Breaking Taboos in Asian Young Adult Fiction:

The Cases of Japan and Thailand

A Dissertation

Submitted to Nagoya Gakuin University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Misato NAKAGAMI

2017

Summary

This dissertation looks into the curious absence of Young Adult (YA) literature in Japan and Thailand. The category of YA literature has been established in Western countries since the publication of S.E. Hinton's *The Outsiders* (1967). It has dealt with a number of social problems including divorce, abandonment, sex, gender identity, and racial issues. Teens have used this body of literature as a reference material, checking their own problems against those presented in the narratives of YA fiction.

No such body of literature exists in Japan, nor does it in Thailand, if we are to believe an authoritative voice on Thai children's literature, Siriporn Sriwarakan, whose 2008 research into German and Thai YA literature concludes that the subjectivity of the child is vastly different in the two countries. This dissertation looks at Sriwarakan's findings and suggests ways in which they also hold true for the subjectivity of the Japanese child.

The dissertation examines an important distinction between pre-modern and modern fiction proposed by Franco Moretti in his 1987 *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*. Moretti sees the arrival of modernity in Europe as a kind of crisis, because Europe did not yet have a culture of modernity. In the "stable societies" of pre-modern Europe youth is simply a biological distinction, and youths repeat the pattern of life that has existed for centuries.

With modernity, the rural life begins to crumble, youth are drawn to the city, and become the "essence" of modernity. Now society looks for the meaning of life in the future rather than in the past. The dissertation finds a connection between Moretti's "stable societies" and Sriwarakan's assertion of the "innocence" of the Thai child, separate from the adult world. I also explore ideas by Richard Rodriguez (1992) about "tragic and comic cultures" and link them to Moretti's "stable" and "dynamic" cultures, as Rodriguez contrasts

California's endless optimism and openness to change with Mexico's "tragic culture," where children are "sweeter" and funerals more "opulent" in a flourishing of traditional values.

My examination of Japanese texts that could have been candidates for the YA category found them unsatisfactory because of the safety net which always existed for the child; there was no exteriority in the sense that the protagonist never had to confront dangers or problems by him/herself, without a mentor somewhere in the background. It was as if the story took place in a stuffy room where it was impossible to open any window.

As I was wondering how to overcome the problem of the claustrophobic text I came across Norma Field's essay "Texts of Childhood in Inter-Nationalizing Japan" (1996). Field, a Professor of Japanese at the University of Chicago, analyzed Hideo Levy's *A Room Where the Star Spangled Banner Cannot be Heard* (2011). Both Field herself, the daughter of an American soldier and a Japanese mother, and Levy, whose protagonist abandons the American consulate in Yokohama in search of a more authentic existence in Japan, are what I came to see as "people in the middle," people caught between two cultures.

This was the exteriority I had been looking for. The dissertation proposes Levy's novel, as well as the Thai writer Rattawut Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing* (2004), as prototypes of a new type of Asian YA literature written by people caught in the middle between two cultures.

Acknowledgment

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the members of my dissertation committee, Professor Paul D. McGrath, Professor Masahiro Yoneyama, Professor Karen Campbell, and Professor Mizuho Murayama.

My greatest gratitude goes to Professor Paul D. McGrath, who devoted his precious time to this dissertation. He gave me both academic and mental support. He always encouraged me to go forward whenever I faced an obstacle. His critical insight led me back to the theoretical thinking whenever I got lost. Without his support, I could not have completed this dissertation.

I am also deeply grateful to Professor Karen Campbell, who gave me useful comments. Her counsel opened my eyes widely and expanded my ideas. I am very much grateful to her.

I show my appreciation to the staffs in NGU. Their warmth helped me to finish this dissertation. I am also thankful to the librarians for their prompt attention.

Finally, I am thankful to my family for their understanding and encouragement. With their big, warm support, I could have done my work.

Contents

Acknowledgement

Abstract

Chapter 1:

Introduction YA Literature under Modernity: Stable Communities, Comic Cultures

- Formulating the problem ………………………………………………. 1
- The history of YA literature ……………………………………………... 1
- Norma Field on Hideo Levy …………………………………………….. 2
- Moretti’s distinction: pre-modern novels and their aftermath …………... 2
- “Stable communities” and youth as biological stage …………………… 3
- Youth as the symbol of modernity ……………………………………… 4
- Japan: overwhelmed by modernity ……………………………………… 4
- Tragic and comic cultures ……………………………………………….. 5
- Rodriguez: between two cultures ………………………………………... 6
- Irony in American CL …………………………………………………… 6
- The dangers of irony in CL? …………………………………………….. 7
- Rorty’s ideas on irony …………………………………………………… 7
- Other critics on irony in CL ……………………………………………... 8

- Searching for irony in Japanese CL …………………………………….. 8

Chapter 2:

Young Adult Literature: Asian Lacuna

- Sriwarakan on Thai vs. German YA literature ………………………….. 10
- The contract of the child in Japan ………………………………………. 11
- Taboo topics in Japanese CL …………………………………………..... 11
- Breaking taboo on divorce? …………………………………………….. 12
- Akagi's classification of YA literature ………………………………….. 14
- The YA vacuum is obvious ……………………………………...…… 15
- More attempts to define YA literature ……………………….……….. 15
- Akagi's examples of YA literature ……………………………………… 16
- NPO Library School on YA literature …………………………………... 18
- Other attempts to identify YA literature ………………………………… 18
- YA "candidate" novels in Japan: the safety net …………………………. 19
- Examples of candidate works …………………………………………… 19
- Interculturality and YA Fiction …………………………………………….. 25
- Le Clezio on "interculturality" in literature ……………….………….. 25
- Finding prototypes of a new Asian YA fiction …………………………... 27

Chapter 3:

Struggling into Wonderland: Ben Isaac's Journey to Shinjuku in *Seijōki no Kikoenai Heya*

- Le Clezio's interculturality ………………………………….………….. 28
- *Star-Spangled Banner* as YA prototype ……………………….…..….... 28
- Norma Field on *Star-Spangled Banner* …………………………….………. 29
- The irony of Ben's world ……………………………………….……….. 30
- Ben at Kennedy's burial ……………………………………….………… 31
- No safety net for Ben …………………………………………….………… 32
- Interiorizing contradiction ………………………………….………… 32
- New type of YA literature ……………………………………………….. 32
- Ben as refugee ……………………………………………………………… 32
- Shinjuku as home for Ben …………………………………………….… 33
- The fake and the authentic ………………………………………………. 34
- The interculturality of *Star Spangled Banner* …………………………..... 35

Chapter 4:

Reclaiming Thailand in Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*

- Japanese and Thai YA literature ……………………………………………. 36
- McGrath on Thai CL ……………………………………………………….. 36
- Thai CL: pre-modern and didactic ………………………………………. 37

- Subjectivity of the larger community ………………………………………. 37
- *The Happiness of Kati* as upper class drama ……………………………. 38
- *Kati* is full of safety nets …………………………………………………… 39
- Irony and the objective mind ……………………………………………… 39
- The stories of Makut Onrudee …………………………………………... 40
- Background of "Rohin's Poem" ………………………………………… 41
- Ethnic purity in France and Thailand …………………………………… 42
- "Mongrels" in *Sightseeing* ……………………………………………..… 43
- The face and authentic in *Sightseeing* …………………………………... 43
- Light ironic tone of "farangs" …………………………………………… 45
- American masculinity on a Thai beach ………………………………… 45
- American masculinity in *Sightseeing* …………………………………… 46
- The "Monkey Boys'" revenge …………………………………………... 46
- Success of "the idiot stunt" ……………………………………………… 47
- "At the Café Lovely" ……………………………………………………… 47
- Weeping mothers ………………………………………………………… 47
- Flashpoints from the boy's memories …………………………………… 48
- Lapcharoensap on image of Thailand …………………………………… 49
- Social duty of the writer ……………………………………………….… 50

- The new Asian YA literature: back to pre-modernity ……………………. 50

Chapter 5:

Conclusion ……………………………………………………………….. 51

Works Cited

- The new Asian YA literature: back to pre-modernity ……………………. 50

Chapter 5:

Conclusion ……………………………………………………………….. 51

Works Cited

Breaking Taboos in Asian Young Adult Fiction:

The Cases of Japan and Thailand

A Dissertation

Submitted to Nagoya Gakuin University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Misato NAKAGAMI

Chapter One

Introduction

YA Literature under Modernity:

Stable Communities, Comic Cultures

Formulating the problem

This dissertation probes the curious absence of Young Adult literature in Japan and suggests that the only "authentic" YA fiction in Japan has been penned by writers who are "in the middle," straddling two cultures. It examines the subjectivity of the Japanese child as well as that of the Thai child, seeking to define the difference between Asian ideas surrounding childhood and those from the West. It looks at issues of irony and its parent, modernity, in order to account for those differences. It reviews a number of would-be Japanese YA novels and discusses why they cannot be included in the category.

VanderStaay (1992) gives us a useful definition of YA literature:

> Young-adult literature is literature wherein the protagonist is either a teenager or one who approaches problems from a teenage perspective. Such novels are generally of moderate length and told from the first person. Typically, they describe initiation into the adult world, or the surmounting of a contemporary problem forced upon the protagonist(s) by the adult world. Though generally written for a teenage reader, such novels-like all fine literature-address the entire spectrum of life. (www.jstor.org/stable/819930)

The history of YA literature

YA literature, as a category of literature distinct from children's literature, is often said to have come into existence with the publication of SE Hinton's *The Outsiders* in 1967

(Hill, 2014, 1). That means it is at the half-century mark in the year I am writing this dissertation. Like children's literature, it is not a category with an enduring historical presence, and is probably best defined as including "books freely chosen for reading by persons between the ages of twelve and twenty" (Nilsen and Donelson (1980/ 2012, quoted in Hill, 2014, 6). That definition is not at odds with the fact that for centuries, children as well as young adults read whatever books were at hand.

Norma Field on Hideo Levy

An article by the Japanese literature scholar Norma Field takes us more deeply into issues involving literature and youth. Field reviews Hideo Levy's *星条旗の聞こえない部屋* (1992) (*The Room Where the Star Spangled Banner Cannot be Heard*, 2011). The novel, one of the first to be written in Japanese by a foreigner, is characterized by "classic narrative features," according to Field, features which are also the classic features of YA literature: "it has aspects of the tale of exile and adventure ("the road")--loss of parents, expulsion from/rejection of home, the appearance of a protector, a series of trials" (154). I will discuss this novel at greater length later in this dissertation as part of my thesis that narratives of "people in the middle" constitute what I call "genuine Asian YA literature," but here I want to focus on Field's comments on the novel.

Field is intrigued by the protagonist's portrayal as a child: "At seventeen, Ben is, properly a youth. Yet he is portrayed as a child. It is as a child that he undergoes his existential adventures in language and national identity" (154). In analyzing the reasons for such a portrayal Field turns to the literary theorist Franco Moretti and his discussion of European narratives under the force of modernity.

Moretti's distinction: pre-modern novels and their aftermath

Hamlet himself is supposed to be thirty years old, Moretti points out, but he has come down to us as a youth. Field tells us that Moretti's explanation for this alteration "draws an

important initial distinction between the classical *Bildungsroman* (*Wilhelm Meister*), which acquires meaning from its march to definitive closure, and its successors, which exploit the impossibility of ending" (154).

This is a crucial difference, Field goes on to explain, the difference between the pre-modern, non-capitalistic world in which social formation is primary, as opposed to commodity production. "It is in this extra- or noncapitalist world that the hero's attainment of maturity and happiness are plausible. Modernity as capitalism predicates unending change; maturity is by definition impossible" (155).

