Genesis at the Shrine: The Votive Art of an Anime Pilgrimage

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In 2002 a *dōjin* group known as 07th Expansion produced a sound novel (visual novel) format game called *Higurashi no naku koro ni* ("When they cry," hereafter referred to as *Higurashi*).[1] Over the next several years, anime, manga, light novels, films, and other *Higurashi* products swept into the marketplace for an ever-expanding fan base. *Higurashi* is a mystery story that follows six central characters who are haunted by a series of murders. Much of the action of the narrative takes place in the rural community of Hinamizawa in June 1983. Besides one male protagonist, Maebara Kei'ichi, the main characters are all female and include Furude Rika, Hōjō Satoko, Ryūgū Rena, and the Shinozaki sisters, Mion and Shion. Additionally, there is one more character of interest: Rika's ancestor, Hanyū, who happens to be the deity worshipped in the local shrine in Hinamizawa.

All of this, of course, is standard enough for an anime. But there is a twist—not with the story itself but rather with how fans reacted to it. Particularly stimulated by the television airing of *Higurashi* in 2006, fans set off on a quest, driven by Japan's popular culture and accented by artistic intention, to enshrine their beloved *Higurashi* anime characters at the crossroads of the two-dimensional and three-dimensional worlds. They traveled to the site of the genesis of the anime.

THE HIGURASHI PILGRIMAGE

In the same way that motion pictures, TV dramas, and commercials are filmed on location, anime productions regularly incorporate backdrops adopted from real places; in recent years, more and more anime fans are choosing to actually embark on trips to these places, journeys that bring the two-dimensional world of the anime to the three-dimensional setting on which it is modeled. Fans have adopted the term *seichi junrei*, a compound meaning "sacred site" (*seichi*) and "pilgrimage" (*junrei*), for this spiritual enterprise.[2] Within Japan's otaku culture, *seichi* are not limited to the settings of anime and games but also include thriving maid cafes, the homes and workplaces of anime or manga artists, factories manufacturing otaku-valued commodities, and Tokyo's Akihabara shopping district, a mecca for assorted hobbyists.[3] In this way, the term *seichi* is pervasively used by otaku in general, but it is anime fans in particular who tend to use the expression *seichi junrei*, which further emphasizes the pilgrimage aspect and the act of actually journeying to the sacred site in question.

Although *seichi junrei* remain largely unknown outside the fan community, such pilgrimages first started in the 1990s when fans began to seek out sites connected with specific anime. One of the earliest known pilgrimages occurred when fans inspired by the series *Sailor Moon* (1992–97, *Bishōjo senshi Seeraamūn*) gathered at the Hikawa Shrine in Tokyo's urban neighborhood of Motoazabu.[4] Since that time, the cultural phenomenon of anime *seichi junrei* has grown, and today there is an emerging genre of books listing pilgrimage sites throughout the country.[5] Although academic research into anime pilgrimage is in its infancy, studies of pilgrimage as a form of tourism are more and more common, and one can even find a handbook instructing municipalities how to use pilgrimages to invigorate their local economies.[6]

In the case of *Higurashi,* fans perform the pilgrimage in order to spiritually connect with other fans, with the production of the anime, with its creators, and above all, with the characters. Although Hinamizawa is a fictitious village created for the narrative, it is based on an actual site: Shirakawagō, a village in Gifu Prefecture famous as a tourist showpiece of nostalgic rural Japan. Some *Higurashi* fans make the pilgrimage to Shirakawagō only once, some several times, and those enraptured by *Higurashi* visit repeatedly.

To facilitate the pilgrimage, fans have appropriated a tourist map of the real site of Shirakawagō and transformed it into a downloadable map of Hinamizawa, overwriting the original locations with those in the *Higurashi* story.[7] Fans carry these maps in order to find, for example, a building that serves as a model for a character's home depicted in the anime. Methodically capturing a photographic image of a building from the same angle as in *Higurashi,* fans will then post the photo on their blogs and homepages along with an account of their journey.[8] This coincides with what John Urry calls the "hermeneutic circle," which entails "travellers demonstrating that they really have been there by showing their version of the images that they had seen before they set off."[9] Furthermore, such images not only commemorate their trip, but also monumentalize the site as a sacred place of pilgrimage.[10] Fans, who begin their journey by viewing the two-dimensional *Higurashi,* travel through the three-dimensional space of Shirakawagō and then proceed to document this categorically "analog" activity in a digital space online. The fans' engagement with *Higurashi* moves full circle, further cementing the two-dimensional and three-dimensional worlds together.

