

**HEALING LITERATURES BY CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE FEMALE
AUTHORS: YOSHIMOTO BANANA, OGAWA YOKO, AND KAWAKAMI**

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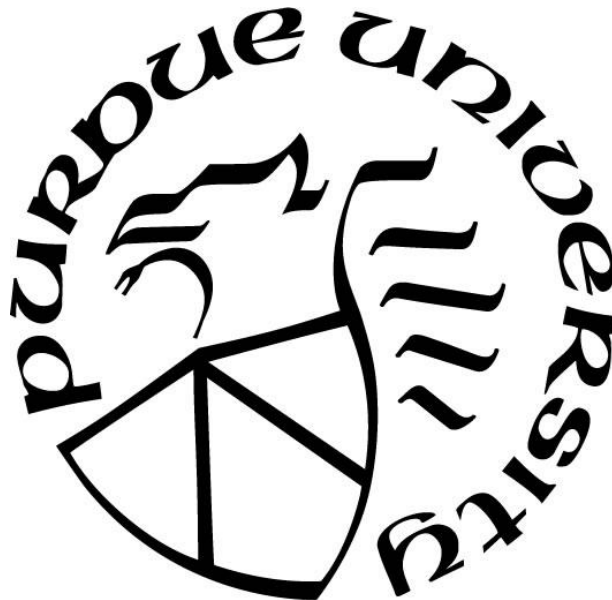
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ABSTRACT

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Title: Healing Literatures by Contemporary Japanese Female Authors: Yoshimoto Banana, Ogawa Yoko, and Kawakami Hiromi

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In this dissertation, I examine three popular contemporary Japanese female writers—Yoshimoto Banana (b.1964), Ogawa Yoko (b.1962), and Kawakami Hiromi (b.1958), who all debuted after the peak of Japan's bubble economy in the late 1980s. Focusing on the works of these three living authors, I investigate the ways in which they deal with the theme of spiritual and emotional healing, and how they are original in the world of Japanese literature. Since they are all women, in terms of feminist context, I also look into how differently they respond to the gender issues from the prior generation of female authors.

In Introduction, I begin with the examination of how prewar authors dealt with the theme of spiritual healing. Using *Snow Country* (1937) by the male writer Kawabata Yasunari and “A Floral Pageant” (1937) by the female author Okamoto Kanoko (1899-1939), I discuss the commonality of these two authors, apart from the evident disparities related to their difference in gender. Their stories both end with the description of their protagonist's spiritual climax, associated with their transcendental leap from their everyday reality. Comparing those prewar authors, I discuss how differently the three contemporary authors approach the same topic. In terms of their common gender, I also address outstanding characteristics of feminist messages delivered by their previous generation of female authors from the postwar to the 1970s, and how our authors are different from the previous ones in terms of their interest in feminism and women's issues.

Chapter 1 examines the novels of Yoshimoto Banana, the author who debuted before the other two. I begin with an analysis on how her interest in spirituality is related to the social background of the bubble-collapse period between the late 1980s and the early 1990s—in relation, in particular, to the healing boom and the impact of Aum Shinrikyō’s sarin gas attack on Tokyo Subways in 1995. With her critiques on the so-called *shin shin shūkyō*, newly established religious groups, she claims that spiritual healing should be based on one’s awakening of his or her connection with nature to be blessed. And she stresses and encourages with that awareness to live through everyday reality with hope.

Chapter 2 explores works of Ogawa Yoko. I analyze how she develops her theme of girlhood by examining her earlier works, which recurrently focus on her adolescent protagonists’ anxieties—their fear of separation from their girlhood and their frustration about moving into a sexualized female adulthood. At the end of this chapter, I examine *Mīna’s March*, a work, which extensively features a young protagonist’s girlhood and her days growing up. Ogawa implies that richness of girlhood—free from sexuality and gender tensions—is the key source for female mental growth.

Chapter 3 investigates stories of Kawakami Hiromi. I begin with an introduction of her essays, which show her core theme of “sakaime” (borderline realm). I examine her earlier stories about relationships between human and nonhuman characters, and as well as her later stories about relationships between two human characters. I consistently find that the “sakaime” opens her protagonists to an animistic vision of a human relationship with nature—a vision which human lives are part of nature’s vast, unsteady, and ever-changing life flows. Ultimately, the animistic sensitivity works for her protagonists’ inner growth.

In conclusion, I summarize the three authors' differences and commonalities in spiritual and emotional healing and related topic such as female independence, individualities, and the human relationship with nature. I conclude that the three authors responded in a timely and effective manner to the needs of the readers in the contemporary society of Japan.

