiritual life of the Japanese people before modernization. In his opinion, the old ways of life had held on in the rural areas, and so he attempted to reconstruct the past by collecting local vestiges of the oral tradition. That is to say, not unlike the Brothers Grimm (with whose work he was familiar), he conceived his folkloric studies as a way to access ancestral voices understood as the invisible origin of the nation—ancestral voices that would serve as a re-instantiated national vision. In this sense, his folkloric work can be
regarded as a kind of ritual, through which he aimed to (re)create the cultural and national identity of the Japanese. How did Yanagita contrive to involve individual readers in his textual community? And, in what way was his undertaking related to the political discourse of modern Japan in its search for a national identity? This chapter considers Tōno monogatari [The Tales of Tono] (1910), one of Yanagita’s representative works from his early years, by exploring the book as a public enterprise from the perspectives of textual strategy and reading experience.

2. Critical Reception of Yanagita

Numerous studies have been published on Yanagita and his work. His half-century career shows sustained interest in a wide range of social issues, which is reflected in the body of work about his oeuvre. Recent research on Yanagita by Japanese scholars, however, can be roughly divided into three kinds of approaches. The first group focuses on Yanagita’s writing style, especially that of Tōno monogatari, and evaluates his texts as literary works. The prominent novelist Mishima Yukio’s rave review of Tōno monogatari (1970) set a precedent for this view. Among recent studies in this area, Ishii Masami’s contribution is particularly noteworthy in terms of its analysis of the characteristics of Yanagita’s writing style from the standpoint of the monogatari tradition of Japanese literature.

The second group of researchers aims to approach Yanagita’s folklore studies from a renewed perspective, distancing themselves from the wholesale admiration of Yanagita expressed by his immediate disciples. Iwamoto Yoshiteru and Fukuta Ajio, for example,
each attempt an objective evaluation of his folklore studies through re-reading his texts. Further, Akasaka Norio focuses on Yanagita’s theory of 山人 yamabito (mountain people) considering it the primary motivation of his entire ouevre.

Finally, most recently, there has been a wave of attention focused on the question of publicness as it pertains to Yanagita’s work. Ōtsuka Eiji, who has discussed Japanese subcultures from the post-modern perspective, for instance, critically examines the role the discipline of folklore studies played in the construction of Nationalist ideology. On the other hand, Ōtsuka also expressed a positive evaluation of Yanagita’s notion of 公共の民俗学 kōkyō no minzoku-gaku (public folklore) due to its possibilities as a democratic decision-making process in the hands of independent individuals. Furthermore, Satō Kenichi regards the production of books by Yanagita as a public enterprise, evaluating it from the viewpoint of reading experience. Satō considers the reader to be an indispensable part of the process of reading, whereby he defines reading as both 本というメディアの存在を基礎に成立したコミュニケーション行為であり、読者とよばれる主体と書物とよばれるメディアとの、かかわりの総体である (193; an act of communication predicated on the presence of the medium of the book and also the sum of relations between the subject called the reader and the medium called the book). Situating the act of reading at the core of Yanagita’s methodology, Satō avers that reading for him is an epistemic exercise through which readers identify the self. This view of reading is resonant with Iser’s theory, namely, as the way in which the readers’ consciousness and subjectivity are constituted. Nonetheless, a striking difference is apparent in that Satō acknowledges the
possibility that reading has a public purpose. Satō’s argument informs my own investigation into the correlation between reading as an individual act and reading as a collective experience.

In this chapter, I focus on reformulating and extending Satō’s premise. His consideration of Yanagita’s work as a public, epistemic exercise is important to my own reading of Yanagita’s writings as a type of social ritual. What I find problematic, however, is that Satō does not pay sufficient attention to the logical tactic Yanagita uses to connect the individual and the public. Yanagita’s notion of 常民 jyōmin (ordinary people) as the “unknown self” to be discovered in the process of reading (Satō) is a fuzzy concept, as it is often used to define national identity. In fact, Yanagita’s book project served to create an “imagined community” by means of ink and paper. It was part of a project to construct a national consciousness whereby each individual reader would achieve a sense of belonging to the textually constructed community, i.e., the “nation” as it existed through and beyond any immediate physical communication.

The studies on Yanagita outside Japan are relatively limited due to his writing style, which poses significant challenges to translators. Of the critics who have written on this author, Marilyn Ivy regards Tōno monogatari as a hybrid text of literature and science, at the junction of which Japanese Nativist ethnology was born. According to Ivy, all nostalgia is premised on the absence of its object and thus by its very nature is dislocated from its origin. She argues that Tōno monogatari with its nostalgic gesture recurrently motivates the modernist desire for the past and in so doing devotes itself to the establishment of a Japanese national identity.
Working from a different perspective, Melek Ortabasi regards *Tōno monogatari* as a literary text and places it in the discourse pertaining to the definition of modern Japanese literature. She approaches the question of narrative realism through her detailed analysis of Yanagita’s literary technique, and compares it with the style of contemporary Naturalist novels. She evaluates *Tōno monogatari* as a socially engaged, communal text, as it depicts the emotional life of the community in which the reader is called to participate. Ortabasi’s argument is valuable and relevant to the present study, as it sheds light on the public aspect of the work with respect to reading experience. Yet, in evaluating *Tōno monogatari* as a literary text, she isolates it from Yanagita’s other folkloric works. Unlike Ortabasi’s approach, the purpose of the present study is to connect *Tōno monogatari* as literature with Yanagita’s folkloric undertaking in one line, which is to say that I will explore the significance of the work as a public site wherein literature and folklore intersect.

*Tōno monogatari* is part of an enterprise to create national identity. In other words—and this is a crucial point—in terms of its genesis *Tōno monogatari* is a public text, a communal text, that is, a ritual text. A distinct characteristic of ritual is that the members of the community share sacred time and space in order to affirm their shared cultural identity. In such an atmosphere, sound, in particular, the voice plays an important role in the formation of a ritual space. Typical examples of this sort of acoustically activated ritual space include the Catholic mass and Shinto Norito (recitations for the purpose of worshipping deities), both of which depend on the vocalization of well-known words and stories to activate a ritually effective communal space. Like these more obviously religious spaces, Yanagita’s collection of folklore generates a sacred time-space into which the
readers are invited by means of a carefully crafted ritualized language. The act of reading as a temporal experience is a ritual performance that activates the text, a spatial presence by giving voice to it.

Yanagita’s collection of folktales and the ritualized vocalizations of mass or Shinto prayer, however, are dissimilar in nature. One key difference between them, of course, is that Yanagita’s work speaks to a very specific cultural moment. The year in which Tōno monogatari was published marks the period in which Japan was experiencing rapid modernization. As the economy moved apace toward capitalism, the rural population flowed to the big cities, leaving their communities severely depleted. In addition, the promotion of a standardized national language through compulsory education effected as an assault on dialects (方言撲滅・方言矯正 hōgen bokumetsu, hōgen kyōsei), undermined the cultural foundations of rural communities. Thus, as Carol Gluck points out, the dissolution of agricultural communities in the wake of industrialization and urbanization was a serious social problem.

3. Books as a New Media for Communication

When local physical communities that had been sustained through voice were faced with the crisis of modernity, books were seen as a new way of creating a shared, imagined community through which people who had become distanced from each other could connect. Certainly, during the period of the Sino-Japanese (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese (1904–1905) wars, the Meiji state was well aware of the power of print
media and the potential of public education as a means of disseminating such media and thus of aligning youthful identity with the nation-state. Yanagita also saw the potential of books as media for national communication. However, he was motivated by concerns that were agrarian rather than belligerent in nature. The poem quoted at the beginning of the present chapter can be read as expressing a refusal to “wake up” to the realities of Japanese expansionism and of an intention to focus instead on theorizing (somewhat naively) an essential identity. He sought to create a public space in the text as a way of substituting for the community function of traditional agrarian life. The readers are invited to participate in this virtual ritual space as members of the community by accepting its values and beliefs.

The consideration of the causality between the two socio-cultural phenomena of modernization: the dissolution of local communities and the dissemination of books as a consumer product highlights the paradoxical nature of the concept of ritual reading. As Maeda points out, the highly individualized and internalized practice of reading deprived society of occasions for communal storytelling while producing a new relationship through the symbol of letters between the now separated author and readers. Against the backdrop of such a social environment, Yanagita conceived of the production of books as a new media for communication.

_Tōno monogatari_ was meant to be a public property that provided a communal space of shared significance. In order to evaluate the work in regard to its public aspect, I will approach the text from two perspectives. First, I will explore Yanagita’s purpose as a folklorist, namely, his efforts to construct a textual community to cope with the aftermath of modernization. Then, I will investigate, from the reader’s point of view, the way in
which readers of *Tōno monogatari* can achieve a sense of belonging to the community. In short, the chapter evaluates the social function of *Tōno monogatari* as a ritual text.

4. **Ritual Strategy: Stylistic Devices**

I will start by examining the text in terms of its unique style and textual arrangement. My analysis of these points will illuminate Yanagita’s primary purpose in writing this work. Although the title of the work *Tōno monogatari* is translated as *The Legends of Tono* by Ronald Morse, a more faithful rendering of the word *monogatari* is “tale” or “story.” This indicates Yanagita’s awareness of his role as an inheritor of the *monogatari* tradition in Japan. He published this collection of tales in 1910 at his own expense when he was a government official with the Ministry of Agriculture and Commerce. Through the mediation of Mizuno Yōshū (1883–1947), a popular novelist of the time, Yanagita met with a native of Tōno town, Sasaki Kizen (1886–1933), who shared stories told by his family members. In the preface, Yanagita offers an account of how the book came into being:

此話はすべて遠野の人佐々木鏡石君より聞きたたり。昨明治四十二年の二月頃より始めて夜分折々訪ね来り此話をせられしを筆記せしなり。鏡石君は話し上手には非ざれども誠実なる人なり。自分も一字一句をも加減せず感じたるまゝを書きたり。 (9)

[All the tales and legends recorded here were told to me by Kyōskei Sasaki who is from Tono. I have been writing these stories down since February 1909 just as he told them to me during his many evening visits. Kyōskei is not a]
good storyteller, but he is honest and sincere. I have written the stories down as I felt them, without changing a word or phrase.\[24\]

The essence of his claim is this: these are not fictions but “true” stories about an existing village. A native of the village, who is sincere and trustworthy, told him the stories and he offers them here without changing a word. Yanagita found it necessary to reveal the source of the stories. By guaranteeing the transparency of the transmitting process, he emphasized the authenticity of his record.

This was not exactly the reality, however. As Ishii’s study reveals, Yanagita’s original writing based on Sasaki’s storytelling was revised considerably prior to publication. The primary reason for this was Sasaki’s strong dialect, which, in Yanagita’s view, would make it difficult for general readers, that is, for readers outside of Tōno, to understand the story. Yanagita re-wrote the original text to make it accessible to such readers, choosing bungo-tai (literary or classical style) instead of kōgo-tai (colloquial style) for his writing. This choice of style had important implications, as it was not merely a matter of taste in the literary circles of the time. Instead, it was an issue at the center of the debate over what constituted modern Japanese literature. There was a huge discrepancy between written and spoken Japanese until the end of the nineteenth century: the genbun itchi movement attempted to overcome this disparity by adopting a unified vernacular language. Thus, the movement was directly related to the tenets of Naturalism, as the vernacular style that “mimetically traces the contours of speech will thus accede as closely as possible to the transparent reflection of the object—whether conceptual, visual, or aural” (Ivy 77). Overall,

\[24\] The English translation here is a slight modification of the one by Morse, as are all the translations of this text in the present study.
compared with the classical style the vernacular style was considered more capable of offering a realistic description of people’s lives. In particular, the Naturalists found the classical style both superficial and overly formal. Given that the vernacular style (kōgo-tai) had already permeated literary circles by the time Tōno monogatari was written, Yanagita’s decision to use the self-consciously literary style, rather than Sasaki’s truthful dialect or Edo dialect (the spoken language of Tokyo that became the model of the vernacular language) was, no doubt, a strategic one. In fact, Yanagita, as a friend of Naturalist novelists such as Tayama and Shimazaki, primarily wrote articles for literary magazines in support of kōgo-tai. In his article “Shasei to ronbun” [Essays and Sketching] (1907), he proposed to adopt what he called the sketching style to describe both a person’s psyche and external objects:

As for a means to express thoughts, there are generally two types: spoken and written words. Written words are, for the moment, not so close to thoughts as spoken words. Whereas spoken words are able to express eight thoughts out of ten, written words can express only six. Furthermore, with respect to written words, there is a huge range of difference depending on the choice of style. The genbun itchi style, in my view, is more suitable for expressing thoughts in detail than bungo-tai owing to its [genbun itchi’s] proximity to spoken words. Hence, from the stylistic point of view, essays should (also) be written in the sketching style.

Yanagita wrote this article in 1907, three years before the publication of Tōno monogatari.

Disapproving the formalism of the written language, he saw a new possibility in the
vernacular style as a means to express inner thoughts and feelings. Yet, he reverted to the classical style in translating the Tōno tales into print. Ivy attributes this change in practice, to Yanagita’s shift in interest from the visible to the invisible world, which arose from his disappointment with the Naturalist authors. Yanagita, indeed, criticized these writers on several occasions. Consider, for instance, this comment, offered as part of an essay about his friend Shimazaki Tōson written in 1926 for the literary magazine *Bunshō-ōrai*:

自分は素より吹けば飛ぶような感傷家の横行を憎む者であるが、同時に多くの所謂私小説が、島崎君などを手本と頼んで、どの位非凡に重苦しく、如何に自己一身に凝固まっている生活でも、これを丹念に自白さえすれば、直ちにこれ人間の実録なりと威張って出し得る傾向を否認せんと欲する。通例の読者の欲求は知ることであって、知らねばならぬ事物が他にも無限にある。（“Ashibumi” 73)

[I have always disapproved the proliferation of feeble sentimentalists. Also, I want to deny the tendency that a number of so-called I-novels are, taking a model from people such as Shimazaki, allowed to present themselves proudly as true human records, in so far as they are the meticulous confession of one’s life, no matter how oppressed and self-obsessed it is. General readers have a desire for knowledge, and there are infinite numbers of other things we must know.]

