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Finding Religion: Liminality in Japanese Popular Culture

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Abstract

Recent surveys estimate roughly seventy percent of the Japanese population as having no religious affiliation.[1] Even seemingly religious activities, such as Buddhist funerals, Shinto weddings, and Christmas celebrations, are practiced regardless of religious background and are often devoid of any deeply religious sentiment. There are even some accounts of Shinto priests who do not prescribe to the Shinto faith, but rather hold the position through inheritance and family obligation.[2] These unique circumstances cause researchers to question; if religious experiences are not being provided to the Japanese population by strictly "religious" activities, where can they be acquired? Looking specifically at Victor Turner's description of a liminal experience, certain seemingly "secular" locations and activities can be described in the same manner and language as the liminal religious experience. The use of the liminal process as a plot device can be seen frequently in Japanese media and popular culture, including films, novels, television shows, and manga comic books. This expression is important in the context of modern Japanese atheism, as such narratives may provide the profound religious sentiment not supplied by everyday religious practices. In this way, the consumption of such media in itself can be considered a religious experience.

1. Introduction and Method

British anthropologist Victor Turner was born in Glasgow, Scotland in 1920 and is best known for his writings on community and liminality. Strongly influenced by Arnold van Gennep's *Rites of Passage*, Turner elaborates largely on van Gennep's concept of passage between states of being, focusing mainly on the middle transitory stage called the liminal state.[3] In *Rites of Passage*, van Gennep describes the three steps found in any rite of passage: separation, transition, and reincorporation. According to his theory, a person is somehow separated from ordinary social conditions, subjected to a "cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state," and is then reintroduced to stable society along with a set of new rights and obligations.[4] The liminal model is applicable in any number of situations, both religious and secular, and is often attached to ceremonies like Christian Baptisms, Jewish Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, or even hazing rituals for fraternities.

Turner begins with Van Gennep's framework, but focuses mainly on the middle period: the transitional stage. He gives these "threshold people" a set of distinct characteristics: "likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon." In addition to these qualities, he notes that liminal persons may also be set apart by their clothing, their behavior, or by physical isolation from the rest of society.[5] Turner describes threshold people as "tabula rasa," blank slates where any existing sense of being is erased and replaced with a new sense of status, responsibilities, and restraints to prepare them for the reintroduction to stable society.[6] While Turner's book *The Ritual Process* focuses largely on his time spent with the Ndmebu tribe of Zambia, he gives us a formula that can be applied to most any religion, or in this case, the narratives found in Japanese popular culture.

2. Findings

Boasting three of the world's most populated cities all situated less than 300 miles apart, Japan sustains an urban culture that many find difficult to even imagine. Entertainment districts, such as Tokyo's Shinjuku ward or Osaka's Namba district are packed with *izakaya*,[7] late-night karaoke boxes, and by-the-hour love hotels. While these areas frequently provide a setting for popular movies and novels, some authors and directors instead pose entertainment districts in an almost magical way, often mimicking Turner's description of a liminal state. Characters immerse themselves in the culture of the red-light district seeking a transformation and emerge at the end of the story with some new perspective or a sense of enlightenment. Haruki Murakami's 2004 novel *After Dark* fits this mold, providing readers with an omniscient third-person narrative of the going-ons of an assemblage of eclectic characters over the course of one night in downtown Tokyo. Another tale, Ryogo Narita's *Durarara!!*, is a popular light novel, manga, and anime series that depicts a young man's experience moving to Tokyo's Ikebukuro district and his interactions with the gangs and urban legends that reside there. Such examples provide settings and characters that easily fit into Turner's descriptions of the liminal experience.

Walter Kirin of the New York Times describes Murakami's *After Dark* as "a streamlined, hushed ensemble piece built on the notion that very late at night, after the lamps of logic have been snuffed and rationality has shut its eyes, life on earth becomes boundariless and blurred."[8] The story is told in real-time, and begins at 11:56pm with a nineteen-year old girl named Mari sitting alone in a Denny's drinking coffee in an unnamed district of Tokyo. As the trains make their final trips to the residential suburbs for the night, the city's nighttime inhabitants begin to emerge. The reader meets characters like Kaoru, a female wrestler turned hotel manager, Takashi, a trombone player with aspirations for law school, and Korogi, a maid with a pseudonym and a mysterious set of scars. During the wee hours of the night while the world sleeps, the city becomes a playground for these night people who exist outside the rules and restrictions of regular society, and at times even outside the laws of nature.