INTRODUCTION

People in Japan have had anxieties for changes in society ever since its westernization and modernization started in 1868. Threatened by the western colonialism reaching Asia, Japan reopened its borders for international trade. To avoid being colonized, Japan westernized itself in an abrupt and radical manner. This westernization of Japanese society caused a great deal of stress and frustration for people who went through those times. By the 1930s, Japan was modernized to the point of becoming a colonial power in Asia, occupying Taiwan and Korea. The 1930s, the time between the two world wars, was a troubling period for the whole world, including Japan.

Critical of the happenings in Japanese society, Japan's modern literature also modernized itself by playing a significant role in the spiritual and emotional healing of people living in the ever-changing society. A number of literary works in the 1930s exhibited stories in which the protagonist is rejuvenated by rediscovering their connection to nature and traditions.

In terms of balancing Japanese traditions and nature with modern western influences, the approach to this topic seems to differ often between male and female writers. As a means of the protagonist's spiritual recovery, male writers tend to distinguish Japanese traditions from modern western cultures. I will use *Snow Country* (1937) by Kawabata Yasunari (1899-1972), a winner of the Nobel Literary Prize in 1968, as an example of male stories. In this story, a Tokyo-dwelling protagonist frequently travels to the "snow country," a rural province in northeastern Japan. Kawabata depicts the snow country to be a place that is full of Japanese traditions that are still intact: a place without western influence. In the snow country, the protagonist meets a geisha, and she heals his fatigued soul. Her old-fashioned warmth towards him, her *shamisen* music skills, the nature that surrounds them like snow, tree, and the Milky Way, all fully consoles him. In short, the

protagonist finds himself reconnected with Japanese traditions and nature, which brings him spiritual recovery. Whenever he feels distressed, he goes on a trip to the snow country.

In the case of modern female authors, on the other hand, for the protagonists' spiritual recovery, protagonists would rather accept and adopt modernization, or western influences, in order to revive Japanese traditions. A typical example can be found in "A Floral Pageant" (1937) by the prewar female author Okamoto Kanoko (1899-1939). The protagonist is a female flower arrangement artist who is in love with a painter diagnosed with tuberculosis. She has experienced learning art in France and teaching flower arrangement in the United Kingdom. After coming back to Japan, her experiences overseas bear fruit: she owns and runs a successful school. However, her niece, who is a reliable student of hers, becomes pregnant with the painter. At the end of the story, the protagonist has a successful large exhibit, whose flowers, containers, titles of different works are full mixture of the West, Asian, and Japan, as well as the traditional and modern. After the show, she stands at the rooftop of the exhibition hall. She cries over her ruined relationship with her deceased lover. Then, all of a sudden, she imagines herself as a giant flower embodying the power of all the flowers inside the building and feels rejuvenated.

Contrary to Okamoto, for Kawabata, Japanese traditions are valued for their pure Japanese characteristics without western influence: this is represented by the protagonist escaping from western-civilized Tokyo to regain energy by reconnecting with Japanese traditions and nature in the snow country. However, to Okamoto, both Japanese traditions and western influences work together in order for the protagonist to enhance her traditional arts.

A common characteristic that the modern authors share is a dramatically spirited climax in which their protagonist is united with Japanese nature and tradition at the end of the story. At the end of *Snow Country* (1937), the protagonist is exposed to the Milky Way, which is presented as

the Heavenly Woman. Subsequently, the Milky Way drifts into him, causing the protagonist and the Heavenly Woman to be unified. In this ending, the beauty of the geisha from the snow country is translated into the cosmic beauty of the Milky Way. Thus, symbolically, the protagonist is united with the nature and tradition of the snow country. As a result, he is revived. As for the ending of “A Floral Pageant” (1938), the protagonist incarnates herself into the ultimate flower, and the flower’s life force spiritually reinvigorates her. Thus, the endings described above demonstrate that these modern authors value nature’s transcendental, mystical powers that go beyond physical and tangible reality.

The number of female writers in Japan increased since the postwar years, and it reached its peak in the 1970s. Influenced by the women’s liberation movement around the 70s, female authors of the 1970s are critical of male-centric society. As a result, the topic of spiritual healing is regressed. The outstanding characteristic for the female authors in the 1970s is that their protagonists are angry and fierce. Some are daughters who are enraged at the tyrannical patriarch, and others are office ladies who are nervous and lonely being at the bottom of the patriarchal society. The female protagonists of those authors are often city-dwellers, who contend with the issues of relationships between men and women, father and daughter, and mother and daughter.