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THE SHRINE WITHIN THE SHRINE

One major reason that fans are increasingly interested in pilgrimage is the associated *ema* (votive tablet). An *ema* is a small wooden tablet or plaque on which visitors write their wishes or prayers; these are often left at a shrine with the hope that their prayers will be fulfilled by the resident deity. The word *ema* literally means "picture-horse," because the tradition developed out of an old custom of dedicating horses to the gods. Over time the horse came to be embodied in painted form on a wooden tablet, the three-dimensional living creature transformed into a two-dimensional representation. The pictures on *ema* expanded beyond just horses to encompass a myriad of symbolic imagery including other animals, religious objects, and the deities themselves. The Japanese continue to use *ema* to petition deities or to express gratitude for their divine grace, but nowadays the practice has become primarily text centered, and drawing or painting on *ema* by worshippers is more the exception than the rule. Generally shrines and temples market *ema* with preprinted designs; supplicants personalize these by simply writing in their prayers.[11]

The anime fan on pilgrimage goes against this trend and often draws a picture of his or her own design. If a shrine that appears in an anime actually exists, then fans are certain to visit. And if they find an *emakake* (the rack

used to hang *ema*) they may offer *ema* adorned with their own illustrations of anime characters. They may also write in a comment about the pilgrimage experience, express appreciation for the anime production or pilgrimage location, or jot down a character's set phrases and the argotic language of anime fans and Internet users. But more than the writing itself, it is the illustrations, the visual portrayal of characters, that represent the most distinctive characteristic of fan-generated *ema*.

If most people who offer *ema* refrain from illustrating them, what then compels anime fans to make this effort? This is a critical question, for certainly a copious amount of thought, energy, and skill go into composing what the fans call an *itaema*, which translates roughly as "painful votive tablet." The naming alludes to the pain of being socially stigmatized for bringing one's private obsession with anime out into the open and subjecting it to public scrutiny, perhaps even ridicule.[12] If the "medium is the message," as Marshall McLuhan long ago suggested, then it is deeply meaningful that these fans choose to express themselves through the physical object of the *ema* and that they do it through images, not just words.[13] By drawing their own versions of the anime characters, they not only replicate the actions of the illustrators of the original text, but they also make that text their own, personalizing it, animating it, and indeed, *creating* it themselves.

Despite their creative and collective participation in the pilgrimage and their shared interest in the *itaema*, however, fans tend to refrain from entering into face-to-face conversation with each other. From the fans' perspective, then, the *emakake* is not only a hallowed space within the shrine but also a site of communication. Through personal observation at the Shirakawagō Hachiman Shrine, I estimate that although only a small minority of fans actually produces *ema*, all the fans making the *Higurashi* pilgrimage circuit of Hinamizawa (Shirakawagō) stop by to check out the *emakake*. Communication between fans is neither face-to-face nor virtual, but it is vital and real, anchored in the material plane through the medium of the *ema*. The *emakake* serves as the solitary place in Shirakawagō where fans communicate with each other, albeit indirectly. The *itaema* on display signify the fans' "public show of labor" and commitment to the *Higurashi* community.[14]

Communicative exchange among fans in this way is in constant flux as new *ema* are dedicated at the *emakake*. The rack has rows of pins on which visitors hang *ema* by a fastened string, usually placing new *ema* in front of older ones. Fans will often lift up or push aside *ema* to get a look at those hidden from view. And some visitors, on finding a well-drawn *ema*, will physically move it into the front row to be better viewed by all. In a reflection of their

social media literacy, fans curate this physical forum as they might an Internet site, contributing postings (*ema*) to a message board (*emakake*). At times, written comments directed at surrounding *ema* even mirror a threaded discussion online. And just as with an online discussion, nonfans may find themselves at a loss when confronted by unfamiliar language and imagery.

It is plausible that without an *emakake*, the fan experience, both on and off the pilgrimage, would be significantly altered. On other anime pilgrimages fans employ communicative strategies, such as writing in notebooks, but the visual allure and the open, public quality of the *emakake* cannot be matched.[15] Fans appreciate and anticipate fan-made renditions of the characters that are artistically, intellectually, and even emotionally stimulating. The visual conspicuousness of the *itaema* is what sets the fans' work apart from other *ema*. In essence, fans have taken the languishing craft of illustrating *ema* and reinvigorated it with a vibrant, contemporary aesthetic.

THE ART OF PRAYER

At the Shirakawagō Hachiman shrine, the raw color emanating from the *itaema* immediately grabs one's attention. Volant in the wind, the *ema* signal their presence with an unrhythmical click-clacking sound. At most shrines the *ema*'s bidding, more often than not, goes unheeded by the passerby. But even for people familiar with seeing *ema* at shrines, the in-your-face compositions distinctive of an anime pilgrimage are unusual and attract attention.