Yanagita’s harsh criticism is leveled at his Naturalist peers who held that true art consists in the stark revelation of one’s private life. He is not interested in apprehending the inner life of others and claims that there are an “infinite number of other things we must know.” The question is what are these “things [that] we must know”? According to Ivy, the idea of the “invisible world” held great appeal for Yanagita:

I would argue that part of Yanagita’s interest lay in that which resists representation—that which is left out of any attempt at naturalized direct description. Thinking about that which evades representation—voices, dialects, margins, ghosts, deaths, monsters—was a way of thinking about literary writing: that writing which (for Yanagita) says more when it says less and thus writes what cannot be said. (80–81)
Invisible things that are verbally inexpressible—“voices, dialects, margins, ghosts, deaths, monsters,” in essence, signify the emotional life of the community as a whole. In a related context, I want to draw attention to the literary critic Karatani Kōjin’s provocative argument that the *genbun ittchi* served as an apparatus through which “interiority” was discovered (75–76). As he suggests, the *genbun ittchi* style makes a person conscious of having an inner life so that he can describe things objectively by separating the self from the world. Yanagita may have recognized that the dissociative nature of *kōgo-tai* makes it difficult to portray the spiritual life of the community as a whole from an interior perspective.

In the end, Yanagita contrived a pseudo-classical *bungo-tai* in order to depict the emotional life of the Tōno community. Regarding this *bungo-tai* in *Tōno monogatari*, Ortabasi highlights several characteristics: Firstly, the narrative elicits an emotional response from the reader via its rhythmical sound and run-on style. Secondly, owing to the absence of both a subject and a proper noun—“momentary sublimation of a character” (140)—the narrative avoids the fixed perspective of a single character to emerge instead as “the viewpoint of the story in question through a set of relationships tacitly agreed upon by the community concerned” (141). Given McLuhan’s argument that the “fixed perspective”—introduced by the print culture during the Renaissance period—had a definitive impact on the formation of individualism in Europe, the unspecified communal perspective of *Tōno monogatari* indicates the potential of books in the opposite direction.

Another important feature, as Ortabasi points out, is the variety of verbs used in the text. Compared to *kōgo-tai*, *bungo* has a rich vocabulary for denoting hearsay. The merit of
hearsay is that the narrated story attains universal value under the authority of the communal tradition, whereby the subjectivity of the narrator is concealed in the storytelling chain. *Bungo-tai* was thus considered more suitable for expressing the communal voice than the vernacular language that expresses the private voice of the individual. According to Ishii, Yanagita altered or added the expressions of hearsay at the end of the sentences such as “と云へる to ieru,” “と云ふ to iu”, “と云ふことなり to iu kotonari,” “とのことなり tono kotonari,” “と也 to nari,” and “とぞ tozo” in the process of making a fair copy so that they eventually constituted thirty-nine percent of the entire text (Yanagita 77–80). This fact supports the idea that Yanagita created the style based on a careful consideration of its merits and demerits in relation to other possible choices. Yanagita’s neo-classical writing style was essential to his project of “古代以来の「物語」の伝統に則りながら、まったく新しい近代の「物語」の創造” (Ishii, “Koe” 121; “creating an entirely modern *monogatari* in accordance with the *monogatari* tradition from ancient times”).

5. Yanagita and Naturalism

In order to describe Yanagita’s ambitions for *Tōno monogatari* adequately, I will inquire further into his relationship with Naturalism. The rather conventional view of the scholar as a “romantic reactionary” opposed to a “dry” Naturalism will not help us comprehend the yearning for communal things at the core of his scholarly enterprise. I will first problematize his claim in the preface, namely, that “一字一句をも加減せず感じたるままを書きたり” (“I have written the stories down as I felt them, without changing a
word or phrase” emphasis mine). This statement reflects Yanagita’s concept of shasei (sketching technique) as a method through which a person can accurately depict what he sees or hears. His understanding of shasei corresponds to the concept of heimen byōsha (flat description), a technical principle that Tayama proposed based on the Naturalist tenet of describing naked reality without the gloss of subjective feelings. In this regard, Yanagita shared the Naturalists’ faith in words as a transparent vehicle for communication.

Worth attention, however, is another adverbial phrase in his claim: “感じたるまま” kanjitaru mama. This phrase can be rendered in English as “as it was told me” or “as it was related to me” (Morse translates it as “as I understood”) although its literal translation is “as I felt.” The point is that Yanagita translates the verb not as “heard.” In other words, Yanagita draws attention to the subjectivity of the listener. This difference is definitive.

Instead of eyes and ears as sense organs for recording external phenomena, it is the mind that functions as a receiver of messages. The communal voice of Tōno is transmitted to Yanagita through the presence of Sasaki, whereupon it is filtered through Yanagita’s subjectivity to be translated into written Japanese (which is supposedly accessible to people outside of Tōno). It is then delivered to unknown readers in the form of printed letters. In this way, the voices of far-flung villages are conveyed to the readers through a multiplicity of processes, all of which Yanagita considered to be transparent.

6. The Traveling Body of the Folklorist
As is evident from the example just discussed, Naturalism was unthinkable for Yanagita without the notion of mind as an organ to project external phenomena: nature.

Accordingly, an inquiry into the depiction of nature in Tōno monogatari will give us insight into the author’s endeavor to understand the interior life of the community. The portrayal of the landscape in the preface provides an adequate example for this. The opening sentence of the paragraph, “Last August, I traveled to the village community of Tōno,” is followed by a long depiction of the scenery, and I cite it in its entirety:

花巻より十余里の路上には町場三ヶ所あり。其他は唯青き山と原野なり。人煙の稀少なること北海道石狩の野原より甚だし。或は新道なるが故に民居の来り就くる者少なきか。遠野の城下は即ち煙花の街なり。馬を駅亭の主人に借りて独り郊外の村々を巡りたり。其馬は黔き海草を以て作りたる厚総を掛けたり。虻多き為なり。猿ヶ石の渓谷は土肥えてよく拓けたり。路傍に石塔の多きこと諸国其比を知らず。高処より展望すれば早稲正に熟し晚稲は花盛りにて水は悉く落ちて川に在り。稲の色合は種類によりて様々なり。三つ四つ五つの田を続けて稲の色の同じきは即ち一家に属する田にして所謂名処の同じきになるべし。小字より更に小さき区域の地名は持主に非ざれば之を知らず。古き売買譲与の証文には常に見ゆる所なり。附馬牛の谷へ超ゆれば早池峯の山は淡く霞み山の形は菅笠の如く又片名のへの字に似たり。此谷は稲熟すること更に遅く満目一色に青し。細き田中の道を行けば名を知らぬ鳥ありて雛を連れて横ぎりたり。雛の色は黒に白き羽まじりたり。始は小さき雛かと思ひしが満の草に隠れて見えざれば乃ち野鳥なることを知れり。天神の山には祭ありて獅子踊あり。茲にのみは軽く鹿たち紅き物かひらめきて一村の緑に映じたり。獅子踊と云ふは鹿の舞なり。鹿の角を附けたる面を被り童子五六人剣を抜きて之と共に舞ふなり。笛の調子高く歌は低くして側にあれども聞き難し。日は傾きて風吹き醉ひて人呼ぶ者の声も淋しく女は笑ひ男は走れども猶旅愁を奈何ともする能はざりき。盂蘭盆に新しけ仏ある家は紅白の旗を高く揚げて魂を招く風あり。峠の馬上に於て東西を指点するに此旗十数所あり村人の永住の地を去らんとする者とかりそめに入りこみたる旅人と又かの悠々たる霊山とを黄昏は徐に来りて包容し尽したり。(9–10)
[Within forty kilometers of the town of Hanamaki there are three towns; the rest of the area is only green mountains and open fields. The houses here are far less scattered than those on the Ishikari plain on the northern island of Hokkaido. One reason for this might be that only a few people have settled there since the roads were opened recently.

The old castle town of Tono is still flourishing. I hired a horse from the innkeeper and rode around to the nearby villages alone. The horse I hired had dark seaweed hanging over its sides and back to protect it from the numerous horseflies. The valley along the Saru-ga-ishi River was fertile and well cultivated. There were more tombstones along the roadside than (I had seen) in other areas. Looking out from a high point, (I could see that) the rice plants planted earlier were just ripening and the late rice plants were in full bloom. The water had been drained off the rice fields and out into the river. The shades of the rice plants changed with the plant variety. In the places where three, four, or five fields had rice plants of the same color, it probably meant that they belonged to one household and probably had the same place name. The place name of any area smaller than a koaza was only known to the owner. The name is always found in the old documents of land-sale transactions.

I went across the valley of Tsukuoushi, from which to see Mt. Hayachine enveloped in a thin mist and looked like a pointed grass hat, or like the shape of the Japanese phonetic katakana alphabet letter he. In this valley, the rice plans had not yet ripened and were still quite green. As I walked along the narrow path between the rice fields, a kind of bird that I did not recognize crossed over in front of me with her young. The young birds were black with white feathers mixed in. At first, I thought they were young hens, but when they hid themselves among the grasses in the ditch, I knew they had to be wild birds.

At Tanjin Hill, there was a festival, and the Dance of the Deer was being performed. A light cloud of dust rose only from here, and bits of red could be seen against the green backdrop of the whole village. The dance in progress, which they called a lion dance, was actually the dance of the deer. Men wearing masks with deer horns attached to them danced along with five or six boys who were waving swords. The pitch of the flutes was so high and the tone of the song so low that I could not understand what they were singing even though I was just off to the side. The sun sank lower and the wind began to blow; the voices of the drunkards calling out to others were lonely to hear. Girls were laughing and children were running about. Yet, I could not help but feel the loneliness of being just a traveler.

During the Buddhist Bon Festival, it is the custom for families in which someone has recently died to hang out a red and white flag high up to welcome back the soul of the dead. Sitting on my horse in a mountain pass, I could point to some ten locations east and west where these flags were flying. Villagers were about to leave their lifelong homes, travelers drifted into the village, and a calm settled on the mountains of the souls; the dust of twilight hovered over them all and then covered them up.]
The narrative begins with a description of the overall geographical features of the Tōno area. Then the narrator’s viewpoint gradually moves until it is within the village—from “the shades of the rice plants changed with the plant variety” to the narrow path between the rice fields, and further to the colors of the wings of wild birds. The eyes of the narrator move from the whole to the particulars as a camera lens gradually narrows its focus on the subject. The traveler Yanagita’s eyes and ears record the images and the sounds of the land to which he is but a brief visitor. The representation of the landscape here corresponds to what the Japanese philosopher Yoshimoto Takaaki refers to as the bird’s eye description characteristic of Yanagita’s writing style, comprising two distinct viewpoints, the horizontal and the vertical, which create a dualistic image where they cross over each other (219). In regard to Yanagita’s idiosyncratic writing style, Iwamoto criticizes it for being based on touristic impressions, rather than the product of long-term period fieldwork. Nevertheless, it seems to me that being a traveler is an essential part of his methodology as a folklorist who aims to draw stories from the local people. His narrative strategy rehearses the familiar set-up of Mugen Noh (as discussed in the last chapter) in which the traveler, the waki figure, serves the performative function of coaxing the “story of the place” out of the main character/shite. As a traveler with ethnographic interests, Yanagita positions himself very much in this role.

The narrative description of Tōno’s landscape through the eyes of a traveler is also reminiscent of the opening paragraphs of Kusa-meikyū, examined at length in the previous chapter. The story opens with a view of the Miura Peninsula and gradually comes to focus on the traveling monk Kojirō who is walking through this landscape. Placing a person in a
distant view in this way, which itself brings to mind medieval ink paintings, creates a sharp contrast with typical I-novels (shi-shōsetsu), in which a solitary protagonist shuts himself up in the private universe of his room to struggle with his ego. The narrator of Tōno monogatari is a traveler, and as such he remains an outsider in relation to the community. By taking advantage of their standing as outsiders, both he (Yanagita) and Kojirō are able to bring local communities’ stories to a wider public.

Regarding the ways in which the figure of the outsider is related to storytelling, I want to introduce Komatsu Kazuhiko’s theory of the 异人 ijin (stranger, alien). According to Komatsu, ijin designates people such as mountain men and wanderers, those who live outside of folk society. As outsiders in relation to agrarian communities, such people are regarded with fear and abhorrence by villagers. And, Komatsu emphasizes the important role they have for community life, arguing that folk society “社会の生命を維持するために、「異人」をいったん吸収したのに、社会の外に吐き出す” (89; “absorbs “ijin” only for the purpose of expelling them so that the life of the society can be maintained”).

Drawing on this theory, we can say that both Kojirō and Yanagita in his guise as a traveler have the role of drawing out the inner life of the community. Prompted by them, the event of storytelling functions as a ritual performance, through which the community is purified and regenerated. As their traveling bodies enter the village, through the proxy of the narrating voice, readers are led into the interior of the village. Travelers, in this way, make the sharing of stories beyond communal boundaries possible. Having learned about the tales secondhand through Sasaki, Yanagita, in reality, was not alone when he visited Tōno. Yet, his gesture signifies the romantic idealization of a traveler as one who transcends the
spatio-temporal distance by way of storytelling, a convention of the pre-modern Japanese literature seen most prominently in Noh plays.

7. Solitude in Nature: Yanagita and Kunikida Doppo

What the description of nature in *Tōno monogatari* reminds me of—and what it probably reminded Yanagita’s original readers of likewise—is the Naturalist author and Yanagita’s contemporary, Kunikida Doppo’s (1871–1908) essay “*Musashino*” [The Musashi Plain] (1898). Inspired by Turgenev’s *The Rendez-vous*, Kunikida described the impression of his visit to the plain as follows:

[Being oaks, the leaves take on the colours of autumn and in due course fall from the trees. The early autumn rains whisper and the winter winds scream and howl so that when gusts strike the hilltops, thousands of leaves flutter into the sky like distant flocks of tiny birds. When all the leaves have fallen, you are left with mile upon mile of bare trees, and with the blue winter sky hanging high over all, there is an air of tranquility pervading the plain. The air is perfectly still so that even distant sounds can clearly be heard. My diary entry for December 26 reads: “I sat in the wood and looked and listened and contemplated.” Just like the man in Turgenev’s story. How did the sounds of autumn through winter match up to my expectations of modern Musashino? In...]

(34)
the autumn there were sounds from within the woods, and in winter from beyond them (102).

As the phrase “sitting in the interior of the forest, I looked around, listened to, looked closely and meditated” indicates, the narrator is observing the changing nature of the plain through all his senses. Nature here is a reflection on the mind of the observer through his sensory organs. This is exactly the product of the sketching technique that Yanagita advocated. Another point to note is that his apprehension of the landscape here seems almost dominated by what he hears—as in Yanagita’s description of Tōno. This emphasis on aural subjectivity highlights their sense of solitude even more despite an earnest desire to become one with the landscape.