In the context of the topic of spiritual and emotional healing in modern literature, mixed with the particular antithesis found in female writings of the 70s, I have become interested in female authors from the late 1980s and focused on the three authors, who are the most popular and representative of the times: Yoshimoto Banana (b.1964), Ogawa Yoko (b.1962), and Kawakami Hiromi (b.1958). Following the feminist messages by the female authors of their previous generation, they stress the topic of women’s independence and individuality, but their anti-male-centric messages are significantly subdued and less focused. Rather, they revitalize the topic of

healing by stressing the topic of reconnecting with nature. However, differently from their older counterparts, their searches seem to more or less consciously resist the transcendently spiritual approach to healing, an approach often commonly shared by prewar and postwar writers.

The three contemporary female authors made their debuts between the late 1980s and early 1990s, a short period of time when Japan experienced a number of ups-and-downs. Between the 1980s and 1990s, Japan was economically successful and away from the postwar recovery days. Additionally, from the late 1980s through the early 1990s, people in Japan enjoyed its bubble economy and often aggressively pursued their materialistic gains. However, from the early 1990s, the bubble collapsed and paved the way to a long recession that is still present to this day. In addition to its economic downfall, in 1995, Japan experienced two major catastrophes: the Great Hanshin earthquake and Aum Shinrikyō's Tokyo subway sarin gas attack. This series of tragedies gave rise to the feeling of anxiety, particularly among the younger generation. Consequently, these events sparked people's interest in things spiritual, which may respond to their anxious minds. The so-called *iyashi būmu* or the healing boom extensively dominated entertainment and artistic fields such as music, movies, as well as literature. A new religion, such as the New Age, also became a means of healing for the younger generation. Such new religions inspired them to reach spiritual salvation by transcending from reality. Aum Shinrikyō was one of those popular new religions that appeared between the 1980s and 1990s.

The three authors I will examine are representative ones, who respond to the above demand of the time for healing. Like Okamoto, they present female figures that empower readers who are mainly female. Similar to both male and female modern authors, their protagonists are spiritually renewed through rediscovering their connection with Japanese traditions and nature. Also, like Okamoto, Japanese traditions do not have to be distinguished from western influences. Instead,

they work together in order for the protagonists to be healed. As I have mentioned, these authors resist any transcendental solution for spirituality, which the pursuit extended beyond and away from everyday reality. Rather than searching for transcendental truths, their protagonists in the end come back to their reality, pursuing a more primal and pragmatic way of living everyday life: their healing is more psychologically spirited rather than spiritual (in the sense of religious implications).

In the following chapters, I will examine the three authors separately: Chapter One on Yoshimoto, Chapter Two on Ogawa, and Chapter Three on Kawakami. I will discuss how each author develops the topics of spiritual and emotional healing and nature, along with the issues of womanhood and girlhood, individuality, independence and the self, as well as communication and relationship with others.

CHAPTER 1. YOSHITOMO BANANA

1.1 The Author, Yoshimoto Banana

Yoshimoto Banana was born in 1964 in Tokyo.¹ “Banana” is her pen name: she came to think of naming herself *banana* when she was a part-time waitress after graduating from college. She was attracted by the flowers of bananas at the restaurant where she was working (*Painatsupurin*, 1995). Her actual name is Yoshimoto Mahoko. Her father, Yoshimoto Takaaki (1924-2012), was a poet and critic. Her sister is a cartoonist under the pen name of Haruno Yoiko (b.1957). Influenced by her sister, Mahoko also became a manga lover.²

Mahoko went to public schools from elementary to high school. In 1983, Mahoko entered Nihon University and majored in literature. In 1987, she wrote “Moonlight Shadow” for her graduation project and won the departmental award, which motivated her to become a full-time writer after graduation.

In 1987, Banana made her official debut in the world of Japanese literary journalism with her publication of *Kitchen*. Banana received the Kaien New Writers Award for *Kitchen*. A hardcover version of this work was published in 1988 and immediately became a bestseller. Banana continued to win more awards and established herself as a popular writer: in the following year of 1989, for “Moonlight Shadow” Banana was awarded the Izumi Kyōka Literary Prize; in 1990, she received the Minister of Education New Writer Prize for *Kitchen* and *Utakata/Sankuchuari* (Transient/Sanctuary); in the same year, the Yamamoto Shūgorō Literary

¹ Regarding Yoshimoto’s earlier life before her debut, I refer to Gendai Josei Sakka Dokuhon Kankō Kai. *Gendai sakka dokuhon 13 Yoshimoto Banana*. Tokyo: Kanae Shobō, 2011.

² As for how *shōjo* manga influenced Banana’s writing style, see Saitō Minako. *Bundan aidoru ron*. Tokyo: Bunshun Bunko, 2006.

Prize for *TUGUMI*; in 1995, the Murasaki Shikibu Literary Award for *Amurita*; and in 2000 the Bunkamura Deux Magot Literary Prize for *Furin to nanbei* (Adultery and South America).