I conducted a field survey of the *ema* at the Shirakawagō Hachiman Shrine on November 11, 2007. In total I found 577 *ema*. Of these, 511 (almost 90 percent) contained textual or image references to anime or the Internet, and inferably can be associated with fan pilgrims.[16] A total of 469 (about 80 percent) made direct reference to *Higurashi*. All together 303 (just over 50 percent) contained artwork, most with *Higurashi* characters.[17] The *ema* included in this survey represent this originating period of the pilgrimage, from 2005 to 2007. Some, but not all, *ema* have dates inscribed on them; the three earliest *ema* date back to 2005, which predates the television release of the anime but is presumably when the shrine first started selling *ema*.[18] One of these three was an *itaema*. In 2006, after the broadcast of the anime series, we witness a sharp increase in the number of *itaema*, and an even greater proliferation as we move into 2007.[19]

Fans produce votive art according to their own tastes and abilities. Drawn by male and female fans alike, female character illustrations predominate. A

machete-like hatchet and a baseball bat, weapons in *Higurashi*'s murderous storyline, appear repeatedly as motif objects. Some fans create extemporaneous works, ranging from a quick sketch to a detailed drawing. Others prepare ahead, bringing graphics or stickers that they affix to the *ema*. Still others purchase an *ema*, take it elsewhere, and bring it back when it is completed, presumably to produce votive art of higher quality. And a devoted few manufacture the *ema* themselves, crafting it from a cut of wood.

CREATING PRESENCE

Fan art springs from mundane fan-life activities, such as watching animations or playing games, much of which entails appreciation of and interaction with images.[20] Indeed, Japanese culture has long placed emphasis on the visual, particularly within the arts.[21] But in and of itself, this immersion in visual culture does not explain why fans would go through the effort to illustrate *ema* with anime images.

Based on Azuma Hiroki's work and with reference to the *Higurashi* pilgrimage, Maruta Hajime explains that because anime are often modeled on actual places, fans can physically retrace the footsteps of fictional characters in the three-dimensional landscape within a "manga/anime realism." But ultimately fans recognize that an anime is fiction and that their own experience is limited to physically being in the place where characters stand; they do not actually experience the place as the characters would.[22] He further posits that an alternative way of processing experience is present in what is known as "game realism," in which a character comes down into the three-dimensional world the fan inhabits.

It has been suggested that *itaema* represent an attempt to transcend the limitations of "manga/anime realism" in accordance with "game realism." In studying the *Sengoku Basara* (2005, Sengoku BASARA) game pilgrimage, Satō Yoshiyuki notes the overriding significance of *itaema*. Through creating and offering an *itaema*, he argues, fans can imagine that the characters overcome the restrictions of the two-dimensional anime and enter into the three-dimensional world where the fans themselves exist. Manifested on the *itaema*, the characters literally become part of the living world of the pilgrims. The fans are no longer just experiencing the places characters have been; rather it is as if they are playing a game in the three-dimensional world, where they are both creating the characters through their art and also observing themselves as reflected in the characters they have produced.[23] While Satō's conclusion

gestures to the general importance of the visual images on *itaema*, I would argue that in order to better understand the dynamics of fan interaction with the anime and with each other, it is critical to closely examine the actual artwork found on the *itaema*. If, as Satō suggests, fans are actively engaging with characters at the pilgrimage site, then details of the illustrations will shed light on the nature of this engagement.

The first *Higurashi itaema* I will use to exemplify anime votive art is an anonymously drawn and brilliantly illustrated piece featuring a female character in a fit of psychotic laughter (Figure 1). The face, the central element, seems to overflow the 14 cm wide by 10 cm high, elongated diamond shape of the *ema*, creating a close-up that gives an impression of movement toward the viewer. A tilting of the head further contributes to the animated effect. Opened wide, with retinas like those of a snake, her eyes peer out and gaze down on the viewer. An elongated mouth reveals a thin, white line of small, jagged, razor-like teeth running from corner to corner. Under this row of teeth the tautly stretched mouth is a dark pit from which an eerie laugh emerges. The laugh is the only script on this particular *ema*: the *hiragana* characters translate as an echoing "ha-ha-ha." The letters encircling the face float off
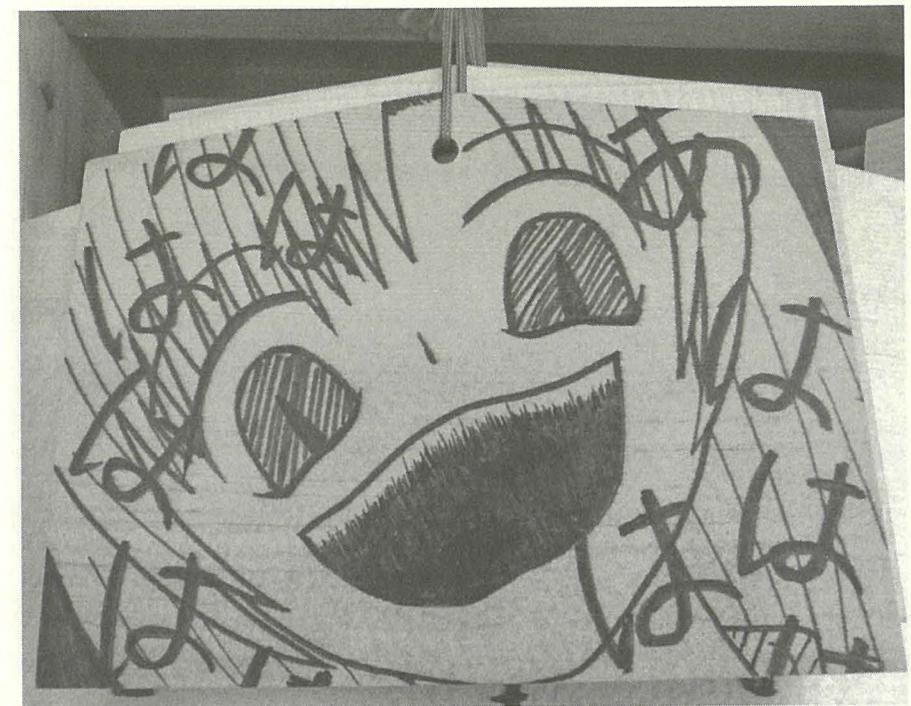