After Dark offers readers a clear demarcation separating the liminal from the ordinary and the transient from the permanent. The separation stage occurs as the last train departs for the Tokyo suburbs. Transit does not run twenty-four hours in Japan and anyone in the city after midnight is usually planning to stay there until the following morning. The reincorporation stage occurs when the trains have resumed operation and Mari returns to her ordinary, everyday life in the suburbs. The concept of the train schedule serves as both a physical and metaphorical means to demarcate the liminal from the stable state, an important element in Turner's description of liminality. In a literal sense, the lack of public transportation creates a barrier, setting apart the state from the liminal and preventing any physical crossover between the two. In a metaphorical sense, the train divides people into two separate classes: those who take the train at night and those who take them in the morning. Those who retreat to the suburbs at night: the housewives, salary men, and schoolchildren, will wake up the next day and go about their regular lives. On the other side of the train schedule however, we have those characters that spend their nights in the cities; they are unhappy husbands, desperate prostitutes, and troubled teenagers who will wait out the night in the city and take the train first thing in the morning.

These characters, described by Turner as "threshold people," are often defined by concepts like darkness, rebirth, or vulnerability. In *After Dark*, Guo Dongli is a prime example of the vulnerability that Turner describes in which people "may be represented as possessing nothing. They may...even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status, property, insignia, [or] secular insignia indicating rank or role."[9] Guo is a nineteen-year old Chinese girl who has immigrated illegally into Japan and works as a prostitute. When Mari first meets Guo, she is impressed by the young girl's outstanding beauty and admits that "if we had met in a different place at a different time, I'm sure we could have been good friends."[10] However, at night Guo loses any sense of pride or individuality through her work as a prostitute. When Mari is first introduced to Guo, the woman is without clothes, status, or property. She holds no form of identification due to her line of work, while her clothes and possessions have been stolen by an unsatisfied customer. Thus the reader is introduced to Shirakawa (we do not know his first name), who represents the death and darkness that can be found in the transitory state. He is the archetype of a regular Japanese salaryman; "[e]verything about him is ordinary—height, build, hairstyle. If you passed him on the street, he would leave no impression."[11] He works a desk job at a software company to pay for his house in the suburbs and support his wife and two children. But nightfall brings out a different side to his personality; Shirakawa regularly calls in for prostitutes when he works late at the office. The reader comes to find that he is the same man who requested, then proceeded to beat and rob Guo. Despite his ordinary appearance and home life, Shirakawa's character devolves into darkness and immorality as the regular social structure begins to falter and the liminal state begins.

Eri is Mari's older sister, a character who finds rebirth in her experience during the course of the night. Eri is a beautiful young girl and a successful model, but she struggles with the pressure of her good looks and her role in

society. Mari describes her sister; "[p]ills and fortune-telling and dieting: nobody can stop her when it comes to any of those things."[12] By the time the reader is introduced to Eri, she has already been in a deep and uninterrupted sleep for several months, fleeing from her addictions and the stress that accompanies her role in society. On this particular night however, things change. In a mystical series of events, Eri is pulled from her bed, through her television, and into a dimension where she is held hostage by a symbolic manifestation of Shirakawa in his office building. Over the course of the night, Eri must come to terms with her decision to withdraw from society. She pleads her case to the reader; "[l]et me get to sleep again!...If only I could fall sound asleep and wake up in my old reality!".[13] Eri's wish comes true; the sun rises as the liminal period ends and Eri begins to stir in her bed, ready to re-enter the stable state with the knowledge from her recent experiences and a new sense of responsibility towards herself and society.