Regarding the description of the landscape in Musashino, Karatani draws attention to the way it is represented:

風景がいったん眼に見えるようになるやいなや、それははじめから外にあるようにみえる。ひとびとはそのような風景を模写しはじめる。[…]

近代文学のリアリズムは、明らかに風景のなかで確立する。なぜならリアリズムによって描写されるものは、風景または風景としての人間—平凡な人間—であるが、そのような風景ははじめから外にあるのではなく、「人間から疎遠化された風景としての風景」として見出されなければならないからである。（34）

[In the very moment when we become capable of perceiving landscape, it appears to us as if it had been there, outside of us, from the start. People begin to reproduce this landscape. [...] It is clear, then, that realism in modern literature established itself within the context of landscape. Both the landscapes and the “ordinary people” (what I have called people-as-landscapes) that realism represents were not “out there” from the start, but had to be discovered as landscapes from which we had become alienated (28).]

The distinction between the interior and the exterior emerged, Karatani argues, only during modern times when people became conscious of having an interior self in the wake of
human alienation from nature. In short, landscape does not exist a priori but it is to be
discovered.

Both *Musashino* and *Tōno monogatari* represent nature through a modern individual,
a modern man in the sense that he is conscious of his interiority. They are travelers at the
core and as such are “out of tune” with their surroundings. In contrast, for those who are in
harmony with nature, nature is self-evident and thus does not surface to consciousness as a
subject of observation. It is only an outsider who would direct attention to the sound of a
flute played for the Deer Dance or to a red-and-white flag hung out on the day of the Bon
Festival. Kunikida and Yanagita are solitary individuals each with the mindset of a traveler.
Yanagita expressed sympathy with Kunikida in his eulogy for the latter: “彼は生まれながらに
漂遊の児であった。世間普通の意味における、故郷というものは有たなかった” (“Kunikida” 43; “He [Kunikida] was born to be a castaway. He did not have
what is called home in a general sense”). Yanagita, having moved from one family to
another in childhood though he was eventually adopted by a well-off family, felt an affinity
based on a sense of being an outsider with Kunikida. His sympathy with Kunikida, however,
grew beyond any biographical consideration. Although a self-professed “relentless critic” of
Naturalist literature, Yanagita was effusive in his praise of Kunikida’s literary works,
commenting on his “詩の感激と自然に対する愛情” の “経験の一つ一つが花の如く
鮮麗に […] 製作の上に咲き乱れている” (“Kunikida” 44; “deep poetic emotion and
love for nature” whereby “each experience [of which] blooms vividly in riotous profusion
[...] upon his products like flowers”). This remark is quite unlike his negative assessment of Tayama, which he expressed on several occasions including as follows:

I told him [Tayama]: “anyone is more or less an acute observer of self. Of course, you can leave certain records if you, with fair preparation of your own, try to represent yourself by going so far as to strip off the subtle shades of your mind. What we have not verified yet, however, is the question as to the extent to which we can apply this methodology or attitude.”

As this comment suggests, Yanagita is by no means against the act of observation, the methodological practice of Naturalism. Seeing and listening, in his view, are essential in any attempt to approach the invisible world, that is, the interior. Yanagita’s attitude on this point is no different from those of Kunikida, Tayama, and the other Naturalist novelists. What is at issue, however, is the question he raises: To what extent can we apply this methodology or attitude?

The auditory is the critical threshold between what is visible/external and what is mental/internal. It is a kind of liminal space: the auditory, the heard, as neither wholly external nor wholly internal, but part of an intimately shared social space. Not a wide-open sharing, but an intimate one. You have to be close enough to hear it; you have to let it seep into you. It is precisely this blurry liminal space that is the subject of Yanagita’s interest, as his essay “Minkandenshō ron” [Theory on Popular Oral Traditions] (1934) makes clear. In this essay, he classifies the object of his research into three categories: (1) visible materials,
(2) aural materials, (3) mental phenomena, or what he refers to as 無形文化 mukei-bunka (intangible culture). The ultimate purpose of his research is to understand the third group, which is “最も微妙な心意感覚に訴へて始めて理解できるもの” (98; “apprehensible only by appealing to the most delicate psychological sense”). It is noteworthy, however, that Yanagita disapproves of restricting the interior to the private sphere of the individual. His final goal is to extend the interior beyond the private individual sphere to the public collective sphere, in which to locate a communal, i.e., national identity.

8. The Search for a National Identity

The singularity of Yanagita’s idea lies in converting something local to something central and national. Stories from rural agrarian villages are conveyed beyond the community through the body of the traveler as he shares them with distant readers. In this way, books serve as a medium by which stories are disseminated nationwide. Yanagita is convinced that investigation into the inner life of the local village is the means by which the nation’s origin can be discovered. In this relation, he also refers to the origins of folktales (mukashi banashi):

昔話が大昔の世の民族を集結させて居た、神話といふもののひこばえであることは、大体いもう疑ひは無いやうであります。従つてもし方法を尽すならば、此中からでも一国の固有信仰、我々の遠祖の自然観や生活理想を、尋ね寄ることは可能でありまして、之を昔話研究の究極の目途とすることは、決して無理な望みとは申されません。(“Mukashi banashi” 252)

[Surely, it is beyond a doubt that folktales are the tender outgrowth of myths, which themselves gathered together all the primordial ethnic groups. Hence, by trying every means, we may be able to derive from these tales a faith]
peculiar to our country, our ancestor’s view of nature and ideas of life. I do not think it unreasonably ambitious to regard this search as the ultimate purpose of the study of folklore.]

In his view, the origin of folktales is myth. Accordingly, collecting folktales and legends is an effective approach to restoring/recovering the heart of the nation from mythical times.

Yanagita’s methodology: exploring the original form through its fragmented residues is based on the tenets of Nativist studies (国学 kokugaku), an intellectual movement that emerged in the late Edo period (1603–1868). According to the teaching of Nativist studies, the country in its primordial state was perfect and pure, but it was adulterated over time by foreign influences (Nosco 64–66). Hence, it is only through exploring the past that one can apprehend what is taken to be an original Japan. That Yanagita later published the triptych of his studies on ancestral spirits under the title of “Shin-kokugaku dan” [Accounts of New Nativist Studies] (1946–1947) attests to his awareness of his debt to Nativist studies for his approach to discovering a basis for nationalism.

Another influence on Yanagita’s thought is the German Romantic poet Heinrich Heine’s (1797–1856) essay Die Götter im Exil [The Gods in Exile] (1853). In this prose narrative, Heine proposes the idea that the ancient Greek and Roman gods have lost their importance in the face of a dominant Christianity. It appears that the idea of gods driven to the periphery by a foreign culture resonated with Yanagita, as he both underlined this section in the original German book and referred to this work in his essay “Yūmei-dan” [An Account of the Nether World] (1905) (Takagi 19–20).

The notion of the original gods and their replacement with a Christian god, though, was not Heine’s invention. The idea was shared by other German Romanticists, and it
appears as a motif in many Romantic works of art. The Germany of the nineteenth century was experiencing the aftermath of the Napoleonic conquest: it lagged behind the rest of Western Europe in the building of the modern nation-state, and there was a sense of urgency in regard to establishing a national identity. It was out of this political atmosphere that the Romantic Movement grew, whereby the call for national unity went hand in hand with a variety of cultural activities in pursuit of discovering some kind of national essence. The Romantic convention of associating the past with the provinces, and where the basis for national identity was surely to be found, crystallized in the folkloric works of the Brothers Grimm (Jacob: 1785–1863, Wilhelm: 1786–1859). Yanagita was very much interested in their work and purchased whole volumes of their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* [Children’s and Household Tales], which he rated highly: “K・H・M の事業は、この方面に於てまさしく世界に君臨して居る” (“Kyōdo” 254; “Without doubt, K.H.M’s enterprise in this field reigns over the world”). Yanagita was most profoundly influenced by the Grimms’ idea of “rural and agricultural landscapes as sites for contact with the now almost ghostly or supernatural ‘spirit’ of the nation’s antiquity” (Eubanks 7). Drawing on earlier studies from within and beyond Japan, Yanagita sought to create a national identity while establishing the discipline of folklore studies unique to Japan.

Yanagita was not isolated in his sense of crisis and earnest search for “Japaneseness.” The question of national identity, in fact, was a serious concern involving the whole nation, in terms both of public and private. Take, for instance, the case of Natsume Sōseki (1867–1916), Yanagita’s contemporary and a prominent novelist of Japanese literature. In a public lecture given in 1911—the year after *Tōno monogatari* was published—Sōseki argued that
the modernization of Japan was “不自然” fushizen (unnatural), referring to it as a compelled “外発的開化” gaihatsu-teki kaika (extrinsic civilization) vis-à-vis the “内発的開化” naihatsu-teki kaika (spontaneous civilization) of the West ("Gendai nihon" 25–36).

Particularly intriguing is that he considers the problem of modernity from both a psychological and an evolutionary standpoint, concepts relating to both of which were very much in vogue in the intellectual circles of the time:

[Four or five years ago, the collective consciousness of the Japanese as a whole was obsessed with the Russo-Japanese War. In later years, there was also a period during which Japanese consciousness was occupied by the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. By inference, we can say that by applying the psychologist’s analysis to the consciousness of the collective or to the consciousness of a long period: the line of the progress of civilization, i.e., the course of the development of human energy, must also make its way by wave motion, by linking hundreds of arch wires. [...] In short, the progress of civilization would be a lie unless it is spontaneous.]

Here, Sōseki is applying psychological analysis to the nation’s collective (un-)consciousness. Society, in his view, is an organism that is to develop “naturally” and “make its way by wave motion, by linking hundreds of arch wires.” Likewise, Yanagita considers Japanese modernization “unnatural” and problematic: “その[近世の社会改革心配の]背後には所謂時世に適せず、もしくは自然に反したと称せらるゝもものある
と思ふ” (“Kyōdo” 260–61; “behind [the failure of recent social reforms], I think, there are things that do not fit with our so-called times or something that can be referred to as unnatural”). Then he emphasizes the role of the field of folklore as a means for exploring the “群集心理” gunshū shinri (mass psychology) of the nation.

Both Sōseki and Yanagita attributed the social problems of Meiji Japan to the country’s “unnatural” modernizing process. Their analyses were undoubtedly influenced by the English philosopher Herbert Spencer’s (1820–1903) theory of Social Darwinism, which had gained considerable popularity among the Japanese intellectuals of the time. Spencer applied Darwin’s evolutionary theory to sociology, thereby advocating his concept of society as an organism that evolves gradually from a simple primordial state to a complex complete form. That Sōseki and Yanagita view society through Darwinian Theory demonstrates their kinship with Spencer. Their question regarding what should be considered “natural progress” for the Japanese, however, may quickly turn into another question: What is Japanese? And, for Yanagita, this is tantamount to asking about the origin of the nation.

Yanagita’s folkloric enterprise of creating a national essence by means of a collection of local stories and the textualization thereof became part of the nation’s grand project to find a cultural identity, propelled by the general sense of crisis in the wake of the country’s rapid modernization. As Gluck shows, the Meiji government was in a rush to establish the judiciary and parliamentary systems necessary to at least presenting an adequate appearance as a modern nation-state. However, this state, such as it was, now found itself in desperate need of some kind of ideological framework. The instantiation of “universal
sentiments” among the people, the inculcation of “a sense of nation and a civic ethos” (Gluck 102)—the formation of a national consciousness—was deemed essential. In particular, as a response to the social problems of the urban life that arose around the time of the Russo-Japanese War, there was a general tendency to idealize agrarian land as the place where national identity would surely be found. Thus, the mythology of the agrarian community was born as a critique of modernity.

Yanagita, however, contradicts himself in his attempt to refute the homogenizing force of the central government by emphasizing the heterogeneity of the periphery on which his idea of the origin of Japan is based. By engaging with the question of national identity, he had inevitably become involved in the political discourse of the modern nation-state. And, this discrepancy in his theory has become a magnet of criticism. Fukuta, for example, critically points out the genealogical bent inherent in Yanagita’s methodology:

しかし、民俗学の研究は、そのような過去に完形品があり、時間の経過のなかで何か判断もつかないような断片になってきたと考え、その意味も分からない断片を集めて、ちょうど考古学の遺物整理が接着剤で破片をつなぎ合わせて昔の形を作り出すように、失われてしまった完全な姿を作ることであろうか。(89)

[But does folklore studies consider that the perfect form lay in the past, which turned into obscure fragments over time? Is its purpose to reproduce the perfect form that was lost by collecting these obscure parts and putting them together, just like the archeologists, in arranging relics, to restore the original form by patching fragments together with glue?]

In the same vein, Ōtsuka also points out that the field of folklore studies played an important role in the formation of Japanese nationalist ideology. Both commentators problematize Yanagita’s shift of interest toward the investigation of ethnos by integrating a
relatively concrete concept, 郷土 kyōdo (native land), with an abstract one, 国家 kokka (nation).