FIGURE 1. A *Higurashi* character laughs eerily. Photograph by the author.

haphazardly in all directions, conveying a demonic energy. This *ema* is an example of the artwork's capacity to visually communicate an animated presence. Even for a viewer with no firsthand knowledge of the storyline, the impression delivered by this image is unsettling. Folklorist Simon J. Bronner has recognized that "a key characteristic of the Internet that distinguishes it from face-to-face talking is how visual it is."[24] Although the *emakake* is a pointedly nondigital space of communication, here, too, visuality is key to a form of communication that is not face to face.

An *ema* with Hanyū (Figure 2) provides insight into another critical aspect of *itaema,* namely the opening of interplay between characters and fans. On the *ema,* the demon-goddess Hanyū has raised her right-hand level with her face to forcibly point an index finger at the viewer. Boldface in red, and positioned vertically along both sides of her head, are the ominous words: "If you do not offer (an *ema*), a curse on you." Because her mouth itself is drawn as a miniscule triangle, this threat bellows forth as if telepathically transmitted, penetrating into the viewer's inner psyche.

On the one hand, the prayer is a comical plea from one fan to another to make an appreciable contribution to the pilgrimage experience, thereby intensifying it for everyone. On the other hand, in complying with Hanyū's decree to offer a votive tablet, fans engage in a dialog with the characters as well as with other fans. Through (re)producing and displaying a visual representation in this way, fans transfer the narratives of the characters from the screen of a television or video monitor to the physical setting of the pilgrimage site. Both the image and the accompanying text, in the form of dialog, allow the illustrated characters to interact with pilgrims and vice versa. In a sense, Hanyū serves as a conduit, voicing a message from one pilgrim to others who follow.

When Donald H. Holly Jr. and Casey E. Cordy investigated present-day activities surrounding the gravesites of alleged vampires in Rhode Island, they commented that they learned little if anything about the motivations of the people who left objects (coins, candles, and so on) at the graves.[25] Unlike the material record in their research, however, *itaema* contain explicit illustrations and therefore provide a plethora of information about *Higurashi* fans and offer insight into why they invest so much time and energy on the pilgrimage. One example contains a large figure of Hanyū backed by a smaller Shion (Figure 3). Looking straight forward, Hanyū wears a matter-of-fact expression as she instructs fans on how to make a petition. Her rounded mouth is opened to suggest that she is uttering the written text. She informs us that we should offer her favorite food, cream puffs.[26] At first glance we see that fans entertain each other with tantalizing references to the *Higurashi* story; shared knowledge is continuously communicated by both text and visual image on

FIGURE 2. The demon-goddess Hanyū threatens fans. Photograph by the author.

FIGURE 3. Hanyū instructs fans how to petition her by offering cream puffs. Photograph by the author.

> BY COLLECTIVELY SUPERIMPOSING HINAMIZAWA ON THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL SPACE OF SHIRA-KAWAGŌ, FANS BRING THEIR BELOVED ANIME CHARACTERS INTO A MATERIAL REALM.

the *itaema*. Yet we also witness the establishment of a relationship with the characters that is a step beyond what is ordinarily expected. In this example, although presented as inside humor, fans overtly sanction the petitioning of the *Higurashi* characters.