"Stable communities" and youth as biological stage

What is important for us in Field's comments and in Moretti's theory is the distinction both make about pre-modern societies and those that have undergone the transformational power of modernity. Moretti provides an explanation of what youth has meant before the transformations of modernity:

> In 'stable communities', that is status or 'traditional' societies, "Being Young" is a question of biological differentiation. Here, to be young simply means not yet being an adult. Each individual's youth faithfully repeats that of his forebears, introducing him to a role that lives on unchanged: it is a 'pre-scribed' youth . . . It is, we might say, an 'invisible' and 'insignificant' youth. (4)

This is all before the appearance of the *Bildungsroman*, before Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, when what Moretti calls "status society" starts to fall apart, bringing about a shift to the city. By the time *Meister* appears, Moretti claims,

> 'apprenticeship' is no longer the slow and predictable progress towards one's father's work, but rather an uncertain exploration of social space, which the nineteenth century—through travel and adventure, wandering and getting lost . . . will underline countless times. (4)

Youth as the symbol of modernity

Youth is no longer a matter of biology: it is both a problem and the symbol of the new age. It is characterized by two forces under capitalism: one is mobility and the other is a new interiority, “perennially dissatisfied and restless” (4). Why should the *Bildungsroman* choose to make youth its symbol, and mobility and interiority its chief characteristics? Moretti’s answer is compelling:

> At the turn of the eighteenth century much more than a rethinking of youth was at stake. Virtually without notice, in the dreams and nightmares of the so-called ‘double revolution’, Europe plunges into modernity, but without possessing a *culture* of modernity. (5)

Japan: overwhelmed by modernity

I want to assert that the situation Moretti describes in Europe at the end of the Enlightenment is the very same situation Harootunian describes in his *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* (2000). The Japanologist describes a Japan overwhelmed by commodified modernization, but far from a culture of modernity, by which I mean the *disenchantment of the traditional and the sacred.* The European enlightenment and its aftermath, philosophically and scientifically, resulted in the birth of a secular civilization and the birth of a new subjectivity. Moretti claims that Hegel, one of the chief commentators on the new subjectivity “deplored” the fact that its interiority was “perennially dissatisfied and restless” (5).

The road to secularization in Asia is hardly the same as the European exit, in the Enlightenment, from the logocentric theological and philosophical that were at the base of everything from collective identity to ethical behavior. The collapse of medieval “grand narratives” was not a part of modernization in Asia, where the process was material rather than philosophical. One result of this more diffuse experience of modernity was the

preservation of the traditional role of the child.

Tragic and comic cultures

Richard Rodriguez, in his essay collection *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father* (1992), makes a distinction between "tragic" and "comic" cultures that parallels Moretti's distinction above about "stable" societies and those that have begun the fragmentation of modernity. Growing up in California, Rodriguez experienced both the "comic" American culture and the "tragic" culture of his ancestors below the border. He too sees the culture transformed by modernity in terms of youth:

> I use the word "comedy here as the Greeks used it, with utmost seriousness, to suggest a world where youth is not a fruitless metaphor; where it is possible to start anew; where it is possible to escape the rivalries of the Capulets and the McCoys; where young women can disprove the adages of grandmothers. (xvi)

California's "comic culture," he believes, came from "a Protestant faith in individualism." On the other hand, "Mexico knew tragedy" (xvi).

I make much of Rodriguez's insights not only because they illustrate Moretti's distinction, but also because they offer a framework for what is to come in this dissertation: a Thai scholar's attempt to articulate the different subjectivities of the child in German and Thai YA literature; the tale of a crisis in Japanese children's literature as scholars and writers met not once, but twice, attempting to overcome the "taboos" for writers of children's literature in Japan: divorce, "independent" mothers with desires of their own, runaway kids (or parents, for that matter), sex, and other topics which are so possible in Rodriguez's "comic culture."

Rodriguez admits that tragic cultures have their advantages: "better food," "sweeter children," "more opulent funerals" (xvii). And living in a comic culture such as California means bearing "the solitary burden of optimism" (xvii). Though he labels that culture as

"comic," he also sees it as sad:

> A state where children run away from parents, a state of pale beer, and young old women, and divorced husbands living alone in condos. But at a time when Californians are driven to despair by the relentless optimism of their state, I can only marvel at the comic achievement of the place, California's defiance of history, the defiance of ancestors. (xvii)

Rodriguez: between two cultures

Rodriguez's position between two cultures allows him to do something that Moretti never imagines, in his certainty that *Wilhelm Meister* marks an uncrossable line between the pre-modern world of apprenticeship and the modern, capitalist journey of endless change with no resolution: Rodrigues can choose. "The youth of my life was defined by Protestant optimism . . . Now that I am middle-aged, I incline more toward the Mexican point of view . . . (xvii)

His position leaves him with the problem of how to write about "the argument between comedy and tragedy." One natural progression would be to start with the boy and move on to the tragic conclusions of the middle-aged man. No good, he decides, because "that would underplay the boy's wisdom . . . The middle-aged man would simply lord over the matter" (xvii).

Irony in American CL

In my MA thesis I examined the growing presence of irony in American children's literature, writing specifically about the work of Jon Scieszka. I linked the irony present in his books to the theoretical writing of Richard Rorty on the function of irony, writing which consistently identifies irony as a positive force, an invitation to a higher consciousness.

At the same time, I looked at some ethical problems associated with the production of children's literature: Mike Cadden's concern, in his article (2000) "The Irony of Narration in

the Young Adult Novel" that authors of children's books are adults, not children; Cadden sees much situational irony in this reality, claiming that "Novels constructed by adults to simulate an authentic adolescent's voice is never—and can never be—truly authentic" (146). The Asian works of fiction I have chosen as representative YA works are free of this situational irony because all three authors—Hideo Levy, Jane Vejjajiva, and Rattawut Lapcharoensap—write stories which are highly autobiographical, with little distance between the author and the protagonist.

The dangers of irony in CL?

Looking back to a warning issued by Barbara Wall (1990, quoted in Cadden, 2000, 146) on the dangers of adults with an ironic point of view writing texts for children, Cadden developed the idea that such writers were ethically bound to create multiple points of view in their texts, in order to create a teaching situation in which readers can choose through awareness of difference.

In sharp contrast to these critics and others who implicitly believe that irony is somehow a negative force which must be carefully tended, Scieszka himself links irony to the *sense of play* and claims that it is a positive force for kids who take up its challenge to grow intellectually. Such a link between irony and play is pointed out by Harvie Ferguson (1995):

> There is something playful in irony, and Socrates, after all, was frequently accused by his Sophist opponents of lacking "seriousness." The limitless freedom of both irony and play subvert any attempt to "fix" their own conceptual boundaries. But if Hegel's definition of irony as "infinite absolute negativity" suggests something of its peculiarity, then play might be viewed as "infinite absolute positivity"; as thoughtless trust in, rather than systematic suspicion of, existence. (233)

Rorty's ideas on irony

Rorty, as I demonstrated in my thesis, is the only theorist who promotes irony as such

"infinite absolute positivity," always portraying irony as an invitation to a higher state of awareness through recognition of the flawed reality of present social conditions. The ethical stance of Rorty's position treats the introduction of irony as a positive act aimed at transforming the reader's perception.

Other critics on irony in CL

In the West, the increasing presence of irony in children's literature has been recognized and described by established critics like Seth Lerer and Linda Hutcheon. In his *Children's Literature: A Reader's History, from Aesop to Harry Potter* (2008), Lerer claims that "children have been coming into their ironic own for decades" (307).

Hutcheon (2008) describes her realization that her own research into parody and irony has left out an important area:

> I spent many years exploring the tricky literary joys of parody and irony. And I know now that rather than burying myself in art films, I could have enjoyed *Sesame Street*. I should have known this, because I *did* know Priscilla Galloway's collection called *Truly Grim Tales* and they taught me as much as Umberto Eco's adult novels ever did about how serious a form of cultural critique parody could be. (171)

Searching for irony in Japanese CL

In the years following the completion of that thesis I turned to Japanese children's literature/ Young Adult literature looking for the same ironic treatment of the home/school situation that I had found in books abroad. I was particularly interested in the portrayal of mothers in current Japanese CL and YA literature, as my intuition told me that the very existence of the mother was a sacrosanct role not to be tampered with; the Japanese expression *ryosaikennbo* (良妻賢母) "good wife and clever mother" summed up the somewhat heavy expectations of how mothers should act in Japan.

And yet, as no less a philosopher than Kierkegaard pointed out in his own Master's

thesis on irony, the goal of the ironist is to reveal the contradictions of our time. Burdened with such high performative expectations and also required, in most cases, to help out with the household income by taking at least a part-time job, the role of the Japanese mother is full of contradiction. But look as I might, I could not find any work of CL or YA literature that depicted the role of the mother in an objective way, let alone an ironic one. In the works I examined, the mother lacks autonomy; she exists for the sake of her children. Trying to analyze the sharp difference in the treatment of the mother and the status of the child between East and West, I found a few valuable pieces of research.

Chapter Two

YA Literature: The Asian Lacuna

Sriwarakan on Thai vs. German YA literature

Siriporn Sriwarakan (2008) is one of the few scholars who have studied the differences between Western children's literature and Asian children's literature. In a very helpful article on the subject, she focuses on the different subjectivities of children in Thai children's literature and German children's literature. According to her, "a number of German children's literary works present children as the partners of adults," and "in German children's literature, the children's world is basically the same as the adults'" (1). On the other hand, "Thai children are normally socialized to differ from adults," and "in Thai children's literature, the children's world is presented as separate from that of adults" (1). She also suggests that German children "are people who have the same rights as an adult. On the other hand, the Thai "child is someone who is a 'subordinate'" (1). Given this relationship of near-equality between children and adults depicted in German children's literature, we can expect that children cannot always be in the secure world described as ideal for Thai children by Sriwarakan.

Sriwarakan gives such examples from German YA literature as a mother asking her daughter to help her choose between her husband and her boyfriend. Her daughter refuses to give advice because she respects her and believes she should make a right decision by herself. However, Thai children's literature mainly portrays the relationship of children, and most child characters are in the role prescribed for children, never the equal of adults. (7)

In other words, German children's literature portrays children and adults as near-equals, and emphasizes real social problems in the relationships between children and adults; in contrast, Thai children's literature depicts children as innocent, pure creatures in a

protective world. Key words for Thai children's literature are "ideal" and "secure," while German children's literature rests on the word, "real." Irony cannot appear where reality is absent, and so irony does not appear in Thai children's literature.

The contract of the child in Japan

The construct of the child is much the same in Japan. Sara Spence Boocock (1992), moreover, examines the ideas of childhood in contemporary Japan. She has it that

> Japan's unique blend of 'imported' ideas (for example, Confucian ethics and Buddhist views of human nature) with indigenous culture and customs have, it is argued, produced a society in which children are more highly valued and more carefully brought up than in most Western societies. (166)

She offers evidence of this from proverbs:

> A number of Japanese proverbs and popular sayings refer to the goodness and preciousness of children, for example: "*Ko ni sugitara takara-nashi*" (These is no treasure that surpasses a child); "*Tsumi mo kegare mo nai kodomo*" (In children there is neither sin nor pollution); "*Nanatsu made wa kami no uchi de aru*" (Until seven, children are with the gods). (167)

The last two proverbial bits of wisdom, maintaining that childhood is a special, blessed state of innocence, provides a sharp contrast with Western ideas of Original Sin and the need for baptism to purify the child from the stain of Adam and Eve.