Banana became well-known overseas as well. *Kitchen* was published in a total of twenty-five different countries: the United States, Brazil, Russia, Lithuania, Germany, Spain, Britain, France, Netherlands, Greece, Switzerland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, Portugal, Czech, Croatia, Italy, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Indonesia, South Korea, and China. Particularly, her recognition in Italy grew to the point where she received a total of four prestigious literary awards: the Scanno Literary Prize in 1993, the Fendissime Literary Prize in 1996, the Literary Prize Maschera d'argento in 1999, and the Capri Award in 2011.

As for her private life, in 2000, at the age of thirty-six, Banana married a rolfar (Gendai josei sakka dokuhon kankō kai). After three years, she gave birth to her son (Yoshimoto 2004). Since her debut, Banana has continued to produce popular works and is a successful female writer well known in and out of Japan. By 2017, Banana published a total of fifty-four novels and thirty-eight books of essays.

1.2 Yoshimoto Banana, the Alien from “Unknown Country”

Yoshimoto Banana made her debut in 1987 when Japan’s bubble economy reached its peak. Her debut work *Kitchen* immediately became a hit, and the author received multiple awards for this publication. Throughout the 1990s, by constantly producing popular works, Banana established herself as a popular female author. In order to explore Banana’s popularity, let me first examine reviews by two Japanese literary critics, Saitō Minako and Ōtsuka Eiji.

Throughout the 1990s, Banana’s popularity grew to the point where it was called ‘Banana boom (*Banana genshō*).’ According to Saitō, Banana became the ‘phenomenon’ in two years since her debut, selling a total of 5.7 million copies:

The writer had published five novels and one book of essays (1.3 million copies of *Kitchen*; 0.9 million copies of *Utakata/Sanctuary* [*Utakata/Sankuchuari*, published in August 1988]; 0.8 million copies of *A Presentiment* [*Kanashii yokan*, December 1988]; 1.4 million copies of *Goodbye Tsugumi* [*Tsugumi*, March 1989]; 0.7 million copies of *Asleep* [*Shirakawa yofune*, July 1989]; and 0.5 million copies of *Painappurin* [September 1989]. (“Yoshimoto” 167)

Since 1993, Banana became a well-known writer overseas as well: translations of *Kitchen* were sold in Italy, the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, France, the Netherlands, and Korea (“Yoshimoto” 179). Although a number of scholars investigated the reason for Banana’s global acceptance, Saitō argues literary critics failed to reach a valid conclusion (167-68). Saitō insists, “I believe that for conventional literary critics, Banana was an alien from an ‘unknown country’” (168). By “unknown country” Saitō means “the country of women and children” (182). Saitō criticizes Japanese male literary critics for dismissing girls’ culture in their analysis. Saitō cites reviews of two of the famous Japanese male critics, Ōtsuka Eiji (b.1958) and Karatani Kōjin (b.1941), and compares them with two different writers from overseas, Ian Buruma (b.1951) and Renata Pisu (b.1935). According to Saitō, the two Japanese critics both argue that the worldwide popularity of Banana is attributed to her globally shared subcultural style, just like Japanese computer games and comics which contain little Japanese-ness (179). On the other hand, the foreign reviewers characterize Banana with Japanese-ness, particularly *mono no aware*, the pathos of things, the aesthetic of the Japanese classics.

Saitō points out that reviews of the Japanese male critics are contradicting and they are missing out on the significance of Banana’s girls’ novel-like literary style: “Banana stories (...) are equipped with elements that are popular among women readers throughout the world: ‘girls’

coming-of-age stories' are borderless" ("Yoshimoto" 181). Saitō asserts that Banana's works are stylistically similar to Western girls' literature, such as Burnett's *Little Lord Fauntleroy* and *The Secret Garden*, Spyri's *Heidi*, and Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables*, in that "the authors and protagonists are women, and the protagonists are orphans" (181). Saitō concludes that Banana's global popularity is derived from the sense of nostalgia that female readers would feel while reading her novels: "That she (Yoshimoto Banana) is now accepted by girl readers of different countries seems to indicate that she has been read as a contemporarily revised version of Anne, with an attractively nostalgic flavor. Readers are probably filled with a sense of "yes-I-know-this-world" (182).