Durarara!! is a tale that takes place just a few miles away from Mari's story, in the bustling Tokyo districts of Ikebukuro and Shinjuku. Originally published in 2004 as a series of novellas written by Ryogo Narita, *Durarara!!* was later adapted into a manga comic series in 2009 and an animated television series in 2010 directed by Takahiro Omori. The story tells of Mikado Ryugamine, who travels to Tokyo for the first time to attend a high school in Ikebukuro with an old friend from elementary school. Having lived a life in the countryside devoid of any excitement or adventure, he longs for the exhilarating city lifestyle that his friend describes through their regular interactions over an Internet chat room. However, Mikado ends up with far more excitement than he bargained for as he is thrust into a whirlwind of gang violence, criminal masterminds, and supernatural local legends. Mikado meets Anri, a shy classmate with a violent history, Shizuo, a debt collector with super-human strength and a bad temper, and Celty, a benevolent spirit who rides her motorcycle through the streets of Ikebukuro in search of her lost head. These threshold people shape Ikebukuro into a playground of chaos and uncertainty that brings about new change and responsibility in its characters.

Unlike those in *After Dark*, the characters of *Durarara!!* get no reprieve from the constant bedlam that plagues the streets of Ikebukuro. While Murakami's sense of liminality is temporal, following the train schedule, Narita's is geographic and separates those in the city from those outside of it. The series' beginning mirrors its end; the first episode begins with Mikado meeting his best friend Masaomi at the train station, while last episode ends with Masaomi leaving Ikebukuro to return to the countryside. The countryside remains in a fixed and stable condition, while anything taking place inside the city is liable to be chaotic and nonsensical. These circumstances create a liminal state which, while affecting nearly every character in the story, has the biggest impact on the two main characters: Mikado and Masaomi.

Mikado's transition over the course of the series is not a complete cycle of the liminal process. While the show ends on a positive note, implying that Mikado may soon be prepared to re-enter the stable state, the primary focus of the story is on the process of that change rather than the final result. Throughout the course of series, Mikado expresses his dissatisfaction with life in the countryside; "in my hometown, the sky seemed endless," he says, "but there was nothing to see."[14] Upon his initial arrival in Ikebukuro, Mikado is easily characterized by several of the liminal qualities that Turner describes. His appearance and behavior clearly mark him as an *inakajin*,[15] and Masaomi is quick to ridicule his strange diction and corrects Mikado with the vernacular when he refers to local landmarks by their guide-book names. Throughout the course of the story, the timid character of Mikado is faced with kidnappings, falling in love, mysterious classmates, and a diverse array of unconventional and often supernatural companions. These experiences bring him quickly to maturity and the final episode shows Mikado welcoming an old friend at Ikebukuro station, much in the same way that Masaomi welcomed Mikado in the first episode. While Mikado's return to the stable state is not pictured in the series, the effect of the liminal period on his status and responsibilities is clear to the viewer.

Masaomi, while equally affected by the liminal state, goes through a drastically different transition than his best friend. Despite his outwardly optimistic appearance and his happy-go-lucky attitude, Masaomi represents characteristics of death and darkness in his liminal transformation.[16] Unbeknownst to the viewer, Masaomi has a long history of violence and has been heavily involved in local gang activity in Ikebukuro. Prior to his meeting with Mikado, Masaomi was involved in an altercation in which his girlfriend Saki was kidnapped, beaten, and subsequently hospitalized. Unable to face the situation, Masaomi fled the scene, refused to visit the hospital where Saki was receiving treatment, and withdrew from his previous gang affiliations. Towards the end of the series however, an accumulation of events brings Masaomi to confront the kidnappers and apologize to his girlfriend. Having finally faced his fear, cowardice, and his dark past, Masaomi and Saki pack up and leave Ikebukuro together for the countryside. With this action, Masaomi has completed all three stages of the liminal process: his childhood in the countryside, his chaotic transition within the city limits, and his eventual return home with a new perception of himself and his surroundings.