Taboo topics in Japanese CL

Japanese children's literature, much like its counterpart in Thailand, has not depicted several issues; for example, divorce, sex, runaways, and suicide. People have believed these issues were taboo for children. However, the very topic of how to overcome these taboos was at the center of a special issue of the journal *Nihon Jidou Bungaku* [Japanese Journal of Children's Literature] in 1978. Yoshiko Akagi and Kenjirou Haitani, authors of children's

books, Hisako Ichimura a kindergarten teacher for twenty years, and Shoichiro Kami, the facilitator of the discussion, talked about these taboos in children's literature in the journal (22-44).

Breaking taboo on divorce?

Ichimura singled out the *Chisai Momo-chan* [Little Momo] (Miyoko Mtsutani, 1964-1999) series as an example of Japanese children's literature which depicts divorce. Haitani talks about other novels dealing with divorce or other taboo issues: *Yasashisa Gokko* [Playing Kindness] (Imae, 1977) and *Asa wa Dandan Mietekuru* [The Dawn is Gradually Breaking] (Iwase, 2005).

Haitani points out that the *Chisai Momo-chan* series dominates the imagination of Japanese readers as if it were the only children's story which has dealt with the issue of divorce (24-25). This was true even fourteen years after the book's first publication. And yet the treatment of divorce in the story has no depth to it; it is presented as a fact with no more emotional depth than the acquisition of a new refrigerator or the disposal of a well-used bicycle. The mere introduction of the fact of divorce was sensational enough, without venturing into the realm of its impact on the child.

Although the discussants are optimistic that such taboos would not endure into a more modern Japan, few works depicting divorce subsequently appeared. Kami points out that some authors do deal with taboo subjects, but their treatment is superficial and does not show the emotional reality for children.

Ichimura suggests that Matsutani, the author of the *Chisai Momo-chan* series, presented divorce as part of the reality of life events, but tried to prune the pain and anxiety caused by divorce with a touch of the fantasy world (29). This work established a way of presenting divorce in stories without dealing with its emotional reality, leaving children

ignorant about how one might cope.

(The father after divorce)

(Momo-chan's moving)

(Dinner time at the new house)

In the same discussion about overcoming taboos Yamahana alone claims that the *Chiisai Momo-chan* series as a fantasy story helps children to understand the issue of divorce and helps adults to tell children about the existence of divorce (64-65). Haitani, another discussant, suggests a possible reason for the lack of reality in such books: the adult point of view is missing from Japanese children's literature. He suggests that Japanese children's literature is poor at portraying adults on a level with children. He also points out that some critics did not accept his own *Usagino Me* (1974) [Rabbit's Eyes] as children's literature because there are many scenes with adults; the criticism merely emphasizes the difficulty of mixing adults in with children, who have the special, pure status described above.

As Sriwarakan maintains above, the separation of the children's world from the adults' one is a feature of Asian children's literature. In Haitani's words, adults are excluded from children's literature; moreover, people cannot accept a work as children's literature if adults figure in it as much as children.

With these factors in mind, it would be good to turn again to VanderStaays' characterization of YA literature, especially his claim that such literature "describe[s] initiation into the adult world, or the surmounting of a contemporary problem forced upon the protagonist(s) by the adult world" (n. pag.).

It seems patently obvious that with a children's literature in which children and adults

are segregated, YA literature featuring the child's emergence into the adult world is out of the question. Perhaps the most famous attempt to define YA literature within a Japanese context is worth quoting to see how this tricky turn is managed.

Akagi's classification of YA literature

Kanko Akagi (2002), a respected authority on YA literature, has the following to say about YA literature in Japan. Young Adult Literature (YA) is often said to be for young people between the ages of thirteen to nineteen in the libraries in the United States, which means the corresponding Japanese target would be junior and senior high school students. Akagi suggests the following seven types of YA literature in the Japanese context:

1. Books which have the Young Adult label from publishers. Eto Mori, the author of *Karafuru* [Colorful] (1998), and Atsuko Asano, the author of *Batteri* [Battery] (2003), are examples of this type.
2. Originally Japanese entertainment novels (mostly they are fantasy) which many adults look down on, refusing to accept them as literature at all. Most readers believe this type is true Young Adult literature. Jirou Akagawa, the author of *Mikeneko Homuzu* [A Calico Cat Holmes] series (1978-), and Osamu Souda, the author of *Bokurano* [We] series (1985-), are authors producing this type.
3. Books translated from foreign children's literature which are recognized in the YA category overseas.
4. Foreign literature for small kids. Even though such books are written for small kids, there are some thick books difficult for Japanese kids to understand.
5. Picture books which target a slightly older audience; in other words, picture books which are difficult for small children to understand.
6. Books which are published for adults whose protagonists are immature. Miri Yu, the author of *Gorudorasshu* [Goldrush] (2001), and *Kazoku Chinema* [Family

Cinema] (1997), Amy Yamada, the author of *Beddo Taimu Aizu* [Bed Time Eyes] (1985) and *Boku wa Benkyo ga Dekinai* [I am Poor at Studying] (1993), and Banana Yoshimoto, the author of *Kicchin* (1988) [*Kitchen* (1993)] and *Tsugumi* (1989) [*Goodbye Tsugumi* (2003)], are in this group.

7. Foreign literature in the same type with number six. This group includes authors as following; Amy Tan, the author of *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), Ray Douglas Bradbury, the author of *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), and Jerome David Salinger, the author of *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951). (18-19)

The YA vacuum is obvious

This categorization seems to be very low on innate characteristics and much too dependent on external factors, such as translations of foreign works already labeled YA. The list only confirms the vacuum I have been describing, and in its constant default to foreign works the vacuum becomes an elephant in the room. It is precisely here that I want to nominate Hideo Levy's novel, written in Japanese, about a young American who runs away from the home of his diplomat father and accepts life as a homeless drifter in Shinjuku. His self-definition as a refugee from the United States, the place and system he is running away from, takes the YA novel into the world of twenty-first century adulthood, where homelessness and the badge of refugee are marks of distinction.

More attempts to define YA literature

This same critic (Akagi) in *Kanko no Minimini Yangu Adult Nyumon Pato 1 —Toshokanin no Kaki no Tane—* [Introduction of Young Adult Literature for Librarians Part 1], has written more about how to categorize books into YA literature (1997). According to this book, some children's literature and picture books can also be characterized as Young Adult; for example,

Group 1: Children's literature for kindergarten kids or younger: This type of book

contains something hard for small children to accept. (1).

・*Mitsubachi Jiisan no Tabi* (Frank R. Stockton, 2000) [*The Bee-Man of Orn* (1974)]

・*Jakuson Neko no Hontou no Ie* (Brian Ball, 2000) [*Jackson's House* (1974)]

・*Obachan no Sutekina Okurimono* (Carla Stevens, 1990) [*Story from A Snowy Meadow* (1976)]

Group 2: Children's literature for elementary school kids: It is difficult for children to understand everything in this type of books. (55).

・*Kyuri no Ousama Yattsukero* (Christine Nostlinger, 2001) [*The Cucumber King* (1983)]

・*Nabaho no Uta* (Scott O'Dell, 1974) [*Sing Down The Moon* (1970)]

Group 3: Young Adult picture books: The target readers are both children and Young Adult. These example books below target mainly Young Adult people. (75)

・*Shinda Eri* (Frances Minters, 1996) [*Cinder-Elly* (1994)]

・*Tsuki no Musume* (Lisa Weedn-Gilbert, 1996) [*The Moon Maiden* (1990)]

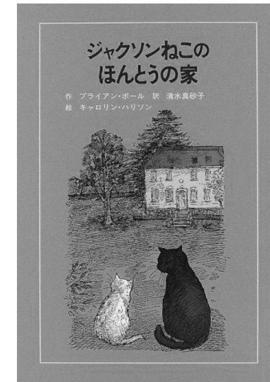
・*Kusaikusai Chizu Bouya & Takusan no Otoboke Banashi* (Jon Scieszka, 1995) [*The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1993)]

Akagi's examples of YA literature

Most books Akagi lists are foreign literature, and many of them show what identity is or how to be independent. For example, *Mitsubachi Jiisan no Tabi* [*The Bee-Man of Orn*] is a story of an elderly man who lives in a very small, decrepit house with many bees. A young magician makes the elderly man travel to look for his real life. The elderly man finds that a baby is what he should be. The magician turns the elderly man into a baby; however, he grows

into the same kind of elderly man living with many bees in a very small, decrepit house many years later. According to Akagi, no one should meddle in other people's business; leaving people to their own designs is best.

For another example, *Jakuson Neko no Hontou no Ie* [*Jackson's House*] is a story of a half-stray cat with many names. Jackson is his original name, and he has other names because he does not want to depend on one particular owner. Jackson has a friend, a female kitty. This friend is a classic "perfect pet". Jackson tries to tell her how to be independent because she is a greenhorn, but she really likes a pet cat life. Akagi wonders if this story is really for children. This story seems to her to be more suitable for a feminist seminar. (43).



Themes of "becoming independent" or "being yourself" may be key words in the western children's literature; however, children are always protected in Japanese society, such themes are hardly broached in Japanese children's literature. As Moretti describes above, "stable," "pre-modern" societies protect the status of the child. Young Adult people are in a term to start thinking of their future, and they need to be independent for their future. That might be why Akagi classifies these children's literature in Group 1 into Young Adult literature.

Nabaho no Uta [*Sing Down The Moon*] by Scott O'Dell (1970) in Group 2 depicts what happened to Native Americans historically and what they did in their usual life. According to Akagi, foreign children books including history are difficult for children, but adults can get knowledge and understand the background of the story easily. Moreover, *Nabaho no Uta* depicts a young couple's love; that is why this story should be for Young Adult (73). The idea that books are a tool for children to increase their knowledge seems curiously absent from Akagi's thought.

Sinda Eri [*Cinder-Elly*] in Group 3 is a today's version of *Cinderella*. Akagi says Elly has her opinion and has a power to tell it, which Cinderella does not do. Akagi says that *The True Story of The Three Little Pigs* and *Kusaikusa Chize Bouya & Takusan no Otoboke Banashi* make fool of folk tales and many students in high school and junior high schools can enjoy with laughing (87). It seems that for Akagi, the presence of irony in these foreign children's books is reason enough to move them to her catalogue of Young Adult fiction.

NPO Library School on YA literature

NPO *Toshokan no Gakkou* (NPO Library School) is a Japanese group that works to encourage lifelong learning. Every year they hold a symposium about children's books, and they publish a journal *Kodomo no Hon ~Kono Ichinen wo Furikaette~* [Children's Books ~Looking back though the year~]. In the journal *Kodomo no Hon ~Kono Ichinen wo Furikaette~ 2008*, Naoko Inoue, a specialist of Young Adult service in a library, says that Young Adult service in the library is still an unfamiliar field, and she has not yet met a Japanese book which perfectly fits in with Young Adult literature (66). She also says that there are many good Young Adult books in foreign literature; especially, American or British literature have really interesting Young Adult books (73-74). Even librarians do not have the specific image of Young Adult literature. Young Adult literature in the West is very good at depicting reality. However, it is believed that children in Japan should be under tutelage to adults, which causes Japanese novels for children and Young Adults to be poor at depicting the reality. She expects Young Adult literature to have those elements which Young Adult literature in the West has.

Other attempts to identify YA literature

Rinko Yoshida introduces two new types of Young Adult literature in the journal *Kodomo no Hon ~Kono Ichinen wo Furikaette~ 2007. Boys Love* (*BL*), stories depicting gay couples and targeting mainly women, and *keitai shousetsu*, novels written for reading on the

cellphone screen, can be Young Adult literature (59-71). She believes that Young Adult are more familiar with entertainment novels such as *Boys Lave* and *keitai shosetsu* because these novels are composed of short sentences and are easy to read. Such literature has little to do with reality, however, and cannot be included in the YA category as I have been defining it.