Fans use the *ema* to restructure their surroundings in order to bring themselves and the characters to the source of the *Higurashi* world. On one side of the *ema* sold by the shrine is the shrine name printed with a scene of the local traditional lion dance, animals connected with birth years, and other such auspicious images. The other side is left blank to provide space to write a prayer. Of the *ema* I examined, I found that eight fans elected to write Hinamizawa's shrine's fictional name, Furude Shrine, on the *ema*. Two *ema* had the name of Shirakawagō Hachiman Shrine crossed out and rewritten with the fictional shrine's name. A third was blackened over with a marker so that the scene was completely indiscernible. We can interpret these actions as the fans actively working to imagine that Shirakawagō is the fictional Hinamizawa; that is, by overwriting the name in this way, fans transform Shirakawagō Hachiman Shrine, where Ōjin Tennō (Emperor Ōjin, reign circa 270–310) is enshrined, into Furude Shrine, where Oyashiro-sama is worshipped. In a sense, they are also questioning which is the original: was Furude inspired by Hachiman, or is it actually the other way around? Through their active participation the pilgrims blur the lines between the two-dimensional and three-dimensional worlds, between fiction and reality.

Moreover, by collectively superimposing Hinamizawa on the three-dimensional space of Shirakawagō, fans bring their beloved anime characters into a material realm. For them, Hanyū, the deity who is worshipped at Furude Shrine, replaces Shirakawagō Hachiman Shrine's deity not just in name but in practice. In her work on the modern popularity among Japanese schoolgirls of the tenth-century sorcerer Abe no Seimei (921–1005), Laura Miller has noted that worshippers offer *ema* so the enshrined deities can read them, which is standard practice at shrines and temples throughout Japan.[27] A review of all of the *ema* at Shirakawagō Hachiman Shrine shows that on numerous occasions the fans directly petitioned Hanyū and other characters to grant their wishes.[28] In 2007, out of 511 *itaema*, 231 (45 percent) were inscribed with prayers and petitions. For all practical purposes, the anime characters have become the deities.

Media and technology scholar Sherry Turkle has posited that Internet users are akin to "dwellers on the threshold between the real and virtual," an observation that certainly applies meaningfully to anime pilgrims as well.[29] Indeed, some pilgrims demonstrate a vivid awareness of the fact that they are enacting a link between the real and the virtual, between the three-dimensional world and the two-. One example that explicitly comments on this point is an *ema* (Figure 4) with multiple characters: Satoko, Rika, and Rena (from left to right) with a smallish figure on top of Rika's head, possibly Hanyū. The figures are drawn in a more childlike style than most other votive illustrations in the survey, and the low placement of the characters on the tablet contributes to the effect of short stature. Moreover, because their rounded eyes are expressed rather flatly, lacking lucidness, the three main figures exude a sense of innocence. Consequently, the image attains an added quality of sincerity that complements a thought-provoking supplication: Satoko prays for more people to be able to distinguish between reality and the two-dimensional world. Here the separation between the two worlds becomes all the more blurred, as fans turn to the two-dimensional world of the anime to communicate with each other in the three-dimensional world.

The image also raises some important questions. Is Satoko's wish simply tongue-in-cheek commentary about the perceived mental state of *Higurashi*

FIGURE 4. Satoko prays for people to be able to distinguish between reality and fiction. Photograph by the author.

fans, or does it, more profoundly, reveal a philosophical outlook that could help explain the need to produce *ema* illustrated with anime characters? Satoko advocates for people to distinguish between reality and fantasy, an ironic request of course, considering that it is being made by an anime character. But if we read between the lines, this irony reveals that the fans are, as Satō seems to suggest, able to transcend the paradox of their liminal condition. The votive art is central to connecting the three-dimensional (human/real) with the two-dimensional (divine/fictional).[30]

One final example (Figure 5) presents an image reminiscent of a traditional *ema* motif of a worshipper in prayer.[31] We find Satoko with head slightly lowered, eyes gently closed, hands raised with palms pressed against each other. Her mouth is hidden from view by her hands. The high positioning accentuates the act of worship while simulating the manner in which Japanese customarily pray at shrines and temples. The image is simple enough, but the accompanying text presents a puzzle that once more blurs the lines between the real and the virtual. In *Higurashi,* the main characters of the story organized themselves into a club, and the text of this *ema* reads, "(I pray) that I can make a scenario in which I am doing the club (activities) with my big brothers and sisters." The words are straightforward, but because of the site and context of its articulation, the meaning is ambiguous. Is the *ema* referencing the artist's desire to interact with other pilgrims, the desire of Satoko to play with the other members of the club, or is Satoko expressing a desire to have the pilgrims become a part of her world?