Perhaps the reason that the rural Japanese countryside is so romanticized, or stigmatized in the case of *Durarara!!*, is because of the great divide between the urban and rural populations within the country. As of 2011, roughly ninety-one percent of Japan's population lives in cities and urban areas, leaving a fraction of the nation's population inhabiting the farmland and forests of the rural countryside.[17] Compare this to the eighteen percent rural population of the United States, a figure nearly twice that of Japan's percentage of rural inhabitants. As such, having friends or relatives who live in the countryside becomes a rare occurrence for many Japanese, and a sense of wonder and mystery can develop towards the countryside and its inhabitants for those who have spent their entire lives within city limits.[18] Such sentiments often lay the framework for liminal narratives of those characters seeing reprieve in the countryside and an opportunity to reexamine themselves and make changes in their lives. But unlike the chaotic and often dangerous liminal experiences that take place within the city, rural narratives tend to follow Turner's model of "submissiveness and silence," emphasizing the meditative and reflective aspects of the liminal experience.[19] Prime examples include the film *Ookami Kodomo no Ame to Yuki*,[20] which tells of a mother and her experience raising two rather unusual children in rural Japan, and *Omohide Poroporo*, [21] a film depicting the emotional transformation of a Tokyo woman during her time spent working on a farm in rural Yamagata prefecture.

Ookami Kodomo no Ame to Yuki, often referred to in English as *The Wolf Children Ame and Yuki*, or simply *Wolf Children* is a 2012 film by acclaimed director Mamoru Hosoda. Taking in numerous prestigious awards worldwide, including Animation of the Year for the Japan Academy Prize Association, the film was well-accepted by viewers and critics alike.[22] It tells the story of a woman named Hana who falls in love with a man who is half-man half-wolf, and together have two wolf children: an older daughter Yuki, and a younger son Ame. Shortly after Ame's birth, Hana's husband passes away and she is left to raise the two children on her own. In order to do so, she decides that she must pack up and leave her small apartment in Tokyo and move to the countryside.

The daughter Yuki, who also acts as the narrator for the film, recounts how her mother "was wondering whether to have us live as humans or wolves." Hana describes the countryside and her decision to move there in a clearly liminal manner. "I was thinking of moving," she tells her children, "someplace where you can choose [to be] whatever you want."[23] Hana's hopes for her children come true, and their home in the countryside comes to represent a place of liminal transformation, where each child must decide who he or she wants to become. Following the family's transition to life the countryside, the film covers the next seven years each child's unique growth and the choices they make about how they want to live in the future.

As a small child, Yuki openly embraces her status as a wolf child and enjoys exploring the nearby forests, collecting animal skeletons, and catching small animals. But as she begins school and meets other girls her age, she learns that her behavior is not acceptable and that, while her classmates admire her energy and enthusiasm, they are disgusted and frightened by many of her more feral qualities. As such, she decides to return to the state of "tablula rasa," where she must learn the liminal quality of restraint so that she may alter her natural wolf-like tendencies and act as an ordinary human girl in order to make new friends and be accepted at school.[24] The end of the film shows that Yuki has graduated from elementary school and moved back into the city to attend boarding school: a complete cycle of the liminal process.

Ame, while completing the same transformation as his older sister, does so with a very different outcome. Ame is a prime example of Turners concept of vulnerability, as he is originally terrified of his new life in the countryside and begs his mother to return to the city.[25] Ame has difficulty embracing his wolf half and, after reading *The Three Little Pigs*, tearfully asks his mother: "Why is the wolf always the bad guy?"[26] This all changes however, when Ame nearly drowns in a river and decides that he must become braver and embrace his qualities as a wolf. Ame stops going to school and instead spends his days with a fox that he refers to as *sensei*[27] and who teaches him about life in the wilderness. Following a severe flood in which his *sensei* is killed, Ame decides to take his teacher's place as the leader of the forest and leaves his home in the countryside to live permanently in the wilderness. While Hana initially struggles with his choice to leave home, she ultimately accepts her son's decision and tells him to "Go! Live your life!"[28] This shows the completion of Ame's transformation through his ability to overcome his weakness and vulnerability and complete his liminal experience in the countryside to prepare him for life in the wild Japanese forests.

Omohide Poroporo, more commonly referred to by its English title *Only Yesterday*, is a 1991 film directed by Isao Takahata and produced by Studio Ghibli. While the movie has not achieved the international success of other Takahata and Studio Ghibli films, such as *Grave of the Fireflies* or *Spirited Away*, *Only Yesterday* is a standout among its peers for its distinct style of animation and its uniquely mature storyline, primarily targeted at older female viewers. The film follows twenty-seven-year old Taeko Okajima as she makes a trip to rural Yamagata prefecture to help her brother-in-law's family with the annual safflower harvest. During the course of her travels, she begins to reminisce about growing up and her desire as a child to visit the countryside. "I was born in raised in Tokyo," she explains to the viewers, "and my parents were as well. I always envied my friends who had a country

hometown to return to."[29] This initial recollection opens up a tide of memories and Taeko is forced to spend her trip alongside her metaphorical and literal ten-year old self.