In my own search for Japanese YA fiction I did find a number of works that show the image of a changing family, works which take up "taboo subjects" such as divorce. I will describe several of these works in the following section, but my contention is that no matter what social situation they describe, they cannot be classified as genuine YA literature because of an omnipresent "safety net" never far from the protagonists, a "caring" adult presence in the wings.

YA "candidate" novels in Japan: the safety net

I read a number of Japanese "YA candidate" works of fiction which depict social issues such as (grand)parents' divorce, runaway parents, single parent families, death, and suicide. Those books describe how children live their lives in an evolving social unit quite different from the so-called "normal" family. While people generally commiserate with a child who has a single parents or no parent because they believe these children must be unhappy or envy the situations of their friends. However, these novels I have read do not make a dark, negative impression on us and the reason is related to my claim that caring adults are always somewhere in the wings. This safety net keeps the stories from the stark colors of real situations. Even their situations at school are painted in brighter colors than are justified, given the harsh reality of bullying kids who bear the stigma of "difference."

Examples of candidate works

I will talk about five novels. The first example is *Tamago no O* [The Cord of the Egg] by Maiko Seo in 2009. The protagonist, in the last year of elementary school, lives alone with his mother. He doubts whether he is really the biological child of his mother. He does does

not know anything about his father and his mother doesn't seem to know much about his own preferences as far as food goes. Moreover, his grandparents' reaction is suspicious when he asks them if he was adopted child.

He learns about what an umbilical cord is and how it connects the baby to its mother; he also hears that most mothers preserve it. But when he asks his mother to produce one, she doesn't have one and instead offers him a few pieces of egg shell. In fact, he does not have blood relationship with his family because his real parents died when he was a baby. His mother might think he is too young to understand everything and she has camouflaged the facts. Here come the caring adults from the wings, always ready to camouflage reality.

Needless to say, the boy is not unhappy with his family. Except for the fact of his missing father, he is in an ideal situation. His mother is good at cooking, keeps up communication with him all the time, and often expresses her "love" for him. His grandparents live near the protagonist's house and do their utmost to make him welcome. The security and warmth of his situation make the question of the missing father relatively unimportant.

The mother is very careful in the way she prepares her son for the fact that she has a boyfriend who may join their household and become the boy's father. In this sense, the story shares something with the German YA stories presented by Sriwarakan as a contrast with Thai stories which cannot deal with such realistic scenes, but there is a crucial difference in the degree of care with which the situation is handled. The protagonist in this Japanese story is treated with an intense loving care that allows him to even accept another candidate for his mother's affection.

The boyfriend becomes the boy's father, and the boy changes his surname. He

wonders how he should explain his new name to his classmates. There is always the possibility of bullying in such a situation. But true to the optimism of this work of fiction, one of his classmates creates an occasion in the class where his name change is treated with humor and accepted by everyone.

The next change in the boy's situation comes when his mother becomes pregnant. She decides at this point to tell him about his real parents who died when the boy was just an infant. His status is close to being a foster child. He has no blood relation with either of the people who are now his parents, and this is a potential trouble spot, but the enormous care of his mother and her new husband protect him from experiencing the loneliness of being "different." The novel cannot really be classified as YA literature because of the strong gates of overwhelming care that keeps any harshness of reality at bay.

The second example is *Ririsu* [Release] by Taki Kusano in 2010. Once again, the protagonist is in a single-parent family; his father passed away some time ago. Once again, the stereotypical unhappiness of a single-parent family is dispelled, thanks to the enormous effort of not only his mother, but also his older brother, who took on all the household chores when his father died.

All his relatives see this protagonist as the reincarnation of his father, and they expect him to follow his father into the medical profession; he was born on the same day his father died. However, his future dream is not being a doctor but a pro basketball player, so he has to look for a way to convey this fact to his relatives. He is afraid disappointing his relatives and of their opposition; however, he knows that his older brother will support him. The existence of his brother is the biggest security net for the protagonist.

The crisis over the boy's future causes some changes in the family. The brother, whose devotion to housework has kept him from focusing on his own future, is banned from

doing housework, and the protagonist himself is required to help. The mother assumes more of a central role in the house and the safety net for her children is tightened and made more secure. This novel too, lacks the exteriority necessary to qualify as genuine YA literature; the protagonist is not exposed to society outside of his own house, and his world is too protected to make the story interesting outside of a limited Japanese readership. Judged by Moretti's division of pre-modern and modern fiction, this work bears few of the marks of modernity.

Yet another candidate for YA literature is *Karenda* [Calendar] by Hiko Tanaka in 1997. Tsubasa's parents died when she was a child. She does not like people who say "*Taihen-ne*" ("Wow, that's tough!") "*Ganbatte-ne*" (Hang in there!) or "*Eraino-ne*" ("You have my admiration!") all of which include some feeling of commiseration. According to the speaker's stereotypes, a life without a family is a life to be pitied, but Tsubasa rejects that conclusion. She had been living with her maternal grandparents, but a few years ago they got divorced and she now lives with her grandmother.

Despite the double punch of losing her parents and experiencing her grandparents' divorce, Tsubasa doesn't feel she is a victim and rejects pity. Divorce is a not uncommon thing among her classmates. It is part of their world. And there is her grandmother, who tries very hard to provide the kind of loving care she thinks Tsubasa's mother would have given her. Once again we can see the existence of a safety net. Tsubasa believes so strongly in the strength of that net that she shows no fear when her grandmother, out of kindness, allows a couple to live with them because the man is sick. Occasionally alone with a strange man in the house, Tsubasa feels no fear because of her strong awareness of her grandmother's omnipresent care.

Second, the protagonist's grandmother works hard for her granddaughter. She tries

to be an ideal mother for her granddaughter imaging what the protagonist's mother would do if she were alive, that is to say the grandmother establishes a big security net for the protagonist. That is why the protagonist strongly believes her grandmother. She admits a couple into the house because the man is sick even when her grandmother is absent. It should be danger for a child to let stranger in the house, but the protagonist does not feel fear at all. This is because she knows that her grandmother, the big security net, is coming back soon and that the house is under the control of her grandmother. The grandmother's daily life and her way of making decisions are depicted, so that readers do see the rationality of the adult world.

Another kind of support comes from the woman of the couple admitted by the grandmother. She herself lived in a foster home as a child, so she can understand Tsubasa's situation. She never shows the kind of stereotypical response listed above, and she becomes a kind of role model for Tsubasa, a psychological safety net.

This novel obviously aims at demythologizing the stigma of the parentless child, as well as the stigma of divorce even between such reverent persons as one's grandparents. But it maintains the concept of the child-centered world with adults in a caring orbit. Here too, there is no exteriority, no fresh air from a window open to the world.

The forth is *Kattena Kei* [A Freewheeling Mother, Kei] by Rumiko Nakamura in 1992. This novel depicts a freewheeling family, a mother and a child, Ako. The protagonist is living with her mother because her parents got divorced when she was small. She does not remember anything about her father. The mother is far from the Japanese ideal image of mother. She smokes a lot and she completely neglects housework. She does not consciously provide care for her child. Ako is a bit of a troublemaker at school, and there is some hint in the text that being a troublemaker comes from lack of love.

When her mother goes on a trip to Hong Kong, Ako gets a chance to stay with her

father in Hiroshima. Here is the warm, standard home she has never had. Her father treasures his time with her, his new wife is kind to her, and her parental grandparents are warm and close by. For the first time in her memory she gets warm meals, clean clothes and a tidy house, apparently the things all children are entitled to.

When her mother gets back from Hong Kong Ako cannot help but ask if she can go to live with her father in Hiroshima. When her mother cries out loud at the very idea, Ako realizes how much her mother needs her and gives up the idea of going to live with her father. While the book does introduce the unusual spectacle of a mother who does not play by the rules, the main thrust of the book is to let Ako know that she, too, has access to an ideal family setting where she can be a full-fledged child on occasion.

The last example is *Kofuku na Shokutaku* [The Happiness Table] by Maiko Seo in 2007. Sawako, in the last year of junior high school, is aware that her family is falling apart. Her father made a suicide attempt, and her mother started living alone to escape the stress and pressure caused by her husband's action. Her older brother, Nao, has no interest in other people and is satisfied with superficial human relations. Her father quits his job as a teacher, and he seems to have given up on the role of father.

The mother maintains close ties with the family despite her living apart from them. She comes back to the house in times of special stress, as when Sawako's physical condition deteriorates in the rainy season. She is careful not to display shock or disappointment at her husband's loss of a job so that her children would not feel alarmed.

But the real catalyst for change comes when Sawako's boyfriend is killed in a traffic accident. Sawako falls into a depressed state, and her family snaps out of their lethargy to take care of her. The father resumes his parental role, and the mother moves back in. Her

safety nets are back in place.

In all of the novels I researched in my attempt to find genuine YA literature the conclusion is the same, no matter what troubles or complicated situations have arisen. People around the protagonist pull together and show that his/her safety net is in place. Modernity and disenchantment are defeated, if they ever appear at all.

Interculturality and YA Fiction

Before I begin my discussion of the Asian fiction of "writers in the middle," I want to look at the theory of interculturality as developed by Jean-Marie Gustave Le Clezio, the 2008 recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature. I feel that his ideas on the universal aspects of literature will help us to focus on why the pieces of Asian YA fiction I have chosen not only serve as prototypes of such fiction but also stimulate us to think about what YA fiction should be like in our era of displaced masses and a widening division between "stable" cultures and the refugee world.

Le Clezio on "interculturality" in literature

In my previous discussion above I have identified the distinction between stable and rapidly changing cultures as defined by Moretti as well as the similar classification between tragic and comic cultures proposed by Rodriguez. Le Clezio (2015) adds a sinister color to the concept of "stable" cultures when he points out that cultural "stability" is something promoted by governments:

> In Europe (particularly in France), we are at a point where the government promotes the affirmation of a singular culture and language while excluding all others. This trend has recently become ridiculous when the government, influenced by the rise of radical intellectuals (Deon or d'Ormesson from the right and Debray or Sollers from the left), decided to lead an official investigation on "national identity" with, as we know, a very small success. (129)

The "purity" of national literatures is not innocent, Le Clezio points out; it is constructed and promoted by nationalists and committees on the national language, given voice by such critics as Richard Millet, who penned a "a racist, islamophobic . . . xenophobic statement" (133) decrying the destruction of French literature, a piece of writing that Le Clezio attacked. In return, the Nobel Prize winner was called "a multiculturalist invertebrate" by the French essayist who stirred controversy in 2012 with his claim that Norway deserved the mass killings carried out by Anders Brevic:

"Multiculturalism, as it has been imported from the United States, is the worst thing possible for Europe … and creates a mosaic of ghettoes in which the [host] nation no longer exists," Millet told France Info radio on Aug. 27. "Breivik, I believe, perceived that and responded to that question with the most monstrous reply." (*Time,* 8/28/2012)

The word "multicultural" appears here both in Millet's complaints about the "mosaic of ghettoes" that resulted from the French adoption of American ideology and in Millet's labeling Le Clezio a "multicultural invertebrate." But Le Clezio is not promoting multiculturalism, which he sees as a static policy compared to interculturality, which seeks to find the universal in the other culture:

> Interculturality is a response to the complexity of cultural entities. It isn't by cultural dialogues that we can make a German speak with a Greek: it is to make the Greek understand what he has that is German and for the German to understand what he has that is Greek. Literature is a good example for that because literature is complex. *It isn't the expression of a territory, and if literature is reduced to such an expression it becomes inaudible and unacceptable*. (131: emphasis added)

My dissatisfaction with Japanese YA literature and the attempts of critics to define it responds to this assertion: "Literature . . . *isn't the expression of a territory, and if literature is reduced to such an expression it becomes inaudible and unacceptable*. "Inaudible" and

“unacceptable”: these are good words to describe the tepid expressions of individuation in the novels I have summarized above. They belong with the popular fiction we can find in train kiosks or airport bookshops, literature which Le Clezio disdains not out of snobbery but because “it doesn’t hold much significance, in my opinion. These books are replaceable and don’t bear witness of anything; they offer very little” (132).