1.3 Banana's Stories as "Girls' Folktale"

Ōtsuka Eiji, in his book of *Monogatari chiyu ron—shōjo wa naze 'katsu-don' o daite hashiru no ka* (*A Theory of Healing Tales—why shōjo runs with a bowl of fried cutlet*), also examines the early Banana works in terms of her writing style. Ōtsuka labels Banana's novels as "shōjo minwa (girl folklore)," a folk tale in which a girl overcomes obstacles, and in the end she accomplishes her coming-of-age. According to Ōtsuka, Banana's stories take a form of *mukashi-banashi* (Japanese folk tales) in that there are repeated trips of a young female protagonist between home and a destination far from home. Taking *Kitchen* (1987), *Kanashii yokan* (*A Presentiment*, 1988), "Sankuchuari (*Sanctuary*, 1988)," and "Mūnraito shadō (*Moonlight Shadow*, 1987)" for example, Ōtsuka proves how his theory applies to Banana's early works. Let me look at *Kitchen* in order to show the points of his theory.

Kitchen is a story about the female college dropout Mikage, who eventually recovers from the loss of her grandmother, her last blood relative. At the beginning of the story, her grandmother dies. Due to becoming an orphan, the protagonist becomes so depressed that all she can do is sleep

beside the refrigerator in her kitchen. After the funeral, a college boy, Yūichi, who works part-time as a florist where her grandmother used to stop by, visits Mikage's apartment and invites her to live at his place with himself and his transgender mother Eriko. First, Ōtsuka states that Mikage's shutting herself in her kitchen after her grandmother's funeral is equivalent to one of the Japanese folk customs: in order to recover from *kegare*, 'uncleanness' that one is spiritually contaminated with from being exposed to an impure situation such as the death of a family member, he or she had to get out of the house and stay somewhere away from home.

In addition, Ōtsuka states that the ending of "Mangetsu (Full Moon)," the preceding story after "Kitchen," ultimately shows Banana's admiration for Japanese folk culture (*Monogatari* 46). At the beginning of "Full Moon," Yūichi's transgender mother dies. Therefore, this time, Yūichi is the one who is in need of spiritual renewal. In order to be purified from his *kegare*, theoretically, Yūichi needs to get out of his home like Mikage has done in "Kitchen." The author let Yūichi leave his house in Tokyo and shut himself in a Japanese inn in Isehara, Kanagawa. Mikage, after moving out of Yūichi's home, is now working as a cooking assistant for a prestigious cooking school. While Yūichi is in Isehara, Mikage stays in Izu, Shizuoka, assisting her instructor. In Izu, Mikage goes to dinner by herself and eats *katsudon*. As soon as she takes a bite of *katsudon*, Mikage intuitively senses the need for Yūichi to have that *katsudon*, which she believes would energize him. Immediately, she catches a taxi, heads for Isehara, and hands it to Yūichi. After eating it, Yūichi is invigorated.

According to Ōtsuka, eating food somewhere away from home with him or her when someone is in *kegare* condition is called *monoimi*, a ceremonial custom Japanese people used to do in order to help remove his or her uncleanness. Ōtsuka states that Mikage and Yūichi's eating

katsudon at the end of “Full Moon” is equivalent to *monoimi*, and this shows Banana’s admiration for Japanese folk culture.

After eating *katsudon*, as the sign of reinvigoration, the author depicts Yūichi going back home to Tokyo. The ending suggests that Mikage and Yūichi start to live together as a new family. Using Max Lüthi’s (1909-1991) theory of folk tales (*The European Folktale*, 1982), in which distance between a young man and a princess indicates the emotional distance between them, Ōtsuka argues that Banana’s *Kitchen* works as a folktale: in *Kitchen*, Mikage’s endeavor of delivering *katsudon* to Yūichi makes the two get closer not only physically but also psychologically as well. Furthermore, referring to Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), Ōtsuka points out that Banana’s stories are folktales—for girls—in which a young female protagonist goes through a severe trial and in the end accomplishes a coming-of-age. Arguing that this ending attracts a number of young female readers, Ōtsuka concludes that Yoshimoto Banana is an author of “shōjo minwa,” or girls’ folktale.

Thus, Saitō points out that Yoshimoto follows the tradition of Western girls’ novels, specifically the genre of girls’ coming-of-age stories. Ōtsuka argues that Yoshimoto takes over from the pattern of Japanese folklore where a girl eventually recovers from *kegare*, which results in her coming-of-age. In reference to Ōtsuka (1991) and Saitō (2002), in terms of the theme of spiritual healing, I will examine Yoshimoto Banana’s seven different works published from 1993 to 2008. Before going into the examination of each work, I will analyze how the popularity of Yoshimoto Banana is related to the social backgrounds of the late 1980s and the 1990s.

1.4 Banana’s Interest in Spiritual Healing

Banana made her debut in 1987, when Japan’s bubble economy reached its peak. However, by the early 1990s, the economic bubble collapsed and opened the door to a long recession that is present

to this day. The economic stagnation has given rise to a feeling of anxiety, especially among young people. Accordingly, these young people have sought means of healing. According to Yumiyama Tatsuya, people's interests in spiritual healing grew after the collapse of the bubble economy, which developed "healing" cultures in a range of magazines, books, music, and workshops (272-74).