The boundaries of Taeko's liminal experience exist, though they are not as clearly defined as those in previous examples. The stable state is easy enough to identify. It is Taeko's one bedroom apartment, her desk job, and her professional office attire: in short, her regular adult lifestyle in the city. But things begin to change as her flashbacks start, and as she boards the overnight train for Yamagata, she finds herself sharing the car with a projection of her ten-year old self. Unlike characters in previous examples, whose transformations occurred based solely on their geographic or temporal condition in the story, Taeko's period of liminal transition is marked largely by her mental state as a result of her decision to visit the countryside. In this way the countryside acts as a catalyst, rather than a physical setting, for Taeko's liminal transition, while the flashbacks themselves are what characterize her time spent in the liminal period.

Much like Mikado and his arrival in Ikebukuro, Taeko is easily distinguishable as a liminal person upon her arrival at the family farmhouse in Yamagata. Everyone is eager to meet the "Tokyo girl" and they comment on her appearance in traditional farming clothes, as well as her unusual attitude as she is eager to begin the workday. Taeko's experience on the farm turns into one of rebirth, of "being reduced to a ground down or uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable [her] to cope with [her] new station in life".[30] In order to return to this blank slate, Taeko must look to her past and determine whether she has become a person that her ten year old self would truly be proud of. "I wonder," she muses, "if the reason my fifth-grade self is following me is that she is trying to tell me to look back and figure out who I am."[31] After reminiscing on experiences such as her first taste of pineapple, her struggle learning to divide fractions, and her success in the school play, Takeo comes to the conclusion that her current lifestyle is not one that her childhood self would be proud of. The movie ends with the ten-year old and twenty-seven-year old Taeko walking side by side back to the car that will return them to the farmhouse. As the two women make peace with Taeko's past and her decisions about the future, the liminal state comes to an end.

Takahata also explores, perhaps in a more covert manner, Taeko's sexual journey and her battle with femininity throughout the liminal process. Turner notes that "[t]he undifferentiated character of liminality is reflected by the discontinuance of sexual relations and the absence of marked sexual polarity," a description that falls very much in line with Taeko's experience.[32] Being single and twenty-seven-years old, Taeko's lack of a husband is something mentioned by numerous characters at different points in the film and is something that Taeko herself is rather sensitive about. She also gives off an air of sexual immaturity, as demonstrated by her reminiscences about her first crush in elementary school and her childish reaction when it is suggested that she marry one of the young farmers in the family. Throughout her liminal experience on the farm, Taeko chooses to wear the unattractive and unfeminine farming uniform, though she is warned by the other female farmers that "young farmers' wives seldom wear them these days."[33] In this way, Taeko's sexuality and gender become somewhat ambiguous throughout her liminal experience. Upon her return to the stable state however, her period of androgyny comes to an end. As the film closes and Taeko has made peace with her ten-year old self, it is implied that she intends on marrying the farmer and moving to the countryside.

3. Conclusion

By now, my audience has come to understand the liminal journey as a plot device, the variety and elements of different liminal experiences, and the frequency with which these narratives appear in Japanese popular culture. But before I explore the significance of this media to the modern day Japanese religious profile, I first seek to clarify those misunderstandings that commonly arise in the course of discussion regarding popular culture as religion. An ever growing subject in religious studies scholarship, religion and popular culture is a subject that can be divided into several distinct categories. Jolyon Baraka Thomas explores these categories, but specifically as they apply to Japanese manga and anime. In his chapter titled "Recreating Religion," Thomas identifies five categories of religious media: *exposure*, *show*, *tell*, *canonization*, and *homilies/parables*.[34] While all five categories provide important perspectives to the study of religious popular culture and to Japanese popular culture specifically, the liminal process and its presence in media is not relevant to all of these categories in all cases.