Such "pictorial and narrative polysemy," as Jennifer Robertson has noted about *ema* in other contexts, is characteristic of many of the *ema* found at the Shirakawagō Hachiman Shrine.[32] It is up to the viewers to interpret the meaning of text and image. Moreover, it is the viewers who ultimately decide who is speaking: the character, the fan who offered up the *ema,* or both. Had fans refrained from adding art and simply followed the general custom of only inscribing text on their votive offerings, then the *ema* would not have become so readily observable (visual), and the relation with the characters would not have become as lively and interactive.
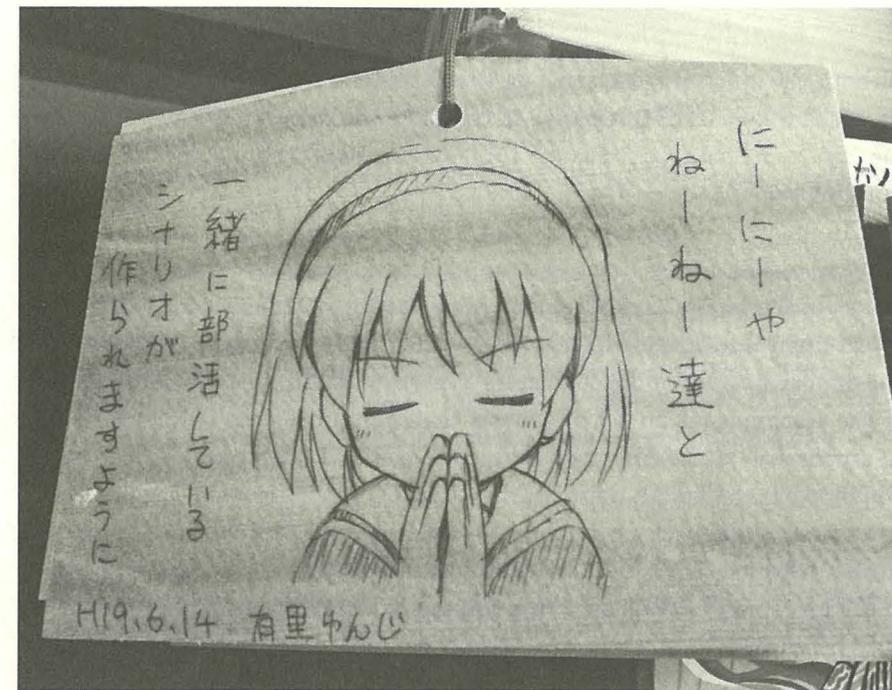
> WHEN THEY TRAVEL TO THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL HINAMIZAWA, THEY SENSE AN EMPTINESS, AN INCOMPLETENESS, WITHOUT THE ANIMATING PRESENCE OF THE CHARACTERS WHO ARE INSEPARABLE FROM HINAMIZAWA. SO, FANS UNDERTAKE TO COMPLETE THE PICTURE, AS IT WERE, TO DRAW THE *HIGURASHI* CHARACTERS INTO THE THREE-DIMENSIONAL HINAMIZAWA AS ILLUSTRATIONS ON *EMA.*

FIGURE 5. Satoko in prayer. Photograph by the author.

In fact, I would argue that it is the *illustrations* that constitute the vehicle for this transference of characters from the flat world of anime into the three-dimensional pilgrimage terrain. Despite being recognizable as material products, the characters on the *ema* are "in the status of persons."[33] It has been noted that in contemporary Japan, the anthropomorphizing of objects is now part and parcel of everyday life, and many people express an emotional attachment to fictional characters.[34] On an *ema* featuring a drawing of Rika one fan wrote, "Rika, I love you, I love you! So please raise my grades."[35] In such instances, we see fans pursuing intimate interaction with *Higurashi* characters as well as treating them as if they were deities to be petitioned.

In describing how a person receives an amulet from a shrine or temple, H. Bryon Earhart explains that the shrine or temple contains more power and sacrality than the home.[36] Extending this train of thought to our subject, the movement of the characters out of the private and into the public sphere—more specifically off the TV or computer screen in the home to the *emakake* at the pilgrimage site—is a sacralizing action that imbues the characters, embodied on the fans' *ema,* with ubiety in the three-dimensional world. The *Higurashi* world arose from the scenery found in Shirakawagō; fans recognize that Shirakawagō is the origin of Hinamizawa. But when they travel to the three-dimensional Hinamizawa, they sense an emptiness, an incompleteness,

without the animating presence of the characters who are inseparable from Hinamizawa. So, fans undertake to complete the picture, as it were, to draw the *Higurashi* characters into the three-dimensional Hinamizawa as illustrations on *ema*.

Bronner has suggested that people tend to doubt the realness of what they see on the screen because of an object's intangibility.[37] Accordingly, by situating the image of characters within the three-dimensional world, fans invest them with an added, real-world authenticity. They make them tangible. The materialization of the characters' presence within the physical landscape of the pilgrimage is an act of genesis that simultaneously animates the instrumentality of the *Higurashi* characters and also makes real a place called Hinamizawa. McLuhan defined "medium" as "any extension of ourselves": by extending themselves through *itaema* imagery in the sacred space of the shrine, *Higurashi* fans literally make themselves part of the story, and part of the place where it occurs.[38] Through this act of creation, fans give birth to their own world.