In addition to "healing" cultures, one of the means of healing for these young people was to believe in a new religion. A number of so-called *shin shin shūkyō* (lit., new new religion) increased during this time. According to Shimazono Susumu, many established religions, such as Sōka Gakkai, declined due to a rise of *shin shin shūkyō* (232). Shimazono states that one of the major differences between 'new religion' and 'new new religion' is that 'new new religion' is not interested in "this-worldly healing" but that "there is a great concern with the problem of meaninglessness and the loss of fulfillment in life" (232-33). Another distinguishing trait of 'new new religion' is that their salvation is for individuals rather than the group as a whole:

The concern for a happy family and working life has declined, and in its stead, there is an increasing concern with life after death and personal inner fulfillment. Although miracles and mystical techniques and practices are still regarded as important, the emphasis has shifted from their practical application in group life to that of personal experience and individual fulfillment. (233)

Shimazono maintains that although members of the previous religions helped each other with the problems of everyday life, 'new new religions' tend to "separate from the larger society and create a monastic or separate religious community" (233). This tendency was unexceptionally seen in the movement of Aum Shinrikyō. According to John Hall, Matsumoto Chizuo, the founding guru, built a communal village where he gathered his followers by isolating them from society. In 1987,

he gave himself the religious name Asahara Shōkō and named his group Aum Shinrikyō (Hall 86). Asahara spread his doctrine that yoga and other spiritual trainings would bring them to salvation (Hall 86). In 1995, members of Aum Shinrikyō attacked a number of people in the Tokyo subways with sarin gas. This incident symbolically represented the dangers associated with the type of spirituality pursued by the new new religions.

Before Aum exposed the threat of ‘new new religion’ to the public, Banana’s interest in spirituality had already appeared in her works. According to Lisette Gebhardt, Yoshimoto’s choice of interviewees indicates her interest in spirituality. For instance, in the beginning of the 1990s, Banana published a collection of her talks with intellectuals and chose to have a talk with Kiyota Masuaki (b.1962), a psychic artist and singer, for a girls’ magazine *Non-no*, in the May 1990 issue. In their talk entitled “Chōnōryoku tte zettai ni sonzai suru to omou” (“We truly believe in the supernatural power”), Yoshimoto mentions that she has been interested in people with supernatural power since she was a child: she used to read more books on supernatural power than regular novels. Through the media, she knew about Kiyota from childhood, wished to meet him for a long time, and appreciated the opportunity to talk with him (264).³ During the talk, she acknowledges that she possesses supernatural power: “I think I have supernatural power to some extent” (*Frūtsu* 265). In agreement with Banana, Kiyota says she has the ability to receive people’s distress and this talent led her to becoming a writer. For another example for her interest in spirituality, in 2009 and 2011, Banana co-published books with William Rainen, a world widely known psychic channeler living in Hawaii (Yoshimoto and Rainen 2009; 2011). Considering the fact that she chose to talk with these psychic intellectuals, one can undoubtedly recognize that Banana is strongly inclined towards the topic of spirituality.

³ Translation is mine.

Accordingly, her strong inclination towards spirituality-associated topics is clearly shown not only in her interviews but also in her novels. Lisette Gebhardt maintains that, considering her extensive references to spiritual issues in her literary works, Banana's works became products of "popular new age teachings." According to Gebhardt, "Amrita," Banana's first full-length novel focused on the theme of spirituality, is "a concentration of esoteric-occult topics" and "this does not necessarily benefit the text." "In 'Amrita,' the author loses her earlier artistic ease (...) and focuses more strongly, both in terms of content and of the author's intentions, as they can be perceived while reading, on the esoteric and the complex 'need for meaning' and 'healing'" (263). Gebhardt maintains that given her substantial attentiveness to the topic of spirituality, Banana's works could not be taken as artistic fantastical novels, but products of "popular new age teachings":

With an increasing density of the esoteric and the emphasis on the motif of "spiritual healing," it becomes more difficult to regard Yoshimoto's work—for example the works *Karada wa zenbu shitteiru* (2000; *My Body Knows Everything*), *Ōkoku sono I* (2002; *Andromeda Heights*), *Deddo endo no omoide* (2003; *Dead End*), *Kanojo ni tsuite* (2008; *Her Night*) or even *Suīto heaafutā* (2011; *Sweet Hereafter*) as artistic products of a Japanese fantasy (*gensō bungaku*) or of ironic postmodernism. What we see is a turn towards popular new age teachings, particularly in the commentaries or her choice of who she will cooperate with in the framework of her own writing activity. (263)