The categories of *exposure* and *show* frequently overlap, seeing as the two both deal with religious content simply for its aesthetic appeal. The popular show *Naruto: Shippuden*[35] is a prime example of religious exposure, as it utilizes traditionally religious figures and terminology with little reference to their religious significance.[36] Characters on the show fight using supernatural abilities, including powers with names like *Izanagi*, *Izanami*, *Amaterasu*, *Tsukuyomi*, and *Susanoo.*[37] While these titles all refer to prominent figures in Shinto mythology, they

exist within the show simply by their names with no reference to each character's mythological background or religious significance. Thomas notes that while those who consume exposure-type religious media "tend to have higher levels of familiarity with mythological terms (such as deities' names) than those who do not...[t]his does not necessarily mean that audiences exhibit religious behavior in response."[38] In a similar manner, *show* refers to the use of shrines and other places of religious significance as an aesthetically pleasing backdrop "without necessarily displaying any commitment to a particular religion."[39]

Tell is a category of religious media that has thrived as a medium for non-fictional products in Japan, largely due to the accessible nature that manga has to offer its consumers. Manga-style comics are wildly popular for all Japanese regardless of age or gender, and everything from religious history, religious doctrine, and promotional materials for religious organizations has been adapted into a manga format. In a not-so-subtle manner, this type of religious media is "designed to elicit the interest of potential consumer-adherents,...to convert potential believers,...[or] to instruct current members of a particular tradition."[40] Authors prefer to use this style of advertising because doctrine often seems less intimidating in cartoon format and is more likely to be read by children and those with lower levels of education. Despite its prevalence and market success, this style of manga is almost always found in the religion section of bookstores and can hardly be considered secular or particularly influential on popular media.[41]

The fourth category of religious media, *canonization*, is perhaps the most frequent application of religious theory to popular culture. Often applied to phenomena like celebrity worship, sports fanaticism, or enthusiasts who profess to follow certain types of popular media "religiously," canonization in manga and anime culture often takes the form of fandom and *otaku*[42] culture. Thomas describes the process of canonization of manga and anime as when "the characters and themes within these works come to take on a life of their own, sometimes becoming objects of devotion or models to be emulated."[43] David Chidester, who writes specifically on the subject of canonization in American pop culture, defines religion as being "about sacred symbols and systems of sacred symbols that endow the world with meaning and value," and uses this definition to describe phenomena such as baseball, Coca-Cola, and Rock n' Roll in a religious context.[44] I seek to make a clear distinction that, while Japanese media that employs the use of the liminal narrative may provide deep religious meaning for its consumers, that it does not do so through the process of canonization. I do not doubt that the wildly popular works of Haruki Murakami and Studio Ghibli do, to some extent, have a canonical following, but I stress that the religious implications provided by these works is not something that can simply be attributed to fandom and *otaku* culture.

The presence of liminality in Japanese popular media and its religious and spiritual impact on consumers falls within the *homilies/parables* category of popular culture. This category involves "using the parabolic mode to relate moral and religious positions through easily accessible language and allegory," though the concepts and messages portrayed by authors are not limited to morality and ethical commentary. This type of media "may also reflect an author's reflections on the nature of the soul, the afterlife, or the cosmos in a way designed to encourage reflection, but not necessarily conversion."[45] In this context, the inclusion of liminal transformations by authors and directors gives readers and viewers the opportunity to reflect on characters' experiences and relate them back to their own lives. The inclusion of this spiritual element may be a deliberate action by the writer or simply coincidental; but regardless of intentionality, its presence has the same introspective effects on consumers.[46]

In light of this perspective regarding spiritual implications in secular narratives, we should perhaps adjust our vocabulary when describing the Japanese religious profile from "atheist" to "non-religious." In his chapter titled "What Does it Mean to 'Lack Religious Beliefs'" Toshimaro Ama argues that "[b]eing religious means a rejection of reveled religion but impl[ies] an identification with natural religion."[47] This natural religion, as he describes it, has its roots in Japanese Buddhism but incorporates a "healthy-minded" attitude towards morality, respect of family members and the elderly, and a general awareness of one's actions and condition in the universe.[48] Should the Japanese continue to foster a healthy spiritual mind and religious attitude, perhaps through means like reflection upon the liminal accounts in popular media, Ama explains that "there [is] no need for people to choose revealed religion as their declared means of spiritual liberation."[49] "The Japanese religious mind," he argues, "cannot simply be deemed non-religious, due to the paradoxical expressive nature of spiritual feelings."[50] Following this attitude, even the secular narratives found in unexpected places like comic books and television shows can help to develop a consumer's sense of spiritual awareness.