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Notes

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1. A *dōjin* circle is a group of people with shared interests, i.e. in making fan-created works. *Higurashi no naku koro ni*, PC (07th Expansion, 2002).

2. *Seichi junrei* commonly refers to a pilgrimage to a traditional religious setting; however, the parameters of the term are expanding to reflect current social attitudes regarding spirituality. For an overview of contemporary pilgrimage sites both in and out of Japan, see *Seichi junrei tsūrizumu* (Pilgrimage tourism), ed. Hoshino Eiki, Yamanaka Hiroshi, and Okamoto Ryōsuke (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 2012).

3. Nomura Sōgō Kenkyūjo, *Otaku shijō no kenkyū* (Otaku marketing) (Tokyo: Tōyō Keizai Shinpōsha, 2005), 34.

4. Ishii Kenji, *Terebi to shūkyō: Oumu igo o toi naosu* (Television and religion: A new inquiry in the wake of Aum Shinrikyo) (Tokyo: Chūō Kōron Shinsha, 2008), 214–15.

5. Dorirupurojekuto, *Seichi junrei navi: Anime & komikku* (Pilgrimage navigation: Anime and comics) (Tokyo: Asuka Shinsha, 2010); Kakizaki Shundō, *Seichi junrei: Anime manga 12 kasho meguri* (Sacred site pilgrimages: A tour of 12 anime and manga locations) (Tokyo: Kirutaimu Comyunikeeshon, 2005). There are also manga-based pilgrimages: Ofusaido Bukkusu Henshūbu, *Manga no arukikata* (How to find manga settings) (Tokyo: Sairyūsha, 1999).

6. Imai Nobuharu, "Fan ga nichijō o 'seika' suru: Ema ni kakerareta negai" (Fans sacralize the everyday: The prayers written on votive tablets), in *Shūkyō to tsūrizumu: Sei naru mono no henyō to jizoku* (Religion and tourism: The change and continuity of sacred things), ed. Yamanaka Hiroshi, 170–89 (Kyoto: Seikai Shisōsha, 2012); Okamoto Takeshi, "Rakusuta seichi 'Washimiya' junrei to jōhōka shakai" (The pilgrimage to the Lucky Star sacred site 'Washimiya' and the information society), in *Kankō no kūkan: Shiten to apurōchi* (The space of tourism: Viewpoint and approach), ed. Kanda Kōji, 133–44 (Tokyo: Nakanishiya, 2009); Yamamura Takayoshi, *Anime/manga de chiiki shinkō: Machi no fan o umu kontentsu tsūrizumu kaihatsuhō* (Local development by means of anime/manga: A content tourism developmental method to create fans of the local community) (Tokyo: Tōkyō Hōrei, 2011).

7. "Hinamizawa kankō annai chizu" (Hinamizawa tourist map), http://outdoor.geocities.jp/hinamy2006.

8. A parallel can be drawn with the Edo-period pilgrim as explained by Akinori Kato, who would take back a souvenir for those who could not join the pilgrimage. The *Higurashi* fan's souvenir is a posted image on a blog, for example, that she or he can share with friends. Akinori Kato, "Package Tours, Pilgrimages, and Pleasure Trips," in *The Electric Geisha: Exploring Japan's Popular Culture*, ed. Atsushi Ueda, trans. Miriam Eguchi (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1994), 54.

9. John Urry and Jonas Larsen, *The Tourist Gaze 3.0* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2011), 179.

10. E. Frances King points out that the act of taking home souvenirs (material culture) from a pilgrimage is invaluable in communicating the experience to others. E. Frances King, *Material Religion and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 97.

11. Ian Reader provides a comprehensive explanation of *ema*. Ian Reader, "Letters to the Gods: The Form and Meaning of *Ema*," *Japanese Journal of Religious Studies* 18, no. 1 (1991): 23–50.

12. This interpretation of *itaema* is based on conversations with numerous fans at various venues, including gatherings of *itasha* (anime-decorated automobiles) enthusiasts.

13. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 7.

14. Simon J. Bronner, *Grasping Things: Folk Material Culture and Mass Society in America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 130.

15. I documented a *Kamichu!* fan-made spiral notebook at the *emakake* of Misode Tenmangū Shrine in Onomichi, Hiroshima Prefecture in April 2008. Multiple fans added comments, prayers, and illustrations.

16. The remainder (roughly ten percent) may also include fans.

17. In a March 2012 survey this number had risen to just under 64 percent.

18. The shrine's caretakers did not disclose the exact year they began selling *ema*.

19. From 2008 onward, the shrine's caretakers began to periodically remove many of the *ema*, presumably to make space available for new *ema* to be dedicated. Periodic removal is common practice at many shrines and temples; see Reader, "Letter to the Gods," 35.

20. Henry Jenkins, "'Strangers No More, We Sing': Filking and the Social Construction of the Science Fiction Fan Community," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 210.