The tension between the center and the local is evident even in Yanagita’s earliest folkloric studies. His well-known phrase from the essay “Nochi no kari kotoba no ki” [Notes on Traditional Hunting Lore] published a year before Tōno monogatari indicates his view of history, that is, the horizontal transposition of vertical time: “思ふに古今は直立する一の棒では無くて。山地に向けて之を横に寝かしたやうのが我国のさまである” (435; “history, in my view, is not a kind of a pole standing vertically; the state of our country is that of the pole laid down toward the direction of the mountains”). According to this understanding, a newly imported foreign culture spreads from the center to the periphery and so the province serves as a depository of older customs and habits. Based on this presumption, Yanagita concludes that a study of the periphery would lead to insights into the origin of the nation. This kind of conversion or incorporation of what is peripheral into the central system is, indeed, a typically Meiji move and what Benedict Anderson refers to as a kind of “imagined community.” That is, as the authorial move of a single individual, it mimics the larger policies of the Meiji government, such as the remaking of geopolitical borders from han (the feudal domain of the Edo period) to ken (prefecture), to the elevation of a local dialect (Edo) to a national language. The central assertion is that there is a Japanese people, not just a collection of villages and valleys that happen to exist along a shared archipelago. Yanagita’s folkloric undertaking, in this way, provided an ideological platform for the centralizing trajectory of the Meiji government.
9. Narrative Strategies

Yanagita’s ritual strategy for making the local into the national is enabled by his carefully crafted writing style and textual arrangement. A close reading of the text of Tōno monogatari will illuminate the way in which Yanagita incorporated rural customs and beliefs—the inner life of a distanced community—as the heart of the nation. The tale below, for instance, demonstrates a characteristic of his narrative style:

山々の奥には山人住めり。栃内村和野の佐々木嘉兵衛と云ふ人は今も七十余にて生存せり。此翁若かりし頃観をして山奥に入りしに、遥かなる岩の上に美しき女一人ありて、長き黒髪を梳りて居たり。顔の色極めて白し。不敵の男ならば直に銃を差し向けて打ち放せしに、弾に応じて倒れたり。其処に馳け付けて見れば、身のたけ高き女にて、解きたる黒髪は又そのたけよりも長かりき。後の験にせばやと思ひて其髪をいさゝか切り取り、之を繋ねて懐に入れ、やがて家路に向へしに、道の程にて耐え難く睡眠を催しければ、暫く物陰に立寄りてまどろみたり。其間夢と現との境のやうなる時に、是も丈の高き男一人近よりて懐中に手を差し入れ、かの繋ねたる黒髪を取り返し立去ると見れば忽ち睡は覚めたり。山男なるべしと云へり。(15)

[Deep in the mountain lives a yamabito (mountain man). A man named Sasaki Kahei, who is now over seventy years old, still lives in Wano in the village of Tochinai. When this old man was young, he went back into the mountains to hunt and saw from afar a beautiful woman seated on a rock combing her long black hair. Her face had a beautiful whiteness about it. Bold and fearless, he raised his gun, aimed, and brought her down with one shot. He ran up to where she was and found her to be rather tall. Her loose black hair was longer than she was tall. Thinking of it as some kind of evidence, he cut off a lock of her hair, looped it up, and put it into his chest pocket. He headed home, but along the way he felt too sleepy to continue the long walk. So he stepped into the shade and dozed off for a while. While Kahei was still on the border between sleep and waking, a man, also quite tall, drew close to him, stuck his hand into Kahei’ s chest pocket, took the loop of black hair, and ran off. At that moment Kahei woke up. He said, “That must have been a mountain man” (12–13).]
The mountain man here designates a kind of people who live in the mountains across the country and took on such work as logging, mining, and charcoal making. *Tōno monogatari* includes a number of tales about mountain people, which reveals the fact that they were feared by agrarian communities. What is remarkable about the sentences above is the use of proper nouns. Unlike typical folktales, the name of the provider of the story (“Sasaki Kahei”) as well as his place of residence (“Wano in the village of Tochinai”) is revealed as though to stress the immediacy of the experience, told firsthand by an existing person.

Yanagita included proper names in a bid to emphasize the authenticity of his collections, even though Sasaki Kizen, the native informant, concealed them in an effort to protect the privacy of the individuals. Yanagita’s positivist attitude enhanced by his journalistic, matter-of-fact writing style, which itself appeals to modern skeptical readers, however, changes immediately with the phrase, “此翁若かりし頃猟をして山奥に入りしに” (“When this old man was young, he went back into the mountains”). Along with the subsequent portrayal of a mysterious beauty combing her dazzling black hair as she sits on a rock, the readers are taken immediately into the mythical world of the folktale. What makes such a transition possible is the use of the auxiliary verb き ki as in the phrase “山奥に入りしに” yamaoku ni hairishi ni. This verb denotes the past of an immediate experience and as such lends credibility to the fantastic content of the story. This linguistic device makes for a unique contrast with the pre-modern monogatari bungaku (tale/story literature), in which the frequent use of the auxiliary けり keri effectively heightens the

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25 [S]hi as in hairishi is an inflected form of the auxiliary ki according to the grammar of classical Japanese.
impression of hearsay. Moreover, *tari* and *ri* are also auxiliary verbs that signify the duration of actions, as in the sentences “山々の奥には山人住めり” *Yamayama no oku ni wa yamabito sumeri* (“Deep in the mountain lives a yamabito”) and “長き黒髪を梳りて居たり” *nagaki kurokami o kushikezurite itari* (“combing her long black hair”). As Ishii and Ortabasi note, these auxiliaries are characteristic of the narrative of *Tōno monogatari*, which reflects the claim of the author in the preface: all the stories are “目前の出来事なり” (10; “facts that exist before our eyes”) and “現在の事実なり” (“present-day facts”). By adopting *たり tari* and *り ri* along with the auxiliary *き ki*, Yanagita conveys the impression that the man’s extraordinary experience in the past has a continuing reality in the present.

By taking advantage of the linguistic devices of classical Japanese, the narrative of *Tōno monogatari* adroitly involves the readers in an atemporal space of myth and fantasy. The combination of the reportage-style writing with the folkloric narrative works to dissolve the temporal distance between past and present. As a young man, Sasaki Kahei, now a man of seventy years and a resident of Tochinai village, went into a deep mountain area where he encountered a beautiful woman. He shot her and then dreamed that a mountain man, presumably her mate, had taken the loop of black hair that Kahei had cut from the dead woman’s head. In reading this tale, the reader in terms of the here and now is directly connected to the mythical past through the presence of the old man. In this tale, those who live in mountains are mystified as “mountain men” and “mountain women”; defending oneself against them has been acceptable, up to and including the act of killing
them. This is not a “murder,” which is after all a modern, legal category. Instead, it is an atemporal act of community and individual defense. The way in which the incident is handled makes a direct contrast to the non-ritual treatment of murder cases in Die Judenbuche, which turns precisely on the temporally disjunctive notions of murder operating in, and left unresolved by, that story.

As discussed, the text of Tōno monogatari brings readers into the interior of the community by virtue of its unique narrative technique. The contemporary novelist, Ōe Kenzaburō, for instance, comments that Yanagita’s narrative style “個の経験に縛られているわれわれを解き放って、民族を構成する大きい集団の経験へと参加せしめる” (154; “liberates us from the bounds of our individual experience and so to participate in the collective experience of a larger group, which constitutes the nation [minzoku]”). Ōe gives much of the credit to the evocative power of the imagination expressed in Yanagita’s writing. Similarly, Yoshimoto Takaaki is also enamored of Yanagita’s writing style:

書きしるしていく柳田国男の文体も、それを読んでひきこまれてゆくわたし（たち）の方も、ほら、あらたまって言わんでもわかるだろうといった内証ごとの世界にはいった感じで、＜読むもの＞と＜読まれるもの＞の関係にはいっている。いわばかれの方法も文体も読者の無意識が、村里の内側にいる感じをもつことをあてにし、それを前提に成り立っている。その魅力（魔力）にひきこまれてゆくかぎり、読む者はまちがいない、日本の村里の習俗の内側にいるという無意識をかきたてられる。それがわたし（たち）に既視現象みたいな感じをあたえる理由だともえる。（10–11）

[Yanagita’s writing as well as I (we) who as a reader gets drawn into it, both of us are in an intimate relationship between “the readers” and “what is read,”

26 “Nation” can be translated into Japanese as 国家 kokka (“country” in the sense of the modern nation-state), 国民 kokumin (people, members of a nation-state) or 民族 minzoku (ethnic group). Ōe clearly distinguishes between the terms minzoku and kokka.
getting the feeling of having entered the secretive world of “See, we don’t need to say it. We already knew it.” Both his methodology and style, so to speak, rely and are premised on the assumption that his readers unconsciously get the feeling of being inside the village unconsciously. Insofar as the readers are attracted to its charm (magic), it will doubtlessly stir up their unconscious to imagine themselves within the folkways of a Japanese village. This is probably the reason that [his writing] gives me (us) a sense of déjà vu.]

The readers experience *déjà vu* because what they have repressed under the control of daily consciousness is activated through storytelling. A journey into the inner life of the community thus turns out to be a journey toward the origin of the self.

10. Collective Fantasy

The world of *Tōno monogatari* is dominated by a sense of fear and uncanny but also by nostalgia, which is derived from the sense of taboo. Freud provides an illuminating explanation regarding the relationship between nostalgia and the taboo. Drawing on the lexical properties of the German *unheimlich* (uncanny), he describes this as synonymous with *heimlich* (familiar/intimate). It is for this reason that the sense of something as uncanny is often accompanied by a sense of intimacy. To summarize Freud’s theory on the uncanny: our feeling of the uncanny is evoked through the working of the unconscious, that is, when what was once *heimisch* (= *heimlich* familiar) returns to us through the process of repression (“Das Unheimliche”). The uncanny refers to the return of death, death in the sense of a phantom of a non-existent past. In other words, we feel fear when what has been repressed in the unconscious surfaces to the conscious mind in the form of taboo.
In our consideration of the correlation between taboo/prohibition and communal identity, Yoshimoto’s theory of 共同幻想 kyōdō gensō (collective fantasy) is helpful. Unlike Marxist theorists who regard human activity as solely determined by material conditions, Yoshimoto explores human motivations in the world of ideas that are constructed on the basis of collective fantasy. According to Yoshimoto, the collective fantasy signifies “人間が個体としてではなく、なんらかの共同性としてこの世界と関係する観念の在り方” (16; “the way of ideas, according to which humans relate to this world not as individuals but as a certain communal being”). Any kind of community such as family, school, and nation can be included in this category. Yoshimoto regards folklore and myths as a valuable resource for exploring the collective fantasy of the ordinary Japanese (常民 jyōmin) and illustrates the way in which a closed agricultural community of blood relationships sustains itself on the shared fear of outsiders and supernatural events, using Tōno monogatari as the primary text. Yoshimoto comments as follows on the stereotype of a mountain woman—though she is actually a village girl who having been kidnapped by a mountain man has become his wife:

この種の山人譚で重要なことは、村落共同体から離れたものは、恐ろしい目にあい、きっと不幸になるという〈恐怖の共同性〉が象徴されて いることである。村落共同体から〈出離〉することへの禁制（タブー）が、この種の山人譚の根にひそむ〈恐怖の共同性〉である。[...] 未明の時代や場所の住民にとって、共同の禁制でむすばれた共同体の外の土地や異族は、なにかわからない未知の恐怖がつきまとう異空間であった。心の体験としてみれば、ほとんど他界にひとしいものであった。 (59–60)

[What is important about this kind of mountain man lore is that it symbolizes “the collectivity of fear”; that is, those who left the village community are to confront terrifying experiences and no doubt become unhappy. The prohibition (taboo) against “the renouncement” of the village community is what
constitutes “the collectivity of fear” rooted in the heart of this kind of mountain
man lore. […] For the people of primordial place and time, lands and folks
outside the community that were tied together through collective prohibition
signified the unusual space that was accompanied by unknown fear. As a
mental experience, it was almost equivalent to the other world.]

It is out of the group psyche, the collective fear of behaving in a way considered taboo, that
the concept of ijin came into being. The collective fantasy, in this way, affects people’s
thinking and behavior while sublimating the private experience of the individual to that of
the public and communal.

11. Textual Arrangement: Denial of Novelistic Time

Yanagita’s way of involving readers in an inter-subjective community is distinctive in
regard to the aspects integrated in the book as well. Tōno monogatari, with its unique
mixture of science and literature, does not fall into any clear-cut genre. Despite its highly
poetic narrative style, the text is presented in a proper scientific fashion with the collected
individual tales marked with numbers to emphasize the scholarly quality of the publication.
Moreover, what is noteworthy about its textual arrangement is that it subverts the modern
notion of time. Unlike typical prose narratives, wherein the story consists of a series of
events arranged in temporal succession, each tale in Tōno monogatari is a fragment
assorted into groups according to topic. This system whereby topics are indexed allows the
readers to search for a tale from anywhere, without being obliged to start reading at the
beginning of the book. The concept of time in Tōno monogatari, in this way, opposes the
linear sense of time of modern novels that, according to Anderson, constitutes the
ideological foundation of a modern nation. In other words, the modern nation represents the
modernist attitude of defining the nation retrospectively by tracing it back to an (imagined) past.

To be sure, it is this sort of desire for the origin that connects the concept of nation with modern novels. I will explain this correlation in terms of the notion of time. Generally, the act of reading is driven by the desire for meaning, which is to be disclosed in the passing of time configured by the plot. Simultaneously, however, the meaning of an event is not apparent to us until the event has already become the narrated past, which is to say that the meaning of a story becomes fully apprehensible only in the repetition of time in an attempt to restore the past. The concept of repetitive time, in this way, is shared by the novel and the modern nation in its desire to identify the self based on origin.

Unlike novelistic time tinged with a sense of historicity, time in Tōno monogatari is flattened through processes of fragmentation and homogenization. By denying the linear quality of novelistic time, the text enunciates a seamless continuity between the mythical past and the readerly present. And, we can regard this kind of flattened time as Yanagita’s methodological realization of his claim that the tales are “present-day facts.” By equating the past with the present, he aims to represent the nation in the spatial expanse instead of the temporal. He detemporalizes the country’s past and places it in the physical space of the text, and so he presents Tōno monogatari as the embodiment of the nation per se.

12. Desire for Unity

Yanagita’s strategic devices for Tōno monogatari—its narrative style and textual arrangement—are inseparable from the general sense of linguistic crisis that arose in the
process of Japan’s modernization. He found it necessary to establish a new methodology to grapple with the problems of modernization, as Satō argues:

このような〈管理化〉の意味論的等質化作用と抽象化作用によって、現代社会のことはでは把えられない無意識の方に追いやりられた「意味の諸次元の総体性の奪回」と細片に砕かれててしまった「全体の具体的な連関の総体性の獲得」とを重層させること、すなわち〈管理化〉そのものの本質的限界を知り、その根拠を自覚化してゆく実践としてはじめて、〈総体化〉への志向が必然となる。(117)

[Our aspirations of “totality” become necessary only as a practice of knowing the limitation intrinsic to “control” and through an awareness of the rationale thereof, that is, by superimposing the “recovery of totality in every dimension of meaning” that has been driven into the unconscious and thus become incomprehensible in the language of modern society, and through the “acquisition of totality in concrete connections of the whole,” which has been broken into pieces—both the corollary to the semantic homogenization and abstraction of such “control.”]

As official efforts to control language intensified, people confronted the issue of how to restore “original” meanings to words. First, as a means of recovering meanings lost through “abstraction,” Yanagita creates a narrative style in order to evoke a feeling of interiority. Secondly, “as the practice of knowing the limitation intrinsic to “control” and through an awareness of the rationale thereof” he conceives a way of presenting the collected tales in fragmentary pieces. By displaying the fragments as they are, Yanagita intends to make readers aware of the lack of semantic relations of words. The exhibition of disconnected tales in Tōno monogatari represents a gesture of aspiring to unity.