Finding prototypes of a new Asian YA fiction

It is my purpose in this dissertation to propose two Asian works of fiction as prototypes of a new type of YA fiction, fiction which portrays protagonists caught in the middle between cultures and languages. They are the children of modernity in that disenchantment is their starting point. They are the children of modernity because they have emerged from the discontents of the US globalized imperialist reach. They are the children of modernity because there can be no closure to their dilemmas. And they are the subjects of my dissertation because I believe that their stories describe protagonists who are emerging into a world beyond concepts of national identity. I want to valorize their stories as a new type of Asian YA fiction, a type which has no safety net for its protagonists.

Chapter Three

Struggling into Wonderland:

Ben Isaac's Journey to Shinjuku in *Seijōki no Kikoenai Heya*

Le Clezio's interculturality

In his explanation of what interculturality is, Le Clezio points to a paradox that is inherent in that experience:

> it is an idea founded on the notion of cultural permeability, but at the same time, there are hard nuclei in each of these cultures: languages. Languages are resistant to words coming from other languages, even sounds that come from other languages. (132)

Star-Spangled Banner as YA prototype

In this chapter I will discuss Ben Levy's 1992 novel *Seijōki no Kikoenai Heya* (English translation, *The Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Can't be Heard)* (2011) as an eminent candidate, a prototype of new YA Asian fiction. The novel was a rare work written in Japanese by an American. Does that make it Asian American fiction, or is that category reserved for tales of hardship endured by Asian immigrants in the Americas?

The book is a tale of hardship, the tale of a young man of seventeen just graduated from high school who comes to live with his diplomat father in the American consulate in Yokohama. His father has been posted to various Asian countries and Ben Isaac, the young protagonist of the novel, has been schooled in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Asian locations.

It is a tale of hardship because his father is a cold, unsympathetic man with little fondness for Japan, the Japanese, or their language, which he considers to be soft and sensual, not like the rational Chinese he prefers. This matters to Ben because he has set himself the task of learning the Japanese language and gaining the interculturality that such an achievement would bring.

Norma Field on *Star-Spangled Banner*

Norma Field comments on Ben's desire for the language in her essay "Texts of Childhood in Inter-Nationalizing Japan" (1996). She comments on a passage in which Ben is travelling from Yokohama into Tokyo on a train, mesmerized by the neon signs in the kana syllabaries and kanji (Chinese characters):

> Ben cannot yet read most of this writing; even when he can, he does not know the meaning. He is a "traveler who cannot read most of the signposts." But his eyes reflect an intense desire to read. . . . The allure of metropolitan commodities, or rather, of the metropolis as commodity, is crystallized as language, and the instrumentality of ordinary desire for the commodity is purified by passion. The city becomes a dazzling forest of signs for the child-seeker. (156)

It is not long before Ben decides to run away from the consulate where there is scant affection for him. His father, having divorced his Polish American wife some years before, has remarried with a Chinese woman and they have a young son. Ben's father gets increasingly angry as Ben comes home from his Japanese lessons later and later.

What Ben's father does not know is that Ben has found a mentor-friend living near the school, a university student named Ando who encourages Ben to learn Japanese and treats him as a younger brother. Ando's simple acceptance of the blonde haired blue eyed Ben stands in stark contrast to the way he is treated by members of the ESS (English conversation club) members at the university. They hang around the International Students' Lounge, waiting with pre-set questions to catch one of the foreign students. It is the time of the Student Movement, the late sixties, when anti-US-Japan Security Pact students hold daily demonstrations at the university and around the consulate, and the fever has spread to the ESS members:

> The Members of the English Conversation Club had fairly decent pronunciation, but

> the way they carried on a conversation made it unlike any he had ever experienced in English. Instead of a discussion, it was more like an interview—at times an interrogation—as they bombarded him with questions. . . . Some even recited a list of carefully worded questions from a card . . . "Don't you feel guilty about the Vietnam War? What about the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima?" (21)

Ben realizes that what they really wanted was not to have a conversation with him, but "to subject the West itself to scrutiny" (21) Asked about his ethnicity, Ben replies "I'm half Polish, half Jewish," only to be interrogated again: "Well then, what do you think of Zionism?" Ben is at a loss for words. Finally he confesses, "I'm a Jew who doesn't dream of Israel" (22).

Ando appears one day during these interrogations, when Ben is being grilled about white supremacy "as a Caucasian" (23). He has never been seen in the International Lounge before, but he has an important question to ask Ben: Why are you speaking English when you're in Japan?" (24) Ben feels "as though someone had hit him with a wooden sword" (24). Ando takes Ben under his wing and nurtures him in Japanese by just speaking naturally.

The irony of Ben's world

I should say something here about the irony of Ben's world. As I mentioned above, irony has been creeping in to Western CL and YA literature. Seth Lerer's chapter on irony in his *History of Children's Literature* is a convincing demonstration of recent publications that use irony as a *lingua franca*. And yet, the Japanese publications I have discussed above are devoid of irony. Indeed, Akagi reacts to the presence of irony in such works as Jon Scieszka's *The Stinky Cheese Man* by classifying it as YA literature, though it is treated as children's literature in America.

There is much irony in Ben's world. His father, the America consul in Yokohama, disdains anything Japanese—including the language and the people—and discourages Ben

from seriously pursuing the language. The Japanese language program at "W" university (no doubt Waseda) teaches Ben hopelessly formal, rather unusable Japanese: "*Watakushi wa Amerikajin de gozaimasu*." The ESS students refuse to converse in Japanese with him.

Ben at Kennedy's burial

And there is a larger irony in the background: Ben's high school days in Arlington, Virginia, where he had lived with his divorced mother in a poor part of the city had coincided with the assassination of John Kennedy. Ben lived close enough to the national cemetery that he could walk to the burial. Crowds of people lined the road into the cemetery, and shiny black cars with cigar-smoking old politicians made their way to the burial site. "Those bastards" a man standing near Ben mutters, showing his disgust that the young president was dead while political cronies lived on (67).

America is undergoing a change, and Ben is there to see it. He picks up a crumpled page of *The Washington Post* and sees that the front page has a black border inside which Walt Whitman's poem "O Captain, My Captain!" is printed. This was Whitman's elegy written at the death of Abraham Lincoln. Ben's eyes catch a line in the middle of the poem: "My father does not feel my arm" (66). Written for the dead Lincoln, displayed again for the dead Kennedy, this line has multiple meanings for the Ben who can never progress into the "adult world" by a bond with his father.

Jackie Kennedy passes nearby Ben and in the "wry smile" on her face Ben thinks he hears "*All of you had a hand in this, you know. So save your tears*" (68: emphasis in the original.) Later Ben reads something a poet said about that day in November: "it was the last day Americans shed public tears" (69).

Ben's childhood was spent in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and other Southeast Asian postings. He attended special schools for the children of diplomats, always in the shadow of America's imperialist reach. The America he glimpses in the Arlington National Cemetery

only confirms his chilling image of the country whose identity card he bears. (He will later burn that card after he runs away from the consulate, thereby endangering his visa status in Japan.) The large irony of the ESS students badgering Ben about the Vietnam War is only too apparent as we learn more about Ben's past.

No safety net for Ben

The irony of Ben's world comes from the enormous contradictions surrounding him. There is no safety net for the seventeen-year-old who runs away from the security of the American consulate, heading for the very place his father has forbidden him to visit, the place Ando has promised to take him: Shinjuku, one of Tokyo's urban centers, aptly described by Norma Field as "Tokyo's glitzy, tawdry entertainment center" (156).

Interiorizing contradiction

Moretti sees the only way to survive for the youth in the *Bildungsroman* involving an ability to internalize the contradictions that surround him/her:

> When we remember that the *Bildungsroman*—the symbolic form that more than any other has portrayed and promoted modern socialization—is also the *most contradictory* of modern symbolic forms, we realize that in our world socialization itself consists first of all in *the interiorization of contradiction*. (10: emphasis in the original).

New type of YA literature

A new type of YA literature, no longer interested in "initiation into the adult world" (Vanderstaay, cited above) because that world cannot resolve its contradictions, must look for ways to emerge into a world no longer "stable" but rather a world characterized by its own contradictions: a world of refugees and homeless, nationless, people.

Ben as refugee

For Ben, Shinjuku will be the site of a kind of epiphany along these lines. He

stumbles into a café where another customer, a Japanese woman, is determined to find out just what kind of *gaijin* (foreigner) Ben is. "Tourist? . . . Missionary? . . . Hippie?" (58). Ben denies each of her categories. Then, as she angers and demands "Well then, what the hell are you?" he proposes one of his own: "I am a BO-MEI-SHA" (refugee). Questioned further, Ben replies that he is a refugee from a war, at which the woman protests, demanding "Aren't you guys the ones waging the war?" (59). Ben does not yet have the language to tell her "that he was escaping from 'you guys—who were actually 'my guys,'" so he lets the conversation end with the false admission that he is a "tourist" (59).

That night Ben sleeps on a bench in a small plaza in Shinjuku, and it is here that he has his epiphany. The sound of Japanese has become more familiar to him:

> he got the feeling that he could understand the many Japanese voices around him. It was as if his own voice were echoing off the walls of the buildings around him, multiplying into different Japanese voices—words ending with *da, yo, wa*, and *ze*—that saturated the sky above the darkening plaza. (83)

Shinjuku as home for Ben

Ben wakes in the morning to find that other bodies were sleeping on the other benches in the plaza. He gets up, feeling

> weak at the knees. He felt like he was leaving his own corpse behind. The seventeen-year-old son of the American consul who wandered into a SHIN-JU-KU plaza one late November evening, his life cut short beside a fountain. The young Yankee who never did go home, his face pale as bones. (84)

Ben experiences a symbolic death on his first night outside of the armed security of the US consulate. He has no more status now than the other occupants of benches around the fountain. As he starts to walk away, he notices a change in his perception of the Japanese around him. "For some reason, they didn't strike him as Japanese, or *Nihonjin*, as they had

the previous day" (84). And this leads him to look more closely at the place he finds himself in, so different from the "adult world" into which young adults are expected to emerge:

> Perhaps it was the nature of the place called SHIN-JU-KU, but everyone looked like they were here because they too had run away from home. Was this SHIN-JU-KU Ando spoke of a place for people who had no home to go to? A Japanese voice—reminiscent of Ando's but unmistakably his own—welled up in Ben's head. *Ore wa koko ni iru beki da*, it proclaimed. *I belong here*. (85)

By taking on the "hard nuclei of language" that Le Clezio describes as constituting the paradox of interculturality, Ben has arrived at an authentic stopping point, a place where he can function comfortably. In my summary of some of the issues I encountered in my MA thesis on irony in children's literature, I reported several ethical issues raised by critics regarding the use of irony in children's literature. I myself valorized the interpretation of irony proposed by Richard Rorty, seeing in it a positive ethical act: the invitation to a higher state of consciousness through the repudiation of the fake.