Granted, Banana's interest in spirituality is substantial, but rather than "products of new age teachings," Banana's works could be considered as "artistic products of a Japanese fantasy or of ironic postmodernism." According to Ann Sherif, Banana's cross-cultural reference keeps her from being an admirer of new religions, though she has a New Age tone:

Yoshimoto Banana makes extensive use of vivid imagery such as light and water. Her texts are accessible to readers of many cultures because the imagery does not have to be read as culture-specific—especially not as evocative of traditional/exotic/non-Western Japan or the Anglo-European world. Instead it is generally suggestive of spiritual, mythical, and psychological categories of transcendence, enlightenment, and the unconscious. While her novels have a vaguely New Age tone, Banana always pulls back from endorsement of, and in fact regards with a critical eye, the syncretism of the New Religions. (298)

In agreement with Sherif, I argue that Banana rather avoids encouraging the New Age movement: her stories emphasize the importance of reevaluation of everyday reality as a channel for her protagonists' spiritual recovery, in place of the search for some transcendental truth, as is often exercised by New Age activists.

Since the 2000s, her attention has been focused on therapeutic practices overseas. In her online diary in 2008, she wrote that she went to spiritual sessions taught by Ihaleakala Hew Len, the advocate of Ho'oponopono, the traditional Hawaiian therapeutic practice. In principle, Ho'oponopono allows one to clean one's negative subconscious memories and connect with one's true inner self ("Unihipili" in its term) by stating "Thank you," "I'm sorry," "Please forgive me," and "I love you" (Ihaleakala, 2010). Natural things like "blue solar water," tap water exposed to the sun for more than an hour, strawberries, and blueberries, help solve one's problem (Ihaleakala, 2012). Ho'oponopono also suggests to say "Ice blue" touching plants and trees when one suffers from pain. In 2012, Banana gave an account of her experience with Ho'oponopono for Ihaleakala's book (Ihaleakala, 2008).

In her works, Banana's belief in Ho'oponopono can be seen. For instance, in *Ōoku sono ichi Andromeda Haitsu* (Kingdom One Andromeda Heights, 2002), the young female protagonist is healed through communication with her cacti she brought from her home in the mountain. Starting from the 2000s, her characters' spiritual recoveries are based on this type of animistic belief—that they come to be healed with the aid of nature. Note that her belief in nature's healing power is not limited to Japanese animism. By associating herself with Hawaiian animism, she intentionally frees herself from the issue that connects Japanese animism with Shintoist nationalism. According to Ann Sherif, one of the reasons for Yoshimoto Banana's popularity is attributed to her apolitical stance:

For many members of Ōe Kenzaburō and Yoshimoto Takaaki's generation, spirituality and religion in postwar Japanese society remain tainted by the ghosts of prewar and wartime uses of state Shinto. Yoshimoto Banana, however, displays a constant and unapologetic interest in spirituality in her works. ("Japanese" 296)

In my M.A. thesis "Spiritual Recovery in Yoshimoto Banana's Works" (2013), I examined how Banana developed her theme of spiritual recovery since her debut in the early 2000s, using *Kitchen* (1987), "Newlywed" (1993), *Amrita* (1995), and *Kingdom One Andromeda Heights* (Ōoku sono ichi andromeda haitsu, 2002). I find that discovering blessing moments in everyday life basically led her characters to spiritual recovery. However, after Aum's sarin gas attack in 1995, she reinforced her critique against New Age spirituality. At the same time, as a means of her characters' spiritual recovery, her emphasis evolved to connection with nature. In this dissertation, first, I will examine her earlier prototypical works, which focus on the topic of spirituality, "Blood and Water" (1993), "A Strange Tale from Down by the River" (1993), and *Amrita* (1995). Then, I will discuss how Yoshimoto deals with the theme of spirituality after the Aum's incident by

examining *Hachikō's Last Lover* (1996), *Honeymoon* (1997), *The Lake* (2005), and *South Point* (2008).

1.5 “Blood and Water” (1993)

“Chi to mizu” (Blood and Water, 1991) is the first work that Yoshimoto Banana used a motif of new religions in. In this section, I will explore how Yoshimoto first dealt with the issue of spirituality in “Blood and Water”—published before the Aum’s sarin gas attack.

The narrator is the young woman Chikako, twenty years old, who feels “comfortable hearing about spirituality” since she lived in a religious sect. Her parents are “involved in a religious sect, one based on Esoteric Buddhism” (“Blood” 93-94).⁴ They began their belief because her father wished to forgive his old best friend, his business partner who betrayed him and stole every cent of his money. One day, on a street, her father met the leader of the sect and was impressed by his compassion and the answers he had to all of his questions. The leader of the sect is supposed to be able to read people’s minds. The leader and his followers built a village and began living together. After her father met him, her parents sold their house and all their properties and moved to the small village founded by the leader.