However, Yanagita’s purpose in undertaking this folkloric project is not restricted to this. The collected tales, in his view, should be unified according to the principle of serving the public, specifically as a collective memory. Yet, we first need to be clear about the concept of collective memory, which, according to Wulf Kansteiner, is distinctly different
from that of “collected memory.” Whereas the former is “an aggregate of individual memories which behaves and develops just like its individual composites” (186), the latter denotes the memory that is carefully selected or manipulated according to the interest of the group concerned. Collective memory is “based in a society and its inventory of signs and symbols” (188). We can say in other words that the collected memories of each individual villager turn into the collective memory of Tōno, and further into that of the Japanese people as a nation. At the center of this interventional operation is Yanagita as the editor of the book. His recurrent references to the methodological practice of folklore studies are important in this respect: “必要なのは部分々々の記述や分析でなくて、其後に来るべき綜合なのである” (“Minkan” 106; “What is necessary is not the description or analysis of each individual part but the unification that comes thereafter”). They allude to his ultimate purpose: that of establishing a system of knowledge by means of the methodology of comparison and unification. To this end, Yanagita attaches particular importance to the book form as a complete and all-encompassing system while disregarding spur-of-the-moment scribbles as worthless:

[First, they say, unification is required for a book. There was a basic definition, according to which a book must be a form of knowledge that has gone through selection and re-construction based on necessities. In other words, a book must be the so-called “grand narrative” of an author/editor who guarantees its unity.]
Collected stories undergo a process of selection and classification, whereupon they are presented as a totality in the form of a book. Underlying this totality, i.e., the complete world of *Tōno monogatari* is knowledge about the origin of the nation.

**Conclusion**

Natsume Sōseki’s “Dai San-ya” [The Third Night], included in his collection of short stories *Yume Jyū-ya* [Ten Nights of Dreams] (1908), tells of the narrator’s uncanny dream that the blind child he has been carrying on his back has turned out to be the man he murdered a hundred years ago. Critics have offered numerous interpretations of this uncanny folklore-based tale. The tale brings to mind Herbert Spencer’s theory of Social Darwinism. By coining the phrase “survival of the fittest,” Spencer advocated the concept of society as a system in which the weak and the maladjusted are eliminated by “natural selection.” His theory appears to hold true for official policies during the process of the modernization of Japan. The collective consciousness of the Japanese after the Meiji era was oriented toward the “more advanced” Western model, thereby forsaking their traditional values and beliefs as inappropriate to a civilized society. Through the nationwide institutionalization of education and Western medicine, the Meiji government promoted the campaign of eradicating pre-modern faith in folk superstitions and invisible monsters as pathological symptoms. They were considered threats to the healthy national body (国体 *kokutai*) whereby “blind faith” in invisible things was associated with the blindess caused by the eye disease, trachoma (Figal 92–97).
Sōseki’s blind child symbolizes nothing but the nation’s past. Yanagita, similarly, sought to discover the national essence in what has been driven out of the consciousness of the Japanese on the way to Japan’s incarnation as a modern nation-state. The fantastic, uncanny world of Tōno monogatari is the materialization of the collective memory of the past.

Yanagita’s purpose, however, went beyond that of retaining the disappearing voices of the ancestors. That is, he attempted to create a past on which a Japanese national identity could be based, and for this purpose conceived the ritual apparatus of the book experience. Tōno monogatari provides a liminal space between reality and imagination. By virtue of its narrative techniques and textual arrangement, the text invites readers to become part of the inter-subjective community by immersing themselves in the collective memory of the imagined past. Tōno monogatari is a literary/folkloric undertaking designed to overcome the challenges of modernity through the creation of a ritual space in the text.
CHAPTER FOUR

Die Judenbuche as an Anti-Ritual Novel

1. Anti-Ritual Novel

In the three texts explored in the previous chapters, the norms and principles of the fictional world are visualized on the occasion of ritual events. The readers become involved in the imaginary world of fiction by submitting themselves to its norms while—as Bell has argued—simultaneously projecting their own schemes onto the text. An inter-subjective textual community, in this way, is created through the interplay between the text and its readers. However, a question arises: To what extent does the readers’ subjectivity play a part in creating the ritual of reading? In other words, can any literary work be ritualized regardless of the structure and context of the text? In order to examine the workings of the text—both in terms of form and content—as a determinant of reading experience and to explore the limits of ritual reading, this chapter considers Die Judenbuche [The Jew’s Beech] (1842) by Annette von Droste-Hülshoff (1797–1848).

The title of this chapter includes the term “anti-ritual” for a reason. Whereas the ritual texts discussed in the previous chapters create an inter-subjective community by facilitating the readers’ recognition of its shared values and beliefs, Die Judenbuche demonstrates the impossibility of such communication. I use the term anti-ritual specifically because the work operates on the basis of the failure of establishing communal
norms as a strategic device, unlike typical modern novels that are simply non-ritual because of their focused description of individual lives. *Die Judenbuche* depicts community life, the norms and principles of which emerge on the occasion of an extraordinary event but only to perplex the readers. As in *Die schwarze Spinne*, Christian morality is the central theme of this novel, the supremacy of which over other existing systems of law is taken as read. Nonetheless, this law, which is about self-awareness in regard to mercy, namely, “judge not lest ye be judged” (Matt. 7.1) as a performative imperative imposes itself on the readers. And, thus, it prevents them from making any of the judgments necessary to grasp the meaning of the text. Thus, the purpose of the present chapter is to investigate the mechanism governing the relationship between textual norms and the experience of reading.

*Die Judenbuche* presents itself as a hermeneutic impossibility. The story revolves around four mysterious deaths. Hermann Mergel, the father of the protagonist Friedrich, is found dead of unknown causes on a stormy night. Hermann’s death leaves Friedrich and his mother in abject poverty. When Friedrich is twelve, he is given into the keeping of his uncle Simon, a member of the notorious bandit group, the Blue-Smocks. Friedrich grows up to be a conceited young man under the negative influence of his uncle. The climax of the first half of the story is marked by the death of the forester Brandis, who is murdered while patrolling the forest in order to prevent timber from being stolen. The Blue-Smocks are strongly suspected of the crime. But without the cooperation of the villagers, the investigation stalls.
The death of Brandis marks a turning point for Friedrich, who suspecting that his uncle is involved, refrains from going to church for confession. After several years, a Jewish moneylender named Aaron is found dead in the forest. This time, suspicion falls on Friedrich, whom Aaron had publically disgraced over the matter of an unpaid bill. However, Friedrich has fled with his cousin Johannes. Nonetheless, the case remains unsolved, as there is no definitive proof. In response, an avenging group of Jews purchases the beech near which Aaron’s body was found. The Jews engrave on it what is, to the German-speaking villagers, a mysterious Hebrew inscription.

After this incident, the narrative makes a sudden leap to twenty-eight years later. On Christmas Eve, a crippled old man, identifying himself as Johannes Niemand, Friedrich’s cousin, returns to the village and tells the Baron and his wife about his life as a slave in Turkey. One day, the man goes missing, and eventually his body is found hanging from a beech tree, the same place where Aaron’s body had been discovered twenty-eight years earlier. It is at this point that the meaning of the Hebrew inscription is disclosed in German: “Wenn du dich diesem Orte nahest, so wird es dir ergehen, wie du mir getan hast” (59; “If thou drawest nigh unto this place, it will befall thee as thou didst unto me” 107). These mysterious words, with their strain of Romantic fatalism, strongly suggest that the dead man is not Johannes but Friedrich, a speculation confirmed by a broad scar on the body. Regardless of these implications, however, the narrative is devoid of a definitive voice of authority and so the ultimate judgment—as to whether the dead man is Friedrich or Johannes—is left to the reader.
This is just an example of the many mysteries that the text presents to the readers. There is no end to the questions the readers might ask: How did Hermann Mergel die? Was it really Friedrich who murdered Aaron? Was Friedrich’s death a suicide or a revenge killing carried out by the Jews? The narrator describes the story in a sober reportage-like style, even offering dates for the events. It is as though the narrator provides all the information only to perplex the readers and enunciate the impossibility of finding out the truth.

The mysteries and problems of Die Judenbuche have been the subject of numerous interpretive attempts. Some researchers pay attention to the text’s anti-Semitic elements (Doerr, Helfer, Donahue), whereas others evaluate the novel as anticipating Naturalism due to its depiction of the protagonist’s life determined by the social environment (Silz, Gray). Others attempt to explicate the novel’s narrative technique and the means by which it creates its mysteries. In yet other approaches, the focus is the moral issue of guilt and redemption (Silz, Wiese, King), the understanding of which, however, rests on how the ambiguous narrative is interpreted. In William Donahue’s view, for instance, “Die Judenbuche is fundamentally a religious narrative that is nevertheless marked by an extraordinary degree of ambiguity” (45). Furthermore, Heinrich Henel offers an insightful argument from an epistemological point of view: “Ethos der Novelle ist also nicht die Verkettung von Schuld und Sühne, sondern die Einsicht, daß Verstand und Vernunft des Menschen ohnmächtig sind, die Wirklichkeit zu erfassen und die Wahrheit zu erkennen (150; The ethos of the novel, in essence, is not the linkage between guilt and its atonement
but the insight that human intellect and reason are incapable of comprehending reality and of recognizing truth).

The purpose of the present chapter, however, is to explore the text in terms of ritual experience. That is to say, I will examine the way in which the text subverts the readers’ ritual experience by performing the very norm that is textually encoded. In short, I read the work not as a detective novel or as true crime fiction. Instead, I read it in light of ritual theory, that is, as an anti-ritual and performative text.

1. Historical Context

As noted in the introduction, Germany during the time in which Die Judenbuche was written was in a politically volatile situation. After the Congress of Vienna, the conservative order was restored but only on the surface. Underneath, in reality, were the voices of the liberals—mainly the bourgeois and intellectuals. They aspired to the unification of Germany on the one hand while pursuing the freedom of economic activities on the other. Consequently, the Deutscher Zollverein (German Customs Union) came into existence in 1833 and so economic unification was achieved before political unification took place. The establishment of the Zollverein paved the way for the development of infrastructure to facilitate industrialization in Germanic areas, as represented by the monetary integration and the construction of the railway network, which enabled the interchange of commodities beyond the borders of sovereign states.
In *Die Judenbuche*, the villagers engage in illegal logging and trafficking of timber as a way to make money, which suggests that capitalism was already exerting its influence in remote provincial communities. Although Droste von Hülshoff, as a member of the nobility, distanced herself from worldly affairs and lived in seclusion with her family, her preoccupation with *Heimat* (home) in *Die Judenbuche* and in other works along with her criticism of materialism should be understood as a literary objection to the growing influence of the liberal nationalist movement.

2. *Geschichte eines Algierer-Sklaven*

A comparison of the novel with its source text will bring to light how Droste-Hülshoff created ambiguity in her text. *Geschichte eines Algierer-Sklaven* [Story of an Algerian Slave] (1818) was written by Annette’s uncle August von Haxthausen (1792–1866) based on the record of a real criminal case. A young Annette frequented her uncle’s castle where she probably learned about the story. Although both texts deal with the murder of a Jew, unlike *Die Judenbuche*, a good part of von Haxthausen’s story consists of a report on documentation pertaining to the murder, such as the autopsy of the murdered victim and a letter by Hermann Winkelhannes—Friedrich’s model—from exile.

Another striking difference is that the narrator of *Geschichte eines Algierer-Sklaven* does not call into question the idea that Hermann murdered the Jew and so the narrator provides a moral lesson at the end of the story:

So hat der Mensch 17 Jahre ungebeugt und ohne Verzweifelung die härteste Sklaverei des Leibes und Geistes ertragen, aber die Freiheit und volle Straflosigkeit hat er nicht ertragen dürfen. Er mußte sein Schicksal erfüllen,
und weil Blut für Blut, Leben für Leben eingesetzt ist, ihn aber menschliches Gesetz nicht mehr erreichte, hat er, nachdem er lange Jahre fern umher geschweift, wieder durch des Geschicks geheimnißvolle Gewalt zu dem Kreis, Ort und Boden des Verbrechens zurückgebannt, dort sich selbst Gerechtigkeit geübt. (158)

[Unyieldingly, without despair, the man tolerated the hardest slavery of body and mind for 17 years, but he could not endure freedom and perfect impunity. He had to fulfill his fate; the law of blood for blood, life for life is deployed but human law could not reach him anymore. After having roamed afar for a long time, the mysterious force of fate brought him back to the circle, to the place and the soil of the crime, for which he was banished and thus he wrought justice upon himself.]

To whom does this narrative voice belong? In declaring “He had to fulfill his fate,” the narrator illuminates the life of Hermann Winkelhannes in the context of the Old Testament. He/she locates the source of authority in a transcendent God, in the name of whom the events are interpreted and given meanings. However, the fatalistic view of this account—no one can escape from justice—is diluted in Die Judenbuche, where the truth about the deaths remains a mystery. Furthermore, unlike Droste-Hülshoff’s novel, the Hebrew inscription in the source text is disclosed in German from the beginning: “der Mörder solle keines rechten Todes sterben” (153; The murderer shall die an indecent death).

The comparison of Die Judenbuche with its source text highlights its literary quality. Unlike Geschichte eines Algierer-Sklaven, which was read only within the close circle of family and friends, Die Judenbuche was published in one of the most influential literary magazines of the time, Cotta’s Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser [Morning Paper for Educated Readers].

Socio-historically, this difference reflects the transition in term of the relationship between the author and the readers, namely, from an immediate, and in some cases, cult
relationship to an invisible one mediated by the publisher. As the title of the magazine indicates, its target readers were the educated classes, whose contributors included renowned literary figures including J. W. Goethe, Alexander von Humboldt, Jean Paul, Heinrich Heine to name only a few. That Droste von Hülshoff presented her work for public evaluation through this magazine reveals her literary ambition. That is, she contrived it as a highly poetic piece of work rather than as popular literature. By abandoning the intelligibility of story and exploring the darkness of human nature, the work demonstrates its claim to be a piece of “true literature.” In fact, the publication of this story in the major literary magazine brought her fame. Nonetheless, the reaction of her contemporary readers to *Die Judenbuche* was not always as favorable as that of today. Although the novel’s succinct, vigorous style, sharp observations, and realistic description of folk life met with high praise, its erratic plot and the absence of *Verklärung* (idealization, transfiguration) was considered a weakness. It is noteworthy, though, that the story’s ambiguous plot, resisting any reductive interpretation has brought renewed attention to *Die Judenbuche* in the post-modern context.