The fake and the authentic

Ben's rejection of his father's diplomatic world and his linguistic tutelage under Ando, his pilgrimage towards refugee status in Shinjuku, constitute a rejection of the fake and a quest for the authentic. Interestingly, although Ben is a citizen of modernity, an inhabitant of the disenchanted world, his encounter with Ando offers him a chance to re-enter the pre-modern, enchanted world. As Field puts it,

> Language is mythically substantialized in *Star Spangled Banner*. In a fairy tale Ben would have been the human child who learns the language of animals and receives their protection. In *Star Spangled Banner*, Ben as language-seeker reenchants the world at the heart of its urban tawdriness. (159)

The interculturality of *Star Spangled Banner*

Ben achieves interculturality past the “hard nuclei” of the Japanese language under Ando’s tutelage and despite the silliness of many encounters with people like the ESS students, who cannot see past his *gaijin* exterior. *Star Spangled Banner* as prototype of a new Asian YA piece of fiction offers the possibility of interculturality and the grasp of the authentic.

Chapter Four

Reclaiming Thailand in Lapcharoensap's *Sightseeing*

Japanese and Thai YA literature

It was Sriwarakan's article, described above, on the differences between Thai and German children's literature that encouraged me to take up this project of examining the state of Asian (specifically Japanese and Thai) YA literature. The common point I could see between the two Asian nations' CL was that the subjectivity of the child was given a special, protected role, determinedly separate from the adult world. While some of the Japanese candidates for the YA category I described in the previous chapter contain situations similar to the ones Sriwarakan describes in German YA novels (single mother introducing her boyfriend to her child, etc.) I hope I have made it clear that loving care is always in the wings in such Japanese fiction, and the child is at the center.

McGrath on Thai CL

McGrath (2007, 2010) has written extensively about Thai children's literature, and I will summarize some of his research before moving on to a discussion of how Lapcharoensap's (2005) *Sightseeing* represents a new type of YA Asian literature, one which seeks to expose the fake and find the authentic. Like Hideo Levy's *Star Spangled Banner*, *Sightseeing* appears from a space in between two cultures and is steeped in a realism born of the protagonist's ironic consciousness.

McGrath (2007) asserts that there is no evidence of irony in the Thai children's literature he reviews:

> In these works the subjectivity of the child is clearly defined and sharply delimited by the Thai community. None of the books sampled had a child as first-person narrator, as in Rodman and Spiegel's *First Grade Stinks*(2006), in which the resolution comes

> from the experience of the child as opposed to coming from the benevolent authority of the community of adults. In a sense, the subjectivity of the child evident in these picture books as well as in longer pieces of Thai children's literature such as Kampoon Boontawee's *A Child of the Northeas(t* 1988) or Jane Vejjajiva's *The Happiness of Kati* (2006), is represented as one part of the larger subjectivity of the community, somewhat like the pre-modern subjectivity of medieval Europe. (34)

This brings us back to Moretti's division of the European novel into pre-modern and post-modern types, the classical *Bildungsroman* and what followed in the wake of modernity, works "which exploit the impossibility of ending" (54). In *Star Spangled Banner* Ben flees the shattered community of the consulate and the America it represents; the interesting question, as I have indicated above, is whether or not his friendship with Ando offers him a way back into a communal existence, into a re-enchanted world.

Thai CL: pre-modern and didactic

To return to the state of Thai children's literature as McGrath describes it in his 2007 article, then, we can say that it is pre-modern and even didactic in the authoritarian voice with which it addresses the child. The classic Thai CL novels which McGrath cites, *Child of the Northeast* and *The Happiness of Kati* both end with a semi-religious affirmation of belief in the cycle of life as their protagonists have and will experience it. As McGrath puts it, "both share a subjugation of individual will, of subjectivity itself, to a cycle of life which is perceived to be both good and inevitable" (37-38).

Subjectivity of the larger community

This is despite the novels difference in the social classes they represent. *Child of the Northeast* depicts the world of the rural poor, the "red shirt" population of Northeast Thailand (though the novel was written before the "red shirt" and "yellow shirt" movements ever appeared.) Koon, the young protagonist of the story, curses the empty sky which never

delivers rain necessary for the crops upon which the farming community depends. The conclusion of the book shows him with a contrite heart, believing that the ongoing cycle of life which generations of his ancestors endured is also the right way for him. McGrath comments

> This is a pre-modern knowledge of participation in the cyclical processes of nature, a spurning of one's own subjectivity for the larger subjectivity of the community that has survived and will go on surviving; with tears in his eyes Koon remembers the monk's words: "Koon, the sky never punished anyone . . . You must never blame the sky . . ."(36: 476).

***The Happiness of Kati* as upper class drama**

On the other hand, Jane Vejjajiva's *The Happiness of Kati* depicts the world of the Thai professional classes, the Bangkok-based "yellow shirts." The author is actually the sister of the Democratic Party's leader, the former Prime Minister Abhisit Vejjajiva. While the book has enjoyed enormous popularity in Thailand and abroad, some reviewers have criticized it for romanticizing the rural poor. The film only magnified this tendency; Kong Rithdee (2009) complains

> In *The Happiness of Kati*, villagers wear crisp, clean clothes, speak with no accent, and generally live a tranquil existence by their green paddies and lucid canals. Every child is sparklingly clean, bright, happy, and no one drinks or smokes or swears or whines. In short, this is a full-scale romanticisation, a sanitised, utopian image of the rural created from the eye, and maybe for the comfort, of Bangkok bourgeoisie, who are the primary market for the movie. (Thai News Service Group January 9, 2009: accessed online)

Kati, a young girl of nine, lives by a canal with her grandparents. She wakes to the kitchen noises of her grandmother preparing breakfast, a sound that conjures up the security

of her life. The one source of dissatisfaction is introduced by epigrams after each chapter title, epigrams which talk about Kati's mother, who is not present in Kati's life. No one talks about the mother; it is eventually made clear that she suffers from ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease), a degenerative disease that wastes the nerves.

When Kati was younger, she and her mother were caught in a storm while boating on the canal, and the frail mother did not have the strength to pull Kati to safety once she herself had stepped on to the shore. The boat started to drift out onto rougher waters with Kati aboard, and only the sudden appearance of a friend prevented an accident. Since that time, the mother has removed herself from Kati's life.

***Kati* is full of safety nets**

As the mother's disease progresses and her time grows shorter Kati is allowed to meet her in her small house by the sea. Their reunion is short and emotional; soon the mother passes away and Kati resumes her life by the canal with her grandparents. Like the Japanese YA books I described above, *The Happiness of Kati* is full of safety nets. Kati has a small army of well-to-do relatives watching her with deep affection. That army is watching to see what Kati will do with a choice her mother has left her, the choice whether or not to contact her father, who is not Thai. Kati goes through the motions of mailing a postcard, but it is not one going to her father, but just to a neighboring friend. Her choice not to get in touch with her father clearly indicates that her happiness is in the life she has led so far.

Irony and the objective mind

I will contrast Lapcharoensap's stories with *The Happiness of Kati* and suggest that he achieves an exteriority in his work that is not possible in *Kati*. Without this exteriority there can be no real authenticity: as the film critic quoted above complains, things become romanticized and self-referential. Kati's decision not to contact her father may be an admirable gesture as it indicates how satisfied she is with her status quo, but it is also a

refusal of interculturality. And while there is much humor in the story, there is not much irony. McGrath does not comment upon this, but in the general remarks he makes upon irony there is a passage from Kierkegaard that could be useful here:

> Irony is the birth pangs of the objective mind (based on the misrelationship, discovered by the I, between existence and the idea of existence). Humor is the birthpangs of the absolute mind (based on the misrelationship, discovered by the I, between the I and the idea of the I.) (38: 19)

Kati's grandfather is the source of much of the humor in the story, and his humor is of the type described above: a former lawyer, he gently deprecates his importance and that of his wife. But in this story there is no indication of "*the birth pangs of the objective mind*," and this idea seems crucial enough to me that I want to use it as a litmus test for YA literature: does the work show signs of the objective mind beginning to appear?

Certainly we can see that in *Star Spangled Banner* as Ben leaves his patrimony behind and sets off for the homelessness of a Shinjuku bench, burning his identity card as he goes. For Ben, the "pangs of birth" are nearly equivalent to his struggle with the language. Ando is not shy about taking Ben's palm and writing the hiragana character for "nu" several times there, seeing himself as the Ann Sullivan who finally brought Helen Keller into the objective world with the repetition of "water."

The stories of Makut Onrudee

McGrath's 2010 article on Thai YA literature, "Representing Islam in Thai Young Adult Literature: Makut Onrudee and the Case of Rohim's Poem," treats the YA novels of Makut Onrudee, better known by his penname, "Nippan." One story discussed in that paper shows the clash between modernity and the pre-modern culture of the "Yawi", the minority Muslims living in the southern provinces that border Malaysia. The title of the story is "Rohim's Poem" (translated into Japanese as "Rohim no uta" (1981). There is a sense in

which this story depicts "the birth pangs of the objective mind," and for that reason I would like to discuss it before turning to *Sightseeing*, the work I argue represents a new type of Asian YA fiction featuring the interculturality of "people in the middle."

Background of "Rohin's Poem"

"Rohim's Poem," McGrath tells us, is the product of a certain time in modern Thai history; the author was one of the idealistic university graduates who wanted to volunteer for various kinds of social work. McGrath talks about this period:

> In the background of this passage, as mentioned above, lie the various student movements of the early and mid-seventies in Bangkok, when the long period of dictatorship was ending and the idealism and political will of students were strong. The young teacher in the story . . . is from the metropolitan area; he takes a long train ride to reach the South, whereas Nippan himself was from Songkla and went to work in villages not far from his home. As his father was ethnically Chinese, and his mother Thai, he was different from the ethnic Malays he lived and worked with in his idealistic attempt to "get to know one's neighbors." The important fact here is that the protagonist, as well as Nippan, has just finished a course of higher education that separates his consciousness from the largely agricultural community he will work in.(26)

The young teacher is a representative of modernity and he wants to bring his freshly completed education to the poor, rural Yawi children he will take charge of. Things do not go as he hoped. One of his pupils has a strong Muslim identity and argues with the teacher when he tries to sell the idea of an inclusive Thai nation. McGrath gives us the teacher's words:

> Let Teacher explain. People who believe in Islam call themselves Muslims, or Hadj, or use other names, but we live in Thailand, so we are Thai. There are Buddhist Thais, and Hill Tribe Thais as well. You and your parents are Islamic Thais. (27:36-37)

Rohim, the brightest of his students, refuses to accept this version of his identity. “My father says I’m a Muslim. And he is too, and he’s been to Mecca” (27). The story builds to a crisis that takes shape when the teacher, in Thai class, gives his pupils a creative writing assignment. Rohim’s composition is so short the teacher can hardly find it in his notebook. It is just a four-line poem:

> Teacher is kind to me,
>
> I am kind to teacher . . .
>
> If teacher hits me,
>
> I will stab him. (27:39)

Ethnic purity in France and Thailand

The well-intentioned teacher is obviously shocked by the strength of Rohim’s rejection of his inclusive vision of the Thai nation. We can look back to Le Clezio to find the reason for his failure in this encounter. The teacher’s efforts to promote the Thai language and the Thai nation are similar to what Le Clezio has seen in French attempts to keep the national language pure. As I reported above, the Nobel prizewinner sees France as resisting any attempt to incorporate its colonial past:

> In fact, it seems as if a certain percentage of the intelligentsia and the political class refuse to face the reality of the world by refusing the natural and irresistible inclination towards the mixture of cultures and genes, in order to preserve an illusionary and unhealthy ethnic “purity” founded upon the principle of an immutable heritage: France from the Classical period, Christianity, and a sort of rigid catechism of the Republican spirit. The reality is that this type of identity does not have any true foundation and that it is contradicted, sometimes violently, by an important part of the youth who does not identify themselves with such a fantasized portrait. (129)

Nippan’s portrait of the young Thai teacher trying to sell a Thai identity to his young

pupils and finding a violent contradiction illustrates exactly the situation Le Clezio describes, and we have to recognize the genius of the Thai writer is capturing so perfectly the failure of government policy in dealing with difference. His story is also a narrative of "people in the middle," the type I am proposing as pregnant prototypes of a new type of YA literature. Le Clezio's description of the type of character he wants to write about lends itself to narratives of "people in the middle": he says he is interested in "immigrants, collateral victims of the colonial wars, or simply young people who are broke and disenchanted—because they speak about a reality that only episodically appears in public life" (130).

