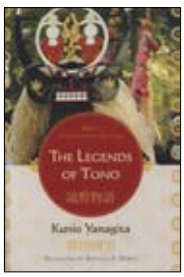

Kunio Yanagita. *The Legends of Tono: 100th Anniversary Edition.* Translated by Ronald Morse

New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008. 120 pages, 2008 preface, 1975 preface, introduction, index, bibliography, b/w photographs and images. Cloth, US$27.95. ISBN-13: 978-0-7391-2767-4; ISBN-10: 0-7391-2767-5.

The timing of Ronald Morse's reissue of his lightly revised and updated translation of Yanagita Kunio's seminal *Tōno Monogatari* (The Legends of Tōno) is felicitous in at least two senses. Most obviously, this handsome volume commemorates the centennial anniversary of Yanagita's trip to the mountainous region in August of 1909. However, the new edition provides an opportunity to survey some of the intellectual ground covered by folklore studies and its related academic disciplines since the 1970s, when the *minzoku būmu* (folklore boom) was at its height in Japan and North America. It was during this era that Morse completed his dissertation on

Yanagita at Princeton in 1975 and published his original translation of *Tōno Monogatari* (Tokyo: The Japan Foundation, 1975) which has now been out of print for some years. While the primary objective of this review is, of course, to explore the merits and uses of Morse's work, such an evaluation must be framed by the general intellectual shift of the last several decades, a shift that has been characterized at least in part by the ascendency of historicist—as distinct from archetypal—methodologies.

Yanagita Kunio (1875–1962) is famous as the grandfather of Japanese folklore studies (*minzokugaku* 民俗学). In Yanagita's vision, folkways blended poetically, often romantically, with agricultural policy, rural community, economic development and a sometimes quixotic search for the origins of Japaneseness, as suggested by the homophonous term for native ethnography or ethnology (*minzoku* 民族). *Tōno Monogatari* is a brief but powerful fugue to those themes, constructed around a leitmotif of the supernatural. While his 1910 work was but lightly reviewed at the time, over the course of the last century the slim volume has gone on to become a touchstone of modern Japanese studies, drawing the attention of historians, anthropologists, and literary scholars alike.

Tōno Monogatari is a collection of tales and legends from around the turn of the last century in the remote, mountainous town of Tōno. Many of the stories echo well-known folkloric types: mountain spirits steal away young girls, fox vixens in human form seduce lonely men, agricultural deities manifest as strong young lads who help plant the rice crop, poor farmers discover caches of treasure in the mountains but are unable to relocate them later, and so forth. The stories, however, are neither faceless nor timeless. Most of the protagonists were still living when Yanagita compiled the collection, lending the tales a sometimes eerie immediacy. Themes of insanity, seduction, and attempted murder are punctuated by mysterious screams that pierce the dark forests. In short, the stories are a wicked delight. While general readers with an interest in oral traditions and the spirit world will find plenty of food for thought here, the collection holds a particular allure for scholars of fin-de-siècle, gothic literature. As Morse quite rightly points out, *Tōno Monogatari* is as much a literary work as an anthropological one, with "the geography and history of Tōno" serving as "an ideal backdrop for exploring the feelings, psychology, and beliefs of the people" of the region (xxiii).

Like Yanagita, Morse has moved between intellectual and governmental circles all his adult life. After completing his dissertation, Morse spent much of his career outside of academe at the US Departments of Energy, Defense, and State, and on balance his publications tend toward policy work and economic analysis. Morse has remained in active contact with the developing fields of ethnography, ethnology, and folklore studies. In recent years, he has served as a Professor of Japanese Studies, first at the University of Nevada and later at the University of California, Los Angeles. In some ways, this positions Morse ideally as a translator of Yanagita, whose own career was marked by similar vicissitudes.

Yanagita's prose style is difficult, managing to be simultaneously telegraphic, impressionistic, and phenomenally dense. It has provoked mixed reactions, with Takayanagi qualifying it as "crisp, swift-moving and sonorous" but also complex, at times leaving "an impression of monotonous and repetitive storytelling" (1976,

169). Morse's translation is more readable than Yanagita's original which, like much prose of his time period, remains oddly hung between a classically-inflected scholarly prose style and the idiomatic, contemporary vernacular of the spoken tongue, the living force of which authors of all stripes struggled to capture. There is a price to pay for clarity, however, and the evenness of the English translation does lose something of the richly evocative texture of Yanagita's prose.

Morse also provides some light, critical apparatus (preface, introduction, and annotated bibliography). These help to situate the tales in an ongoing conversation, accentuating the teachability and accessibility of Yanagita's work. In his introduction, Morse identifies as a major theme the tension between the "observed world" of mountains, rivers, and fields and the "concealed world" of spirits and gods (xxiii). This notion of a readily observed exterior and a partially hidden interior suggests, perhaps, Morse's personal interests in translating the legends for the purposes of getting at Yanagita's own intellectual concerns. He argues that Yanagita was motivated by a search for Japanese distinctiveness. Some may find the vaguely romantic notion of a discernible Japanese "essence" or national character to be problematic. In not updating his introduction to respond to this critique, Morse has missed an opportunity to historicize Yanagita's thought and to bring it more fully into conversation with the past quarter century of critical development. The annotated bibliography does provide an overview of the major works in this area, however, for those interested in pursuing the question.

A score of very useful black-and-white photographs, courtesy of Tōno City, help to provide visual context for the tales and add an important sense of emotional tone to the work. One of the more evocative shots features the sharply sloping eaves of a thatched farmhouse, seen across the barren and snowy winter fields. The photographs have been updated, and their visual quality much improved, from the 1975 edition. Furthermore, the addition of a very lightly annotated bibliography of scholarship in English greatly increases the academic range of the book. It will prove a good, first resource for teachers looking to find more background information on Yanagita, Tōno, and the transition to modernity. The bibliography also provides an ideal starting point for undergraduate researchers or for those seeking to acquaint themselves generally with the available English-language scholarship.

In the end, the reservations expressed here are peripheral to Morse's main contribution. His continued efforts to bring Yanagita's work to the attention of those who are not specialists in Japan are to be applauded, and I join Morse in wishing that this "glimpse into the world of Japanese folk customs and folk literature" (xxxi) will inspire continued and sustained critical attention.

Reference

Takayanagi Shun'ichi
1976 In search of Yanagita Kunio. *Monumenta Nipponica* 31: 165–78 [A review of the 1975 edition of Ronald Morse's translation The Legends of Tōno].

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