3. Detection and Confession

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27 Originally titled as *Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände* [Morning Paper for Educated Class], the magazine was founded in Stuttgart in 1807 by the publishing house of Cotta. From 1839, it bore the title *Morgenblatt für gebildete Leser*. Later, the magazine added a literary supplement. The magazine was published until 1865.

28 After the author’s death, *Die Judenbuche* was consigned to oblivion until it was re-published in bookform in 1860. These critiques were shared by some novelists of the later generation such as Turgenjew and Fontane (Moritz, 113).
Evidently Droste-Hülshoff intentionally produced a detective-story-like tension by means of an ambiguous narrative standpoint. Notwithstanding this, the novel abandons the style of confession, another point of contrast with *Geschichte eines Algierer-Sklaven* wherein the protagonist’s confession including his own detailed account of his life in exile featured prominently. The absence of the confessional style is remarkable considering the fact that it is a narrative device characteristic of the detective novels of the nineteenth century. Historically, confession is inseparable from the development of the modern novel, as Michel Foucault brilliantly illustrates in his account of the ways in which the Catholic Church created interiority through a system of confession that changed human relationships at a fundamental level:

In any case, next to the testing rituals, next to the testimony of witnesses, and the learned methods of observation and demonstration, the confession became one of the West’s most highly valued techniques for producing truth. We have since become a singularly confessing society. The confession has spread its effects far and wide. It plays a part in justice, medicine, education, family relationships, and love relations, in the most ordinary affairs of everyday life, and in the most solemn rites; one confesses one’s crimes, one’s sins, one’s thoughts and desires, one’s illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one’s parents, one’s educators, one’s doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. One confesses—or is forced to confess. (59)

Foucault regards confession as a kind of ritual, as it serves to create authority through the revelation of “truth.” The authorities in the detective novel are Dupin, Sherlock Holmes, and the like, genius detectives who solve mysteries by logic and reason. What characterizes the detective narrative as a literary genre is its adherence to legality and its rejection of contingency or supernatural intervention.
The detective story, thus, provides an occasion for a communal celebration of human reason, the very authority that brings to light a hidden “truth.” The denial of confession in *Die Judenbuche*, as symbolically demonstrated by Friedrich’s decision to refrain from attending church can thus be understood as the absence of narrative authority through which the reader is guided to the truth. Due to the absence of a ritual-making authority, the interior—the truth concealed in the human mind—remains secret, never to be externalized or shared with the public.

4. The Forest as a Ritual Stage

In *Die Judenbuche*, the forest is introduced as an important motif producing the effect of ambiguity. Four deaths occur in the forest: those of Hermann, Brandis, Aaron, and the man identified as Friedrich. As the site for extraordinary events, the forest serves as a performance stage for “Spiel[s] von Enthüllen und Verhüllen” (Bernd 356; “Play(s) of unveiling and veiling”). According to Bernd, the forest has the role of functioning as “eine Art Katalyse der angeborenen Eigenschaften der Menschen, die sonst durch die Außenschale der Gesellschaft nicht zur Geltung kämen” (359; “a sort of catalyst for innate humans traits, which otherwise would not become manifest in society”). Indeed, the darkness of the forest entices people to commit criminal acts, bringing to light their hidden desires. On the other hand, it only reveals the results and so that answers to key questions as to “[w]ie diese Verbrechen begangen werden und wer sie begeht” (359; “how these crimes were committed and who committed them”) remain enshrouded in the forest as an eternal mystery. The readers can do nothing but draw their own subjective conclusions
from what is offered to them as evidence. The forest, in this way, functions as a powerful metaphor for the message of the novel: no one can know the truth, i.e., what is in the minds of humans.

The mysterious and uncanny image of the forest in the novel reflects the influence of Romanticism. The young Droste-Hülshoff had become acquainted with the Brothers Grimm, who were central figures in the German Romantic Movement, through her uncle’s circle. In their folklore tales as well as other Romantic works of art, the forest is represented as a magical locale where supernatural creatures such as fairies and demons dwell. The image of the forest as a mythical space had, thus, become internalized by the Germans as an aspect of their psychological scenery. The forest in *Die Judenbuche* is portrayed as a site for murder, suicide, and Jewish mysticism. And, as such it is imbued with qualities, perhaps magic, that cannot be understood through human reason. To put it in psychological terms, it is a symbolic landscape signifying the chaotic aspect of human nature beyond the control of daily consciousness.

Simultaneously, the novel sees the forest in a realistic light, depicting it as the focal point of conflicting interests. As the forest belongs to the landed gentry, felling trees there without authorization is strictly prohibited. On the other hand, timber theft has become part of everyday life for the villagers, who rely on woodland resources for sustenance. Thus, the timber is now patrolled “weniger auf gesetzlichem Wege, als in stets erneuten Versuchen, Gewalt und List mit gleichen Waffen zu überbieten” (4; “less by lawful means than by continually renewed attempts to overcome violence and cunning with the same weapons”; 14). In fact, two systems of law are operative in the community with respect to rights to the
forest: patrimonial law and natural law. Patrimonial law is ceded to the local lord by the state, whereas natural law is universal, inherent in the nature of man and the world (Moritz 24–27). According to natural law, the theft of timber is justified as the natural right of the villagers. It is for this reason that they tacitly rebel against aristocratic authority by refusing to cooperate with the investigation into the murder of Brandis. By opposing natural to patrimonial law, the narrative relativizes the authority of the community. Further, there is another law at work in the forest: the law of Judaism, namely, the retributory justice as demonstrated by the Hebrew inscription.

None of these three laws, however, is given precedence in the novel. The logical scientific approach of patrimonial law is insufficient for the task of solving problems as exemplified by the murder case of Brandis: “[...] die Tat lag klar am Tage; über den Täter aber waren die Anzeigen so schwach, daß, obschon alle Umstände die Blaukittel dringend verdächtigten, man doch nicht mehr als Mutmaßungen wagen konnte” (31; “[...] that a crime had been committed was obvious; however, the evidence incriminating any actual person was so weak, that, although all known facts cast the deepest suspicion on the Blue-Smocks, only conjectures could be advanced” 58–59). The Blue-Smocks are not arrested due to the lack of conclusive evidence. This reliance on positivist methodologies is a weakness. On the other hand, the narrator does not approve the unconditional right of the villagers to behave in any way they wish. This is evinced by her criticism of the violence perpetrated by the Blue-Smocks. Also, as will be elaborated, the narrator opposes Jewish legalism from the standpoint of Christian morality.
The legal system in this community is dysfunctional, which indicates the dysfunction of ritual. Laws and norms are an inseparable part of ritual, as Nick Crossley notes: “To initiate a ritual is to make a powerful normative appeal to very deeply rooted cultural dispositions” (40). Ritual as a self-referential act encourages the participants to subject themselves to the order. For instance, rites of passage in primordial communities or any religious rituals are governed by norms and codes of conduct that embody the values, beliefs, and the worldview of the community. By adhering to them, the participants become part of the ritual order. When Bell notes that generating difference is an integral part of ritualization, the point is to place given norms and worldviews in a clear hierarchal order. The text of Die Judenbuche, however, serves only to obscure the hierarchy of norms, instead of disclosing “latent schemes” (Bell 105). Thus, the readers of Die Judenbuche are precluded from participating in the ritual celebration of the text by giving meaning to it.

5. Johannes as a Doppelgänger

What intensifies the ambiguous effect of the text and makes interpretive judgment extremely difficult is the identity of Johannes. As an orphan, Johannes has an obscure background, although his striking resemblance to Friedrich, which is strong enough to appall Margret, suggests that he is Simon’s illegitimate son. Ragged and shy, Johannes is a “verkümmeretes Spiegelbild” (Silz 684; “vestigial mirror image”) of Friedrich who had once been a pitiable young boy. That Friedrich gives away his violin to Johannes symbolizes his break with a dreamy boyhood and his entry into the adult world of monetary exchange. As the negative shadow of Friedrich, Johannes accompanies him even as Friedrich flees to
Turkey. As Walter Silz points out, Droste-Hülshoff was fascinated with the concept of the mirror and used the motif recurrently in her poems and ballads. The *doppelgänger* motif embodied in the relationship between Friedrich and Johannes, in particular, indicates the influence of late Romanticism as expressed in work such as E. T. A. Hoffmann’s *Die Elixiere des Teufels* [The Devil’s Elixirs] (1815/16) and *Der Sandmann* [The Sandman] (1816). The employment of this motif for Droste-Hülshoff, however, meant more than just adding a romantic-gothic flavor to the story. It is a trope expressing her conviction of “the ineluctable duality and contradictoriness of all things” (Silz 684) at the heart of her literary endeavor.

Related to the identity of Johannes, Jacques Derrida touches on the motif of the illegitimate child by referring to Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Plato regarded “the spoken word (parole),” the legitimate son of “knowledge” as being superior to “the written word (écriture),” a bastard:

> Logos is a son, then, a son that would be destroyed in his very presence without the present attendance of his father. His father who answers. His father who speaks for him and answers for him. Without his father, he would be nothing but, in fact, writing. (1840)

Derrida overturns Plato’s assertion by pointing out, under the term of “dissemination,” the possibility of an *écriture* that is not subject to one who scatters seeds: the “father of logos.” According to Derrida, dissemination is a random uncontrollable signification that ultimately signifies nothing, a notion that is coincidentally suggested by the surname of Johannes: Niemand, meaning *nobody* in German. In the novel, the man who returns home under the name of Johannes apparently turns out to be Friedrich. However, this is merely the Baron’s speculation based on the dead man’s scar. Depending on whether the man is
Friedrich or Johannes, the text conveys an entirely different meaning. The ambiguous narrative in this way generates the infinite possibility of signification. Thus, we see the embodiment of Derrida’s notion of dissemination in the person of Johannes as the illegitimate son of knowledge.

6. The Ritual of Make-Believe

Drawing on Derrida, we can say that every reading produces new meaning, creating a new context without ever returning to the origin. To put it another way, ritual reading rests on the illusion of the homogeneity of context. Accordingly, it is necessary to take into consideration the issue of context as a determiner of readerly response because a successful communication through the act of reading, in my view, depends on the matter of the provision of a context wherein fictional utterances can be accepted as “truth.” To consider the notion of “fictional truth” along with its underlying mechanism, Walton’s make-believe theory is helpful. According to Walton, the experience of fiction differs significantly from other perceptual experiences in that the former requires the act of imagining on the part of the recipient—whether a viewer, a listener, or a reader. In the act of reading, readers participate in “the game of make-believe” while overlaying their experiences of reality with that of a fictional story in imagination: “So an appreciator who participates in a game in the minimal sense of imagining what is fictional will engage in self-imaginings as well” (214). Therefore, what is noteworthy is that the readers not only imagine fictional events or utterances but, being themselves a “reflexive prop” (Walton), imagine from the inside that they believe or know the fictional events or utterances.
A question arises: Is there any necessary condition for the game of make-believe to be operative? According to Walton, an applicable principle is vital if the fictional truth is to be generated. Two types of principles, he argues, determine what is imagined as truth: one based on similarity with the real world (Reality Principle = RP) and the other concerning something mutually believed in a society (Mutual Belief Principle = MBP). MBP is “based on what is ‘overtly’ believed in the work’s community of origin rather than on the real world as it actually is” (151). It is a kind of worldview or context according to which a proposition, say, “the earth is flat” is accepted as a fictional truth without being denied by superior geographical knowledge. The idea is that MBP offers insights into the ritual experience of reading that, with its truth claim, subverts the absolute validity of the material world.

A kind of text that achieves a successful game of make-believe consists in distinct principles of generation. Take the texts of Kusa-meikyū and Die schwarze Spinne for instance: here, unrealistic characters and events such as monsters, goblins, and a pact with the devil are accepted as fictional truth in the fantastic context of each respective story. The readers of these texts accept the truthfulness of the events by imagining themselves to be members of the fictional community. In contrast, Die Judenbuche only has ambiguous principles of generation. There is no certainty as to, for example, the rumor about Hermann’s ghost or Friedrich’s death (whether it is a murder committed in retaliation by the Jews or Friedrich’s atoning for his sin). The narrator only suggests possibilities of interpretation without ever clarifying the underlying principle so that the text lacks the context necessary for the readers to make interpretive judgments. Instead, the text
strategically demonstrates the polysemous interpretation of the story in order to elicit the readers’ awareness of the impossibility of communication. If a ritual experience of reading produces a textual community through the readers’ (imagined) recognition of shared significance, *Die Judenbuche* is certainly non- or anti-ritual in that it intentionally subverts the illusion of such communication.

7. **Christian Justice as the Law of Primacy**

As observed, *Die Judenbuche* is devoid of a distinct semantic context, i.e., the principle of generation necessary to apprehend the meaning of the text, given its intricate system of norms. These principles include the natural law of the villagers, statutory law, and Jewish legalism, the latter of which is connected here with the fatalistic view of destiny. The ambiguity of the hierarchical relationship between the norms prevents the readers from identifying themselves as members of the fictional community by accepting its principles as truth. However, there is a supreme law that stands above all other principles: the Christian morality of mercy, the supremacy of which is pronounced through the poem given in the preface:

Wo ist die Hand so zart, daß ohne Irren
Sie sondern mag beschränkten Hirnes Wirren,
So fest, daß ohne Zittern sie den Stein
Mag schleudern auf ein arm verkümmert Sein?
Wer wagt es, eitlen Blutes Drang zu messen,
Zu wägen jedes Wort, das unvergessen
In junge Brust die zähen Wurzeln trieb,
Des Vorurteils geheimen Seelendieb?
Du Glücklicher, geboren und gehegt
Im lichten Raum, von frommer Hand gepflegt,
Leg hin die Waagschal, nimmer dir erlaubt!
Laß ruhn den Stein—er trifft dein eignes Haupt! (3)

[Where is the hand so fraught with gentle art
That tangled skein of narrow mind may part,
So steadfast that untembling it may throw
The stone upon a wretched creature’s woe?
Who dares to measure surge of vain ambition,
To ponder prejudice, the soul’s perdition,
To weigh each word which, still retained,
Its power o’er youthful heart has gained?
Thou happy man, thou being born in light,
Cherished and guided piously towards right,
Judgment is not thy task, lay scales aside!
Take up no stone—lest it towards thee should glide! (11)]

The recurring motif of the stone suggests the story of the New Testament in which Jesus
saves a woman from being stoned for committing adultery. By placing the poem in the
preface, that is, outside the frame of the fictional narrative, the author proclaims the
primacy of Christian law in transcendental terms. Thus, the poem points to a crucial shift
from an aesthetic of torture (to which the patriarchal Christian view of Die schwarze Spinne
belongs) to an aesthetic of mercy, which anticipates a modern notion of the separation
between church and state and the “mercy” of presumed innocence before the law.