"Mongrels" in *Sightseeing*

The protagonists in Lapcharoensap's stories are just such people, "mongrels" coming out of the inter-spaces of America's far-flung Asian wars. The first story in his collection *Sightseeing* (2005) is called "Farangs" and has a protagonist-narrator who is half Thai, half American. Like Norma Field herself and countless others in the wake of American wars, the unnamed narrator had an American soldier for a father, a man who returned to America promising to send for the boy and his mother, an empty promise that finds them now running a beach motel on one of Thailand's world-famous islands. *Farang* (foreigners) flock to the island the story's opening gives us *farang* by the season:

> This is how we count the days. June the Germans come to the Island—football cleats, big T-shirts, thick tongues—speaking like spitting. July: the Italians, the French, the British, the Americans. The Italians like pad thai, its affinity with spaghetti . . . The British are here to work on their pasty complexions, their penchant for hashish. Americans are the fattest, the stingiest of the bunch . . . They're also the worst drunks. Never get too close to a drunk American. (1)

The face and authentic in *Sightseeing*

"Farangs" was written five years after the movie *The Beach* with Leonardo DiCaprio

immortalized the possibilities of Thai islands. It demythologizes that vision of Thailand as a playground for good-looking Westerners not only with its irony, but with its authenticity. Only a protagonist "in the middle" could have penned this ironic look at American masculinity. As I have written above, the fiction I want to identify as a prototype of new Asian YA fiction exposes the fake and identifies the authentic. Just as Hideo Levy exposes the falseness of the diplomatic world and the lack of reality in the university's international clubs, Rattawut Lapcharoensap uses irony to expose the self-serving egoism of American men travelling abroad.

The unnamed protagonist of "Farangs" is a late teen with a pet pig named Clint Eastwood. The pig was a gift from his long-departed military father, a man who insisted that his child call him by his military rank, "Sergeant Henderson": "Not Daddy" (5). The boy has raised the pig and it acts like a proper pet, sometimes obeying the boy's orders. Clint's adventures on the beach are the occasion for the protagonist to meet up with an American girl sunning herself:

> I knew it was love when Clint Eastwood sniffed her crotch earlier that morning and the girl didn't scream or jump out of the sand or swat the pig like some of the other girls do. She merely lay there, snout in crotch, smiling tht angelic smile, like it was the most natural thing in the world, running a hand over the fuzz of Clint Eastwood's head . . . . (3)

The protagonist has had brief relationships with a number of American girls visiting the island. His uncle, who runs an elephant ride tourist spot on a mountain not far from the beach, sums up the Thai family's attitude towards this procession of American girls. As the protagonist approaches the elephant ride concession, his uncle spots him coming with the American girl in a skimpy bikini. He shouts out to his sister, who is cooking lunch: "It's nothing, Maew, [t]hough I wouldn't come out here unless you like nudie shows . . . The

mongrel's here with another member of his international harem" (10).

Light ironic tone of "farangs"

The ironic tone is light, and sounds a new note in Thai YA fiction. The reverential tone of *Child of the Northeast* and *The Happiness of Kati* is missing, and in its place there is a light ironic tone. Remembering Kierkegaard's words quoted above about irony being the birth pangs of the objective mind, I want to examine Lapcharoensap's fiction to see the ways disenchanted Thailand appears. As the child of a mother who has struggled to raise him alone, the writer takes the Thai side, with no illusions about the promise of foreign lands. Yet his tone is light as he notices his mother's disapproval of his latest find on the beach:

> Ma doesn't want me bonking a farang because once, long ago, she had bonked a farang herself, against the wishes of her own parents, and all she got for her trouble was a broken heart and me in return. (5)

The current American girl's name turns out to be Elizabeth, and she is on the beach alone because she quarreled with her American boyfriend the night before when she discovered him sleeping with a Thai bargirl. The appearance of this boyfriend at the restaurant where the protagonist and Elizabeth agreed to meet that night constitutes part of Lapcharoensap's objective vision. The boyfriend, Hunter, denigrates the protagonist with his actions and his language:

American masculinity on a Thai beach

"'Who's the joker?' he asks Lizzie, gnawing on my squid. 'Friend of yours?'" Lizzie tries to get rid of him, but he persists, turning to the protagonist with "Hey you . . . I'm talking to you. Speak English? Talk American?" When the protagonist says nothing in reply, the American boy talks to Lizzie again: "You've really outdone yourself this time, baby . . . But that's what I love above you. Your unpredictability. Your wicked sense of humor. Didn't know you went for mute tards with pet pigs" (17).

Hunter's offensiveness is massive, thinking that the protagonist is a Thai boy with no English, he shows his disdain for the natives by eating food off the protagonist's plate and referring to him as a "mute tard" (tard="retard"). And when he tries to make up with Lizzie for his unfaithfulness the night before, he defends his behavior by saying something he probably believes: "You know how Thai girls get when we're around" (17).

American masculinity in *Sightseeing*

The protagonist has a long history of exposure to American-style masculinity. The father who insisted that he call him Sergeant Henderson got his son to play war games with him, so confusing the boy that he used the army lingo for Asians; in response to the Sergeant's warning "It could be an ambush" the boy responds "Let 'em come, Sergeant! We can take 'em . . . Those gooks'll be sorry they ever showed their ugly faces" (6).

What the boy faces now, half-"gook" as he is, is not an enemy militia but still a kind of enemy: Hunter and his group of friends, grossly insensitive males used to having their own way. They start to chase Clint Eastwood and are enraged as he evades them; the hunt turns deadly serious and the protagonist, watching from a branch of a mango tree with a childhood friend, starts to worry about the pig.

But his friend has the answer; he starts to throw mangos at the gang of boys. The protagonist joins in and mangoes rain down on the confused boys.

The "Monkey Boys'" revenge

The protagonist and his friend, Surachai, used to advertise themselves as "the Island's Miraculous Monkey Boys" (19):

> For a small fee, we'd climb up trees and fetch coconuts for farangs, who would ooh and aah at how nimble we were. A product of our Island environment, they'd say, as if it was due to something in the water and not the fact that we'd spent hours practicing in Surachai's backyard. For added effect, we'd make monkey noises when

we climbed, which always made them laugh. (19)

Success of "the idiot stunt"

The protagonist and Surachai revert to this old technique, a practice his mother always called "that idiot stunt" (19) to confuse the American boys who have almost cornered Clint Eastwood. The boys cannot see them in the dark; they can only feel the mangoes hit their bodies and hear something like the whooping of monkeys. In the confusion Clint Eastwood gets away.

The protagonist has emerged from a childhood "fighting gooks" to a young manhood in which he can control his farang-populated environment and use the fake to his own advantage. In his objective vision Thailand emerges from the haze of exoticism as a real place quite separate from farang desires.

"At the Café Lovely"

The second story in Lapcharoensap's collection, "At the Café Lovely," is a more somber piece, a coming of age story told in retrospect about the year when the protagonist-narrator was eleven. He was close to his older brother and the two of them lived with their mother on the outskirts of Bangkok, next to the garbage dump which was burned every weekday, producing a noxious smoke and stench they had to live with. It is a Thai setting without the forest sanctuary of *Child of the Northeast* and without the upper middle class setting portrayed as traditionally Thai in *The Happiness of Kati*.

Weeping mothers

In the opening scene the boys' father has been dead for four months. He died on the job when a crate the size of a small house filled with toys for export fell from a malfunctioning crane onto him. The family has been living on the insurance money from the accident, but it is running out. The sadness that fills the story centers around the mother, who never really recovers emotionally from the father's death. In that sense it has a common point

with *Star Spangled Banner*, as Ben's last memories of his mother—before she was put away in a psychiatric hospital—consisted of the sounds of her weeping in her bedroom in the Arlington, Virginia house.

The story focuses on the narrator's attachment to his brother, Anek, who is in his high teens and who takes some responsibility for raising his brother. On his younger brother's birthday Anek takes him out to a MacDonald's-like hamburger restaurant, a luxury that he can hardly afford. Unused to the smell and taste of cheese, the younger brother throws up the costly meal on the floor of the restaurant.

Another memory recounted by the currently adult narrator tells of a night Anek was going out and agreed to let his little brother come because he didn't want to leave him alone with the mother who was absorbing her grief in increasingly disturbing ways:

> One night I caught Ma staring at the bedroom mirror with an astonished look on her face, as if she no longer recognized her own sallow reflection. It seems Pa's death had made our mother a curious spectator of her own life, though when I think of her now I wonder if she was simply waiting for us to notice her grief. But we were just children, Anek and I, and when children learn to acknowledge the gravity of their loved ones' sorrows they're no longer children. (31)

Flashpoints from the boy's memories

Anek agrees to let his younger brother come to the "Café Lovely" where he hangs out with his friends, doing minor drugs and having sex with his girlfriend, who is one of the bargirl-prostitutes working there. The younger brother's memory of that night has somehow overlapped with a friend's drug accident in later years: what Anek does is simply to inflate a plastic bag with paint thinner in it and then inhale. The image of Anek's face puffing away to overinflate the bag has merged in the narrator's memory with the face of a friend in later years who, "high off a can of spray paint, would absentmindedly light a cigarette after taking

a hit and his face would burst into a sheet of blue flames" (42). The narrator looks back from his adult stance and sees the flashpoints of their unsupervised youth.

Another flashpoint from that same night involved the younger brother's curiosity about what Anek was doing upstairs with his girlfriend. Anek, drunk with the thinner and whiskey, told his brother to wait while he and the girl went upstairs.

The boy's curiosity overcomes him and he goes to a brightly lit upstairs with many doors to the small rooms where customers can have sex. The boy is listening to the strange noises coming from these rooms when the bartender from downstairs catches him: "You're in the wrong place . . . I should kill you for being here . . . I should snap your head off your fucking neck" (48).

On the way home, Anek, too high to drive his motorcycle, lets his younger brother drive. For the first time he lets him shift into third and fourth gear as they head home on the speedway. The story ends here except for the plaintiff note the narrator strikes near that ending:

> Years later, I would ask Anek if he remembered this night. He would say that I made it up. He never would've taken me to the Café Lovely at such a young age, he'd say, never would've let me drive that bike home. He denies it now because he doesn't want to feel responsible for the way things turned out, for the way we abandoned our mother to that hot and empty house, for the thoughtless, desperate things I would learn to do. (51)

Lapcharoensap on image of Thailand

In a 2013 interview in Granta, the writer was asked about the way he wanted to represent Thailand in his fiction, considering the popular exoticism of images of Thailand, Lapcharoensap replied that he was "driven to anger and distraction by neo-Orientalist works about Asia or the so-called 'Third World' in which entire countries, populations, and even

continents are merely lifeless devices through which a writer seeks to resolve his or her own privileged problems" (n. pag.).