4. References

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[2] Ama, *Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?*, 1-2.

[3] Carl Olson, comp., *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion: a Selection of Critical Readings* (Belmont, CA: Thomson and Wadsworth, 2003), 240-241.

[4] Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 94-95.

[5] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

[6] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103.

[7] food and drinking establishments often targeted at business men

[8] Kirin, Walter, "In the Wee Small Hours," Review of *After Dark*, by Haruki Murakami, *New York Times*, June 3, 2007, Sunday Book Review.

[9] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

[10] Murakami, Haruki, *After Dark*, trans. by Jay Rubin (London: Vintage Books, 2008) 130.

[11] Murakami, *After Dark*, 71.

[12] Murakami, *After Dark*, 122

[13] Murakami, *After Dark*, 115

[14] *Durarara!!*, directed by Takahiro Omori (2010; Tokyo: Aniplex, 2011), DVD.

[15] Roughly translates to "country bumpkin." A somewhat derogatory term for those who have grown up in the countryside; implies that a person is, naïve, uncultured, or ignorant.

[16] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

[17] "Japan: People and Society," CIA World Factbook, accessed November 10, 2013.

[18] "United States: People and Society," CIA World Factbook, accessed November 10, 2013.

[19] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103.

[20] The title *Ookami Kodomo no Ame to Yuki* translates in English as *The Wolf Children Ame and Yuki.* The children's names (Ame and Yuki) translate to mean rain and snow, respectively.

[21] The title *Omohide Poroporo* does not translate easily into English. Omohide means memories or recollections, while poroporo is an onomatopoetic verb mimicking the sound of dripping water. An effectual translation might be *Falling Memories* or *Drops of Reminiscence*.

[22] 'Animation of the Year," Japan Academy Prize Association, accessed November 10, 2013.

[23] *Wolf Children*, directed by Mamoru Hosoda (2012; Flower Mound, TX: Funimation, 2013), DVD.

[24] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 103.

[25] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

[26] *Wolf Children*, directed by Mamoru Hosoda (2012; Flower Mound, TX: Funimation, 2013), DVD.

[27] Teacher

[28] *Wolf Children*, directed by Mamoru Hosoda (2012; Flower Mound, TX: Funimation, 2013), DVD.

[29] *Only Yesterday*, directed by Isao Takahata (1991; London: StudioCanal UK, 2006), DVD.

[30] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 95.

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[32] Turner, *The Ritual Process*, 104.

[33] *Only Yesterday*, directed by Isao Takahata (1991; London: StudioCanal UK, 2006), DVD.

[34] Jolyon Baraka Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan.* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2012), 57-101

[35] Translates to *Naruto: The Hurricane Chronicles*. Naruto is the name of the series' protagonist.

[36] *Naruto: Shippuden*, directed by Hayato Date (2007 – 2013; San Francisco: Viz Media, 2009 – 2013), DVD.

[37] In Shinto mythology, Izanagi and his wife Izanami are two of the most celebrated deities, credited with creating the Japanese islands. Their children include Amaterasu, the sun goddess, Tsukuyomi, the moon god, and Susanoo, the god of the sea and storms.

[38] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 62.

[39] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 64.

[40] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 78.

[41] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 81.

[42] Originally meaning enthusiast or aficionado, *otaku* has come to be a derogatory term for a person who obsessive engages specifically in the sub-cultures of Japanese manga and anime.

[43] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 91.

[44] David Chidester "The Church of Baseball, the Fetish of Coca-Cola, and the Potlatch of Rock 'n' Roll: Theoretical Models for the Study of Religion in American Popular Culture," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64 (1996): 744.

[45] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 87.

[46] Thomas, *Drawing on Tradition*, 88, 90.

[47] Ama, *Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?*, 3.

[48] Ama, *Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?*, 3-4.

[49] Ama, *Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?*, 4.

[50] Ama, *Why are the Japanese Non-Religious?*, 80.