The ascendancy of Christian morality as announced in Die Judenbuche reflects
Droste-Hülshoff’s own standing as a professed Catholic. She was, however, not as steadfast
as Gotthelf in her faith. According to her biographers, she suffered an ongoing crisis
throughout her life (Berglar, Silz), an experience that was also a hallmark of the modern
intellectual. A new zeitgeist was in the air of the time. Due to the development of natural

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29 John 8.1-11. Jesus said to the Pharisees, “‘He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.’” Thus, Jesus contests the primacy of traditional Judaic law, embodied in the person of the Pharisee.
science, religion was giving way to the worship of material wealth and human reason, such
that God receded into the background as the consciousness of the individual came to the
fore. Droste-Hülshoff’s collection of religious poems, Das Geistliche Jahr [The Spiritual
Year] (1851) conveys the skepticism she struggling with:

Ist es der Glaube nur, den du verheissen,
 Dann bin ich tot.
O, Glaube wie lebendgen Blutes Kreisen,
Er tut mir not!
Ich hab ihn nicht.
Ach, nimmst du statt des Glaubens nicht die Liebe
Und des Verlangens tränenschweren Zoll,
So Weiss ich nicht, wie mir noch Hoffnung bliebe:
Gebrochen ist der Stab, das Mass ist voll
Mir zum Gericht. (“Am Pfingstmontage”)

[If it is faith alone that Thou hast promised,
Then I am dead.
Oh, faith, I have need of it,
Like the coursing of living blood!
But I do not have it
Ah, if in place of faith Thou wilt not accept love,
And the tear-laden tribute of yearning,
Then I do not know how I may still have hope.
The staff is broken, the Measure is full
In judgment of me. (“On Whit Monday”)]

This is a frank confession of the poet’s lack of faith and her poignant longing for salvation.
As the opening lines “Ist es der Glaube nur, den du verheissen, / Dann bin ich tot” (“If it is
faith alone that Thou hast promised / Then I am dead”) indicate, faith, she believes, is the
only way to God. Thus, adherence to external norms brings one to nowhere. Disregarding
conformity to norms and formal conventions, the individual, thus, is required to look inside
him/herself thoroughly and relentlessly. Regarding the above poem, Silz notes, “[w]hat
stands in the way of this saving faith is reason—modern man’s doubting, inquiring
intellect”; “[a]ll through the Geistliches Jahr we find condemnation of human reason, as “Fluch,” (curse) as “Schuld” (guilt) as “Verführung” (seduction) (694; English translation of German words added by me). Human reason, thus, works two ways for modern man: it offers people a tool to illuminate the darkness of their souls but it can also prevent them from submitting to the law of God.

Droste-Hülshoff’s awareness of the restriction of human reason is also reflected in Die Judenbuche. The novel exposes the invalidity of logic and reason and portrays the idolatry of egocentric materialism that brings people to ruin. Her return to Christian faith, “the final triumph of family and religious tradition over free intellectuality” (Silz 696), is echoed in the protagonist’s return home on Christmas Eve after many years—a scene that is described in impressive terms:

Nun schlug es zwölf im Turm; der letzte Schlag verdröhnte langsam, und im nächsten Hause erhob sich ein leiser Gesang, der, von Hause zu Hause schwellend, sich über das ganze Dorf zog: […] Der Mann am Hange war in die Knie gesunken und versuchte mit zitternder Stimme einzufallen; es ward nur ein lautes Schlußchen daraus, und schwere, heiße Tropfen fielen in den Schnee. (49–50)

[Now the clock in the tower struck twelve; the last stroke rumbled and died away slowly, in the nearest house some people began to sing quietly and the hymn, swelling from house to house, spread through the whole village: […] The man on the slope had sunk to his knees and with trembling voice was trying to join in the singing, but the result was only a loud sobbing, as his great, scalding tears fell on the snow (89–90).]

The scene, reminiscent of the Biblical story of the prodigal son appears to bring the readers into a communal celebration of Christian morality. Yet, the narrator betrays our expectations by revealing neither the man’s psyche nor his identity.
Droste-Hülshoff’s distrust of appearance as well as her awareness of the duplicity of human nature leads her to emphasize the morality of the individual rather than shared norms. Inasmuch as a person’s inner life is hidden and unknowable, only God has the right to mete out justice. Atonement for guilt, in her view, is possible exclusively in accordance with a person’s own law. Her sense of morality grounded on the notion of absolution in the New Testament contrasts severely with Gotthelf’s Die schwarze Spinne wherein community-based faith is considered to be of primary importance. Thus, the narrator of Die Judenbuche proclaims his/her conviction to the readers beyond the fictional frame: “Denn wer nach seiner Überzeugung handelt, und sei sie noch so mangelhaft, kann nie ganz zugrunde gehen, wogegen nichts seelentötender wirkt, als gegen das innere Rechtsgefühl das äußere Recht in Anspruch nehmen” (4; For a person who acts according to his convictions, however imperfect they may be, can never perish entirely, whereas nothing destroys the soul more surely than an appeal to external legal forms in contradiction to one’s inner sense of justice, 13). Regarding this claim, Karl Philipp Moritz says:

> Es ist also die Autorität des Gewissens, die den Gesetzen und dem Gewohnheitsrecht gegenüber =, ja eindeutig vorangestellt wird. Damit wird die Autonomie eines moralischen Rechts verkündet in der festen Überzeugung, daß auch der unter der Erbsünde stehende Mensch einen Kompaß in seinem Innern hat, mit dem er das Rechte ansteuern kann. (79)

> [It is the authority of conscience that has precedence over the statutes and the common law. Thus, the autonomy of a moral law (= Recht) is declared with firm conviction that even man who is subject to original sin has inside him a compass to navigate toward what is right (= Recht).]

I should point out first that the German word Recht here has a broad meaning that can be translated either as “law” “justice,” or “right.” It is defined in Duden as:
1. Gesamtheit der staatlichen festgelegten bzw. anerkannten Normen des menschlichen, besonders gesellschaftlichen Verhaltens
2. Berechtigter zuerkannter Anspruch; Berechtigung oder Befugnis

[1. The body of the norms concerning the human, especially social behaviors that are established or acknowledged respectively by the state
2. Right that is authorized and awarded; authorization or authority
3. Authorization of the way in which the [sense of] justice is acknowledged].

It is problematic, however, that the source of the authority of Recht is not clarified. It is due to this ambiguity that the problem regarding the issue of origin arises. From a religious (Christian and Jewish) point of view, Recht is attributed exclusively to God. According to the Old Testament, it is bestowed on the entire community in the form of laws whereas the reformed Christians seek it inside the individual through direct communication with God. When the narrator of Geschichte eines Algierer-Sklaven says that the murderer shall not meet a recht death, he/she is certain about the authority on which his claim rests. The removal of this sentence from the novel, therefore, suggests that the internalized moral perspective precludes a shared recognition of authority. Thus, the novel enunciates the supremacy of the internal law over the external one. It is this internal law, “a compass to navigate toward what is right,” that reaches deep into the darkness of one’s soul, which is not accessible by the positivist methodology of the statutory law. The text exhibits the limits of a closed ritual community that, in the author’s view, is to be replaced by a broader community of universal humanity grounded in a deep awareness of guilt and sympathy for human weakness.

8. Jews as Outsiders
Any closed community needs outsiders in order to affirm its members’ sense of sharing a group identity, as we observed in Chapter 3. In *Die Judenbuche*, it is the Jews who are marked as outsiders and thus their presence shores up the Christian community of the fiction. They are the object of prejudice and discrimination, which is exemplified by Margret’s response to his son Friedrich, who comments on his neighbor Hülsmeyer’s wrongdoing toward a Jewish person: “Hat er dem Aaron Geld genommen, so hat ihn der verfluchte Jude gewiß zuvor darum betrogen. Hülsmeyer ist ein ordentlicher, angesessener Mann, und die Juden sind alle Schelme” (10–11; “If he took money from Aaron, the wretched Jew had certainly swindled him out of it earlier. Hülsheimer is a respectable man, one of us, and Jews are all rogues” 24). Margret’s pejorative remark foreshadows Friedrich’s later trouble with Aaron. At a village wedding, Aaron publically calls Friedrich to account for the money the latter owes:

Friedrich war wie vernichtet fortgegangen und der Jude ihm gefolgt, immer schreiend: “O weh mir! Warum hab ich nicht gehört auf vernünftige Leute! […]”—Die Tenne tobte von Gelächter; manche hatten sich auf den Hof nachgedrängt,—“Packt den Juden! Wiegt ihn gegen ein Schwein!” riefen einige; andere waren Ernst geworden. (40–41)

[Friedrich had gone away seeming utterly crushed, followed by the Jews who kept on shouting: “Alas! Why didn’t I listen to sensible people! […]” The threshing-floor rocked with laughter; many guests had pushed their way out into the yard in pursuit. “Get hold of the Jew! He’ll outweigh a pig, you’ll see! Some shouted, while others had grown serious (75).]

The villagers’ discriminatory attitude is apparent. As Moritz comments, “[d]ie Juden werden als verhaßte Fremdkörper empfunden und gelten als ‘Schelme,’ d.h. hier im alten Wortsinne: als durchtriebene Kerle und Böseseichte (35; “[t]he Jews are perceived as a detested foreign body and considered ‘rogues,’ that is, in the old literal sense of the word:}
as cunning fellows and wicked goblins”). The negative stereotype of the Jew as a money-lending Shylock here is evident in the biased view of the villagers as well as of the narrator. According to Doerr, they are “all viewed from a gentile perspective, always defined as Jews, and thus always placed outside the Christian order. Hence they are classified as different, as enigmatic and malign” (453).³⁰

9. Critique of Legalism

Nonetheless, I agree with Donahue who argues that the anti-Semitism here is not racial in character but religious. It is through the form of Judaism that the very notion of justice is called into question. The question at stake is this: Which kind of morality is to be prioritized, the externalized law of the community or one’s own sense of justice? Contrary to Pauline Christianity, which emphasizes the doctrine of justification by faith alone, at least stereotypically in an early modern Christian context, the idea of the Jewish community was inseparable from its communal laws. The alleged legalism of Judaism has been the target of criticism in Christian theology, represented by the Apostle Paul who called their formalism “the curse of the law.”³¹

The novel dramatizes an opposition between Jewish legalism and Christian morality. The characteristic of Judaism as played up in the novel—adherence to the law and

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³⁰ Whether the anti-semitism expressed here is a reflection of the author’s own view is not easy to determine due to the lack of ironical distance in the narrative. Although Doerr denounces Droste-Hülshoff’s anti-semitic attitude by referring to her letters, such a critique, I think, is unfair insofar as it is apart from the text.

³¹ Gal. 3.13. “Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.”
communal identity—demonstrates its ritualistic quality. One can say in other words: to the degree that Christianity emphasizes faith, it departs from its perception of a ritualistic Old Testament realm. The contrast between Christianity and Judaism is portrayed allegorically in the scene in which Aaron’s wife visits the Baron about her husband who has gone missing:

Alles kniete nieder, und die Hausfrau began: “Im Anfang war das Wort, und das Wort war bei Gott, und Gott war das Wort.” Ein furchtbarer Donnerschlag. Alle fuhrten zusammen; dann furchtbares Geschrei und Getmmel die Treppe heran, […] Die Türe ward aufgerissen, und herein stürzte die Frau des Juden Aaron, bleich wie der Tod, das Haar wild um den Kopf, von Regen triefend. Sie warf sich vor dem Gutsherrn auf die Knie. “Gerechtigkeit!” rief sie, “Gerechtigkeit! Mein Mann ist erschlagen!” und sank ohnmächtig zusammen. (42)

[All knelt down and the lady of the house began: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.” A fearful clap of thunder sounded. Everyone shrank; then there was a terrible screaming and tumult drawing ever nearer. […] The door was flung open and the wife of Aaron the Jew rushed in, pale as death, her hair wind-swept about her head, dripping with rain. She threw herself on her knees before the squire. “Justice!” she cried, “Justice! My husband has been killed!” and she collapsed unconscious (77–78).]

The wife demands justice with theatrical gestures, which is also depicted as a stereotypical Jewish gesture. “‘Aug um Auge, Zahn um Zahn!’ dies waren die einzigen Worte, die sich zuweilen hervorstieß” (43; “An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth!’ These were the only words that she sometimes muttered” 79–80). This scene draws on Exodus 21.23–25, known as *lex talionis*, which is often quoted in order to stress the vengeful character of the God of the Old Testament. The wife’s entrance and subsequent behavior are contrasted here with Lady Baron’s recitation of the opening of the Gospel according to St. John: “In the

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32 Exod. 21.23–25. “And if any mischief follow, then thou shalt give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.”
beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and God was the Word.” The “Word” here means logos, namely, the law. Accordingly, “the Word was with God” means that justice is attributed to God alone: “judge not lest ye be judged.” Evidently, the ritual strategy of differentiation is operative here. As Donahue says, “identifying Judaism with the *lex talionis* serves to reinscribe well-worn cultural prejudices about a worldly, material, and ‘exterior’ Judaism superseded by a superior, inward Christianity” (57). Thus, the narrator proclaims the superiority of the Christian law of mercy over the Jewish sense of justice.