Social duty of the writer

Lapcharoensap says that he is allergic to any kind of didacticism in literature, but he claims he has another allergy, too—to "writing that doesn't have a sense of the world's inequalities, injuries, and injustices, and the way that people are necessarily shaped by those things" (Granta interview, n. pag.). In this he is similar to Le Clezio, who, as we have seen above, is drawn to those very inequalities: "immigrants, collateral victims of the colonial wars, or simply young people who are broke and disenchanted" (130).

The new Asian YA literature: back to pre-modernity

Both Levy and Lapcharoensap start in the fragmented world of modernity. Unlike the vast majority of Asian writers of YA fiction they place their characters in a disenchanted landscape and let them struggle towards a pre-modern re-enchantment that is personal. For Ben in *Star Spangled Banner* that pre-modern world blossoms from his relationship with Ando and the streets of Shinjuku. For the nameless protagonists of *Sightseeing* that world is captured in memory, at the edge of an enormous field of burning garbage where a woman cannot make peace with her loss.

Chapter Five

Conclusion

This dissertation was a long time in the making, and a long time in the writing. It was born of my curiosity about the differences in Western children's literature and Japanese children's literature. My MA thesis was on irony in American children's literature and it valorized Richard Rorty's belief that irony is a positive force, an invitation to a higher stage of consciousness. But the many works of Japanese children's literature I examined hardly contained any irony at all.

I was particularly interested in the figure of the mother in Japanese CL, because I felt intuitively that her place in Japanese society and the literature that reflected it was a sacred one; the "*ryosai kenbo* (良妻賢母)" (good wife and clever mother) stands as an ideal for every Japanese woman to strive for. I wanted to find mothers in Japanese CL who displayed some degree of autonomy; if I could find such a mother, I felt that the possibility of irony would be close by. But search as I might, I did not find such an autonomous mother.

Madonna Kolbenschlag categorizes the stages of growth in a woman's development in her (1979) *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Goodbye*. According to her analysis, based on a scheme suggested by Paul Tillich, the stages are those of heteronomy, in which one is controlled by an outside agent, autonomy, in which control is with the self, and theonomy, in which the self looks beyond itself to larger social concerns. Most of the mothers I found in Japanese CL were in the first stage of heteronomy, controlled not only by their husbands and children, but also by a strong social ideal for how they should act.

I was very stimulated in my research when I found the volumes of the journal *Nihon Jidou Bungaku* dealing with how to overcome the taboos that existed for CL writers: divorce, sex, runaway kids and parents, etc. It was evident in the very title of these special issue

journals that Japanese CL was held back by social concerns over what children should be exposed to.

I was beginning to understand that I would not find the kind of CL I was looking for. This was not only because of the taboos involved, but also because of an ethnocentrism in which common values were very strong. One set of values centered around the safety and well-being of the child, who was always provided with a safety net, usually in the form of an ever-vigilant mother, but sometimes in the form of another adult.

Akagi's attempts to define YA literature only reinforced the reality that there is no Japanese YA literature. Her lists of YA literature are made up mostly of foreign books, and her criteria for inclusion in the category include reasons such as "hard for children to understand" or the presence of irony in a foreign work.

The idea which began to take root in my mind was a new type of YA literature which featured the very exteriority which those incubator safety-net novels never attempted. And to find that exteriority I turned to one of the first novels written in Japanese by a non-native, Hideo Levy's *A Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Cannot Be Heard*. In my research of previous criticism related to that novel I was fortunate enough to find Norma Field's article "Texts of Childhood in Internationalizing Japan," an article which deepened my understanding and led me to read Franco Moretti's *The Way of the World: the Bildungsroman in European Culture*.

Moretti's distinction between the classic European *Bildungsroman*, forged in a society of "stable" values and structured by a repetition of the life pattern from generation to generation and the fiction which followed that classical form, in which no closure was possible, helped me to rethink Asian CL and YA literature. It was the experience of modernity, Moretti claimed, that tipped European literature into the latter form, in which youth was all-important and an ending was impossible.

Modernity as it arrived in Europe involved a disenchantment of the medieval world. Realism became the lingua franca as the novel was born and its protagonists suffered at the hands of an unequal society. But while Asia had experienced various kinds of modernization, it lacked the philosophical and theological structures whose fall, at the hands of science, delivered modernity.

Richard Rodriguez's essay on "tragic and comic cultures" helped me to see the differences between the Protestant-based culture of California, where every kind of change is possible, and the tradition-bound culture of Mexico, where change is much harder to effect. Japan and Thailand, the two Asian countries whose CL and YA literatures I was exploring, seemed much closer to a "tragic culture" such as Mexico's than to the endless optimism of California.

Richard Rodriguez himself was a "person in the middle," caught between the California he grew up in and the Mexico of his immigrant father. Norma Field, whose brilliant essay on Levy had inspired me, was herself a so-called "half," the child of an American serviceman and a Japanese mother. Hideo Levy was also a "person in the middle," not because of mixed blood but because of determined self-propulsion into Japanese language and culture. And Rattawut Lapcharoensap, a Thai American author, stood in the middle of those very different cultures, able to see the abuse of Thailand by foreigners very clearly.

Those writers helped me to set this theme of People in the Middle: An Emerging Asian YA Literature. I expect that more literature of this type will appear and satisfy readers' desire for an authentic voice and objective viewpoint, features of the exteriority which people in the middle afford us.

Works Cited

Akagi, Kanko. *Kanko no Minimini Yangu Adaruto Nyumon Pato 1 —Toshokanin no Kaki no Tane—*. Tokyo: Riburio shuppann, 1997.

---. "2001nenn Y・A Jijou." *Nihonjidoubungaku*. Tokyo: Nihonjidoubungakushakyokai, 47.3 (2002), 18-21.

Akagi, Yuko. and *el*. "Kodomo no Genjitsu to Jidobungaku." *Nihon Jidou Bungaku*. Tokyo: Nihonjidoubungakushakyokai, 24.5 (1978), 22-44.

Ball, Brian. *Jackson's House* (*Jakuson Neko no Hontou no Ie*). Translated by Masako Shimizu, Nagasaki: Douwakan Shuppan, 2006. Print.

Boocock, Sarane Spence. "The Social Construction of Childhood in Contemporary Japan." *Constructions of the Self*. Rutgers University Press, 1992, 165-188.

Cadden, Mike. "The Irony of Narration in the Young Adult Novel." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000, 146-154.

Donelson, Kenneth L., and Alleen Pace Nilson. *Literature for Today's Young Adults*. 9th ed., Pearson, 2012.

Ferguson, Harvie. *Melancholy and the Critique of Modernity: Søren Kierkegaard's Religious Philosophy*. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Field, Norma. "Texts of Childhood in Inter-Nationalizing Japan." *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essay on Cultural and National Identities*. edited by Laura Garcia-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer, Columbia: Camden House, 1996, 143-172.

Harootunian, Harry. *Overcome by Modernity: History, Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Hill, Crag. “Introduction: Young Adult Literature and Scholarship Coming of Age.” *The Critical Merits of Young Adult Literature: Coming of Age*. edited by Crag Hill, New York: Routledge, 2014.

Hutcheon, Linda. “Harry Potter and the Novice’s Confession.” *The Lion and Unicorn* 32.2 (2008): 169-179.

Inoue, Naoko. “2008nenn no Yangu Adaruto.” *Kodomo no Hon -Kono Ichinen wo Furikaette- 2008nenn*. Tokyo: Riburio Shuppan, 2009, 66-87.

Kolbenschlag, Mdonna. *Kiss Sleeping Beauty Good-by*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988.

Kusano, Taki. *Ririsu*. 3rd ed., Tokyo: POPLAR PUBLISHING, 2010.

Lapcharoensap, Rattawut. *Sightseeing*.2004. New York: Grove Press, 2006.

---. Interviewed by Yuka Ishiguro. “Rattawut Lapcharoensap | Interview Rattawut Lapcharoensap & Yuka Ishiguro.” *Granta 124: Travel | The Online Edition*, 5 October 2013, https://granta.com/interview-rattawut-lapcharoensap/. Accessed 1 November 2017.

Le Clézio, Jean-Marie Guestave. “‘Why Interculuality?’—Interview with Jean-Marie Guestave Le Clézio.” Interviewed by Martha van der Drift, *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies*, 19.2 (2015), 128-139.

Lerer, Seth. *Children’s Literature: A Reader’s History, from Aesop to Harry Potter*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Levy, Hideo. *Seijōki no Kikoenai Heya*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 1992.

---. *The Room Where the Star-Spangled Banner Can’t be Heard*. Translated by Christopher D. Scott, Columbia University Press, 2011.

McGrath, Paul. “Myth and Irony in Children’s Literature : from Harry Potter to The Happiness of Kati.” *Journal of Nagoya Gakuin University; LANGUAGE and CULTURE*. 19.1 (2007), 31-39.

---. “Representing Islam in Thai Young Adult Literature: Makut Onrudee and the Case of Rohim’s Poem.” *TEKNOSASTIK*. 8.1, 2010, http://ejurnal.teknokrat.ac.id/index.php/teknosastik. Accessed 1 November 2017.

Minsters, Frances. *Cinder-Elly* (*Sinda Eri*). Translated by Mayuri Hasegawa, Tokyo: HOLP SHUPPAN, 1996.

Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London: Verso, 1987.

Nakamura, Rumiko. *Kattena Kei*. Tokyo: Iwasaki Publishing, 1992.

O’Dell, Scott. *Sing Down The Moon* (*Nabaho no Uta*). Translated by Kazuo Inui, Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2000. Print.

Oe, Kenzaburo. *Shosetsu no Keiken*. Tokyo: Asahi Shinbunsha, 1994.

Rodriguez, Richard. *Days of Obligation: An Argument with My Mexican Father*. New York: Viking Adult, 1992.

Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974.

Seo, Maiko. *Kofukuna Shokutaku*. Tokyo: Kodansha, 2007. Print.

---. *Tamago no O*. Tokyo: Shinchosha, 2009. Print.

Sriwarakan, Siriporn. “Can Children Emancipate Themselves from Adult?: Children’s Worlds in Contemporary German and Thai Children’s Literature.” http://www.phd-lit.arts.chula.ac.th/proceedings_2nd/07.pdf. Accessed 11 November 2012.

Stockton, Frank R.. *The Bee-Man Orn* (*Mitsubachi Jisan no Tabi*). Translated by Natsuya Mitsuyoshi, Nagasaki: Dowakan Shuppan, 1998.

Tanaka, Hiko. *Calendar* (*Karenda*). Tokyo: Kodanhsa, 1997.

Yamahana, Ikuko. “Rikon wo Egaita Sakuhin wo Megutte.” *Nihon Jidou Bungaku*. Tokyo: Nihonjidoubungkushakyokai, 24.5 (1978), 61-66.

Yoshida, Rinko. "2007nenn no Yangu Adaruto." *Kodomo no Hon -Kono Ichine wo Furikaette- 2007nenn*. Tokyo: Riburio Shuppan, 2008, 59-75.

VanderStaay, Steven. "Young-Adult Literature: A Writer Strikes the Genre." *The English Journal*. 81.4 (1992), 48-52. http://www.jstor.org/stable/819930.

Vejjajiva, Jane. *The Happiness of Kati*. Translated by Preaw Juvenile, Australia: Allen & Unwin, 2006.