21. Richard Chalfen and Mai Murui, "Print Club Photography in Japan: Framing

Social Relationships," in *Photographs Objects Histories: On the Materiality of Images,* ed. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart (New York: Routledge, 2010), 175.

22. Maruta Hajime, *Bashoron: Webu no riarizumu chiiki no romanchishizumu* (Theory of location in the information society) (Tokyo: NTT Shuppan, 2008), 109–11; Maruta references Azuma Hiroki, *Geemuteki riarizumu no tanjō: Dōbutsuka suru posutomodan* (The birth of game realism: Japan's database animals 2) (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2007).

23. Satō Yoshiyuki, "Otaku ema to wa nani ka: Miyagi-ken gokoku jinja no ema chōsa kekka to sono bunseki" (What are otaku votive tablets? The survey results and analysis of the votive tablets at Gokoku Shrine, Miyagi Prefecture), in *Community Development and Tourism for the Next Generation,* ed. Yamamura Takayoshi and Okamoto Takeshi (Sapporo: Hokkaido University, 2010), 125. For other articles concerning *itaema,* see Imai Nobuharu, "Anime 'seichi junrei' jissensha no kōdō ni miru dentōteki junrei to kankō katsudō no kakyō kanōsei: Saitama-ken Washinomiya jinja hōnō ema bunseki o chūshin ni" (The traditional pilgrimage and the connective potential of tourist activities as seen in the actions of anime pilgrimage participants: A focus on the analysis of votive tablets dedicated at the Washinomiya shrine in Saitama Prefecture), in *Media Contents and Tourism: An Experience of Washimiya Town and Neon Genesis of Tourism,* ed. Cultural Resource Management Research Team, CATS, Hokkaido University (Sapporo: Center for Advanced Tourism Studies Hokkaido University, 2009), 85–111; Imai Nobuharu, "Fan ga nichijō o 'seika'suru"; Satō Yoshiyuki, "Ika ni shite jinja wa seichi to natta ka: Kōkyōsei to hinichijōsei ga umidasu seichi no hatten" (How did a shrine become a sacred site? The public and extraordinary give birth to the development of a sacred site), in *Media Contents and Tourism,* 71–84.

24. Simon J. Bronner, "Digitizing and Virtualizing Folklore," in *Folklore and the Internet: Vernacular Expression in a Digital World,* ed. Trevor J. Blank (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2009), 29.

25. Donald H. Holly Jr. and Casey E. Cordy, "What's in a Coin? Reading the Material Culture of Legend Tripping and Other Activities," *Journal of American Folklore* 120, no. 477 (2007): 346.

26. Another *ema* displayed three months later shows Hanyū eating cream puffs while restating that pilgrims should offer some to get their wishes granted.

27. Laura Miller, "Extreme Makeover for a Heian-Era Wizard," *Mechademia* 3 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008): 37.

28. Many fans petition to Oyashiro-sama, Hanyū's alter ego, whose name means roughly "Master (of the) Shrine."

29. Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 10.

30. Colleen McDannell, *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 39.

31. For excellent visual examples, see Kondō Masaki's publication on votive offerings. Kondō Masaki, ed., *Negai, uranai, omajinai: Yokubō no zōkei kikakuten* (Prayer, divination, incantation: Exhibition on the form of desire) (Mito, Japan: Ibaraki Kenritsu Hakubutsukan, 2000), 9–11.

32. Jennifer Robertson, "*Ema*-gined Community: Votive Tablets (*Ema*) and Strategic Ambivalence in Wartime Japan," *Asian Ethnology* 67, no. 1 (2008): 46.

33. Michael Ashkenazi and John Clammer, "Introduction: The Japanese and the Goods," in *Consumption and Material Culture in Contemporary Japan,* ed. Michael Ashkenazi and John Clammer (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 17.

34. Yoshimasa Kijima, "Why Make E-*moe*-tional Attachments to Fictional Characters? The Cultural Sociology of the Post-Modern," in *Pop Culture and the Everyday in Japan: Sociological Perspectives,* ed. Katsuya Minamida and Izumi Tsuji, trans. Leonie R. Stickland (Melbourne: Trans Pacific Press, 2012), 153–55.

35. This adoration for characters is reflected in a questionnaire I administered to sixty-eight Tohoku Gakuin University students who participated in my lecture class on October 10, 2012. In response to the question "Do you think it is possible to have an emotional feeling close to love for anime/game characters?" 47 percent answered in the affirmative.

36. H. Byron Earhart, "Mechanisms and Process in the Study of Japanese Amulets," in *Nihon shūkyō e no shikaku* (Approaches to Japanese religion), ed. Okada Shigekiyo (Osaka: Tōhō Shuppan, 1994), 618.

37. Bronner, "Digitizing and Virtualizing," 29.

38. McLuhan, *Understanding Media,* 7.