The narrator’s criticism, however, is not restricted to the Jews. Rather, they are portrayed as a negative allegory of modern material life. That is to say, the narrator denounces the moral decay of the community—as worldly, material and “exterior”—in the form of criticism of the Jews from the gentiles’ perspective, but the downfall of morality also finds its embodiment in the persons of Simon and Friedrich. Simon, with his red hair and red coat, is compared to the devil. Strongly influenced by Simon, Friedrich is no less depraved than his uncle: “Seine Natur war nicht unedel, aber er gewöhnte sich, die innere Schande der äußern vorzuziehen. Man darf nur sagen, er gewöhnte sich zu prunken, während seine Mutter darbte” (36; “His nature was not ignoble, but he accustomed himself to preferring inner to outer shame. One can only say that he got used to making a show, while his mother lived in want” 67). Characteristic of his personality is an extreme obsession with exteriority: “Er war äußerlich ordentlich, nüchtern, anscheinend treuherzig, aber listig, prahlerisch und oft roh” (36; “In outer appearance he was neat, sober, apparently candid, but actually he was cunning, boastful and often brutal” 68). The village wedding was for Friedrich an excellent opportunity to parade himself and demonstrate his
superiority over others. Being insulted by a Jew in public, therefore, is simply unbearable to him.

Moreover, the village wedding is a community event that fails to fulfill its proper ritual function. As indicated by the ill-matched couple who consist of an aging bridegroom and a young bride, a distorted reality is exposed here while the interiority of human life remains concealed in the darkness of the forest. This discrepancy between internal and external life, also manifested in the character of Friedrich, is presented as a corollary to “a modern, commercialized, and ‘Judaized’ age that has fallen far short of its Christian calling” (Donahue 65). Thus, we observe a critique of modernity, wherein judgments are made exclusively based on logics and visible signs.

10. Performativity of Text

As we have observed, the text of Die Judenbuche, with its content and structure, determines the way in which it is to be read. In this sense, we can refer to the novel as a performative text. The text imposes the moral imperative of forbidding judgment by the readers so that any interpretation is deprived of validity. This is because the readers accept the principle of generation—the norm of “judge not, lest ye be judged”—and apply it self-referentially to their own reading. In order to investigate this dynamic relationship between the text and the readers, I refer to J. L. Austin’s theory of the performative. The essence of his theory lies in the notion of the performative as opposed to the constative. Whereas constative utterances are descriptions of some situations, performative utterances are self-referential in that they do not point to anything outside themselves. The act of
saying “I do” at a wedding is an example of the performative in that “the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action” (Austin 5). In fact, all acts of naming can be performative in that they give rise to what they say. Jonathan Culler evaluates Austin’s theory as opening a new horizon in literary studies:

[S]o a literary work performatively brings into being what it purports to describe. The literary utterance, too, brings into being the fictional characters and states of affairs to which it refers. […] And literary works bring into being ideas, concepts, which they deploy. (144)

Accordingly, the law of mercy is brought into being by virtue of the performativity of the text of Die Judenbuche, such that the readers are bound by the norms innate to the text.

This normative, self-referential aspect of the performative is also emphasized by Rappaport in his definition of ritual:

The act of performance is itself a part of the order performed, or, to put it a little differently, the manner of “saying” and “doing” is intrinsic to what is being said and done. The medium […] is itself a message, or better, a meta-message. (38)

Thus, the canonical message of the text—“judge not lest ye be judged”—goes beyond the fictional frame to govern the way in which the text is read and so invalidates interpretive judgments on the part of the reader. In this way, the text rejects a unified interpretation. It produces a multiplicity of significations while allowing each reading of the text as a new possibility.

The text binds the readers to the imperative of fictional truth through a variety of literary devices. In Die Judenbuche, it is the narrative technique of “veiling and unveiling” that entices readers to make interpretive judgments only to reveal the impossibility of a single complete reading. The narrator who is neither omniscient nor an informed member
of the community subverts the readers’ expectations by stepping out of the fictive frame to make an apology:

Denjenigen, die vielleicht auf den Ausgang dieser Begebenheit gespannt sind, muss ich sagen, dass diese Geschichte nie aufgeklärt wurde, obwohl noch viel dafür geschah und diesem Verhör mehrere folgten. [...] Es würde in einer erdichteten Geschichte unrecht sein, die Neugier des Lesers so zu täuschen. Aber dies alles hat sich wirklich zugetragen; ich kann nichts davon oder dazu tun. (34)

[For the sake of those readers who are perhaps eager to learn the outcome of this affair, I must mention that it was never cleared up, although much was done to that end and several other official inquiries succeeded this one. […] It would be unfair to leave the reader’s curiosity unsatisfied in a tale of fiction, but all this really happened—I cannot subtract or add anything (64).]

Who is the “I” in the sentences, “I must mention—” and “I cannot subtract or add anything”? The identity of the narrator is obscure; he/she is an outsider of the community who has no access to the truth behind the events. Thus, the absence of a reliable narrator makes it impossible to arrive at a single unequivocal interpretation. In fact, the text intentionally fails to create a unitary community in which the readers can imagine themselves being submerged. Consider that the literary texts in the preceding chapters were intended to minimize the readers’ awareness of the gap between text and meaning whereby the authoritative narrative is contextualized in the fictional story to generate a fictional truth. The text of Die Judenbuche, by contrast, discloses the illusionary nature of communication via the act of reading, by disclosing the failure of communication.

It is due to this self-subverting quality that I refer to the text of Die Judenbuche as anti-ritual. According to Rapapport, “[u]nless there is a performance there is no ritual” (37). The opposite cannot be said, however. The text is performative in that the readers subject themselves to the imperative of forbidding judgment whereby this very law is executed
on/through the text itself. In this way, the performativity of the text precludes the readers from having a ritual experience, that is, the celebration of shared significance in the textual community. Therefore, I argue that the reading of *Die Judenbuche* is a performative yet anti-ritual experience.

A paradox is embedded in *Die Judenbuche*. The text, by virtue of its narrative strategy, demonstrates the limitations of judgment based on reason, which, in the view of the narrator, must be superseded by the moral law of Christian teaching. The law of Christianity, however, is no longer effective as a public norm because its sense of justice, ultimately, derives from the conscience of each individual. Droste-Hülshoff’s awareness of “communal illusion” derives perhaps from the social situation of her time in which advancing individualism and materialism intensified people’s sense of alienation. Due to the discrepancy between the inner world of the individual and the external surrounding world, the very ethos of the community—a set of values, norms, and expectations—lost its significance. *Die Judenbuche* may be Droste-Hülshoff’s attempt to provide an answer to this question and exploration into the possibility of a broader human community: How can one as a social being live without losing one’s moral values? Her ultimate hope rests on the sense of justice that stems from within the self, and so she criticizes the modern material life from a Christian standpoint. What we perceive in *Die Judenbuche* is the dilemma of a modern intellectual: despair about the impossibility of communication and a desperate faith in the morality of humans who cannot escape society.
CONCLUSION

On March 11, 2011, Japan experienced a catastrophic earthquake that caused unprecedented damage to the northeast part of the country. This disaster motivated the Japanese people, including many who were not directly affected by it, to reflect on the importance of connecting with family, friends, and local communities. As suggested by the term 絆 kizuna (bond(ing), ties), strongly advocated by the media at the time—and later used as a slogan by the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) in its efforts to regain power—the earthquake evoked a feeling of solidarity in many people who perhaps usually felt adrift from society. Along with the ensuing territorial disputes with neighboring countries, the event caused many Japanese to become newly conscious of their national identity. The earthquake evoked fear, a sense of anxiety and of loneliness, a longing for family and home, and a sense of belonging to the nation. It triggered a widespread desire for ritual events of communal reconnecting—though under the most tragic circumstances.

Why “ritual” in this postmodern era? To this question, I would reply that my own response to the earthquake shared with other Japanese people prompted me to explore the issue deeply. A general view of the world situation since the 1980s must take into account economic globalization, the emergence of a borderless society that enables free communication beyond the boundaries of culture, language, and nation via the permeation of the Internet and social media, and the subsequent dissolution of existing communities and social structures. On the other hand, it has been argued that the postmodern situation has intensified ideological struggles by fueling extreme nationalism and religious
This separatist orientation is also manifest in less offensive ways, as in international sports competitions exemplified by the Olympic Games and soccer’s World Cup, the feverish excitement of which is rooted in the identification of the self with the nation. The tendency to seek one’s identity in the collective whole such as nation, race, religion, and local community is growing regardless (or rather because) of intensifying globalization, and it gives rise to a new community in the virtual space of social-networking sites (SNS), Internet bulletin boards, and online games.

I see the concept of ritual as a key to comprehending the tendencies common to these social phenomena—communitarianism, separatism, orientation toward tradition, and the desire for festive, ecstatic experiences—all of which produce a sense of being immersed in the whole. I understand these phenomena as constituting a part of the movement to define the interior by constructing a new (spiritual) border against the influx of the outside world into a (materially) borderless society.

Ritual as a social apparatus capable of effecting differentiation is a kind of resistance against the flattening force of the modern world, namely by establishing a spiritual community based on shared values. In this sense, modern ritual, with its denial of material determinism and rational empiricism, is a counter-reaction to the influence of globalization. Despite this orientation, however, ritual also bears a public and collective character, as we have observed, and this seems to be deeply related to a human nature that cannot endure loneliness as the cost of freedom.

In this research project, I have considered German and Japanese literary works from the mid-nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century—the time marked,
for each respective period, by the first wave of modernization whereby traditional
communities found themselves on the verge of collapse. It is characterized above all by the
spread of print culture and the transformation of reading habits in both contexts. This study
has evaluated the significance of books and the act of reading by focusing on the mimetic
function of ritual texts in this new socio-cultural situation. Certainly, the social
circumstances in which these works—Izumi Kyōka’s Kusa-meikyū, Yanagita Kunio’s Tōno
monogatari, Jeremias Gotthelf’s Die schwarze Spinne, and Annette von Droste Hülshoff’s
Die Judenbuche—were written are in no way comparable to the postmodern situation of
our times. Nevertheless, my investigation of the literary response to the early phenomena
associated with modernization is an exploration into basic human relationships and desires,
and thus, I believe, will serve as a stepping stone for further research into the postmodern
condition. Further, my way of regarding literary texts as a site for generating an
inter-subjective community through the ritualization of reading offers a new perspective
distinct from conventional approaches to modern literature, which typically focus on the
dramatization of the conflict between an individual and the world.

In the Introduction, I summarized theories on ritual from different disciplines,
whereupon I delineated my concept of ritual reading based on four major characteristics:
formality, performativity, group identity, and symbolism. The theories of Bell and
Rappaport were particularly helpful to my study, and by drawing on them, I construed the
notion of ritual reading as a differentiating act of encoded schemes in the process of
interaction between the canonical (the text) and the self-referential (the act of reading). This
view of ritual reading as an interactive process also shed new light on the troublesome issue
concerning the agency of meaning. I also conducted a close examination of each text with respect to its tropes, narrative techniques, and worldview in order to determine the significance of the text as a constituent of ritual reading. By utilizing these components, a ritual text gives rise to an autonomous fictional community to which readers can subject themselves, unlike typical modern novels the primary purpose of which is to attempt verisimilitude by constructing a realistic space in linear time. The immersive experience of the fictional world means that readers of the ritual text find themselves to be not only cognizing subjects but also a part of a broader textual community.

Chapter 1 explored *Die schwarze Spinne*, a chronicle about an agrarian community in Switzerland, narrated based on an apocalyptic Christian vision. I illustrated the function of taboo as an apparatus through which the communal order is maintained. Unlike the Japanese works discussed here, in which a shared ritual space is conceived in an idealized past, *Die schwarze Spinne* sees such a space as existing within the moral framework of the patriarchal Christian community. It is in this religious context that supernatural events, such as the deal with the devil and the presence of the demonic black spider, are accepted as fictional truth. All three texts—*Kusa-meikyū*, *Tōno monogatari*, and *Die schwarze Spinne*—adopt the literary device of a frame story, which gives symbolic significance and authority to the narrated story.

Chapters 2 and 3 examined the Japanese texts *Kusa-meikyū* and *Tōno monogatari*. I described them as literary/folkloric undertakings to resist the modernizing projects of the nation-state. The main plot of *Kusa-meikyū* evolves around Akira’s search for his mother, which is linked metaphorically with nostalgia for pre-modern Japan. I explored how the
intricate narrative structure of the tale creates an inter-subjective community of storytelling beyond the boundary of time and space. The longing for the past as poignantly expressed in *Kusa-meikyū*, furthermore, is embodied in *Tōno monogatari* as Yanagita’s folkloric enterprise. I examined the way in which the collection of oral legends of a remote village came to be read as representing the origin and heart of the Japanese people.\(^ {33} \)

Viewed from the standpoint of ritual, in particular from the aspect of formality, *Kusa-meikyū* and *Tōno monogatari* both demonstrate the normative character of ritual in their narrative styles. As noted, the modern Japanese literature that started with the *genbun itchi* movement endeavored to express the individual’s inner voice through vernacular language. Classical written Japanese, by contrast, conceals the individuality of the narrator within the communal voice, which is possible through this voice’s structural ambiguity in regard to subject. That both Kyōka and Yanagita opted for classical Japanese instead of the vernacular style reveals their intention to restore the communal space based on the literary tradition of storytelling.

Like *Die schwarze Spinne*, *Die Judenbuche* is also concerned with the theme of Christian morality. Yet, I explored the text in its anti-ritual dimension because unlike the other three works, this text precludes the possibility of a ritual community in which readers can immerse themselves. This is because the internalized Christian teaching whereby passing judgment is forbidden invalidates any clear-cut understanding of what is happening

\(^ {33} \) My study of the Japanese texts is not presented as a kind of *Nihonjin-ron*, a popular essentialist genre that focuses on exploring and analyzing Japanese national and cultural identity. Though my research has touched on similar themes, I offer a very different argument. In fact, as the comparative inclusion of German material shows, my claims about ritual reading are not exclusive to any particular ethnicity or nationality.
in the story. This is to say, the ambiguous narrative subverts the possibility of boundary formation by allowing multiple interpretations on the part of the readers. The close examination of the text of Die Judenbuche as a counterexample thus illuminated the idea that norms are an indispensable aspect of the ritual experience of reading.

The authors of the works examined in this project shared a sense of crisis about the impact of modernity, its fundamental transformation of people’s thinking and way of life, including the secularization of life in general, the advance of a capitalism bound up with the spirit of scientific positivism, the promotion of egocentric rationalism, and the dissolution of local communities in the wake of political and economic centralization. The way in which they opposed such modern phenomena, namely, by adhering to existing traditions and moral norms, may appear anachronistic. Yet, I argue that each text partakes in a modern movement by the very virtue of being anti-modern. They are modern, above all, as they refer to ritual experience created in the virtual space of the text while involving the physicality of the reader. Hence, the modern ritual investigated in this project consists of two contradictory elements: the text as universal order and the act of reading restrained to a particular time and space.
WORKS CITED

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