When she turned eighteen, the narrator finally ran away from the commune and started to live in Tokyo in order to meet “the people of my (her) dreams”:

Somewhere, on the other side of those mountains, the people of my dreams existed, people whom I imagined as uncommonly beautiful, powerful beings of great substance. My imaginary men and women laughed and cried: they weren’t afraid

⁴ I abbreviate “Blood and Water” as “Blood.”

of betrayal or heartbreak. They had a sense of purpose, and wouldn't give in even to abuse. They knew what life was all about. ("Blood" 95-96)

The believers in the village, on the contrary, avoid showing their emotions and would rather use "superficial smiles to escape comfortable situations" (96).

After running away from the commune, the narrator finds a job in a design company and on the side sells *omamori*, lucky charms hand-made by her boyfriend Akira whom she met through a friend of a friend in Tokyo. Akira stays at home and makes metal and wood objects, about the size of one's palm. When making one of these charms, he uses supernatural power like the power used for bending spoons with psychokinesis.

The narrator believes in the healing power of Akira's amulet from her personal experience: when she was in a mentally unstable condition from loneliness, Akira made an amulet for her and healed her. From this experience, the narrator knew the healing power of his amulet. At the same time, she came to understand her father, who was moved by someone else's word to the point of dedicating his life to the faith:

"If you lose this one, I can always make you another. I'd do that for you," he replied.

(...) I realized it was what I'd been seeking all along. (...) I'd left my home and family and identity behind and was all by myself, and—though I didn't realize it—terribly lonely. (...) Nothing seemed stable in my heart.

I wondered if the leader of the village had said something similar to my father. For the first time, I felt as though I had some understanding of what my father had experienced. ("Blood" 106-7)

Although she understands how her father became obsessed with the religion and misses her parents, she does not give in to her own weakness. Towards the end of the story, her father visits her in

Tokyo. Chikako is reluctant to see her father because she knows she might want to return to her parents. However, in the end, even after seeing her father, Chikako dismisses the pursuit of a religion, unlike her father, and is determined to live her life in Tokyo. At the end of the story, her father's faith is stressed in his "pious letter," which contrasts with her vision towards life:

Dear Chikako,

(...) I did not mention this to you during our visit but I had a difficult trip to Tokyo. (...)

Once we were in the air, we ran into what I assumed was turbulence, and the plane suddenly started bouncing roughly. (...) I could smell death in the cabin of that plane. I suppose that was because everyone on the flight at that moment thought that we were going to die.

I started chanting a sutra, and did not fear death. I was very sad to see the people around me, who only moments before had had smiles on their faces, now looked extremely frightened. (...) It hurt me so to think that they were facing death without feeling at peace with themselves. I suddenly felt as close to them as I do to your mother, and our friends, and you, and I pledged that I would remember them smiling, rather than as I saw them then. I was overcome with sorrow. It was also the first time that I felt true affirmation for my faith in my heart and soul.

(...) The universe is the mind of the Buddha.

Your mother and I all continue our life here in the village. (...) No matter where you are, you are loved and forgiven, not only by us. ("Blood" 117-19)

In his letter, her father emphasizes that he had felt afraid of death, but thanks to his god, he could overcome it—by stifling his emotion. In other words, it is shutting himself out of reality. To the

contrary, Chikako has the completely opposite view towards life. Chikako narrates the following passage at the end of the story:

The only thing that scares me is time passing, like when the soft branches of a willow tree are warmed by the sunlight one moment and then ripped by a typhoon the next. As when the cherry blossoms bloom only to fall to the ground. That this moment will end, with the warm orange sunlight streaming in onto Akira, as he lies curled up, watching his video, and night will come. That is the saddest thing to me.
(...)

(...) I would go out with Akira and forget, for a brief while, the sorrow that clings to life. I would pretend for a moment that my sadness might someday disappear.
(120-21)

She also has the same sense of fear towards death but suppresses it and relishes every moment of life. Her perspective on life is associated with *mono no aware*: she celebrates life as it is with resignation, embracing all emotions rather than being obsessed with fear.

Thus, in “Blood and Water,” the narrator and her father’s beliefs are shown contrastively: when in despair, the narrator believes in something tangible that is associated with something from nature, as in Akira’s *omamori* made with tree, while her father sees a religious salvation in something intangible and transcendental. Ultimately, the former’s belief is concrete, practical, and down-to-earth. To the contrary, the latter is metaphysical. According to Ann Sherif, Yoshimoto Banana displays an unconvinced stance towards new religions such as Chikako’s father’s religion:

In contrast to Ōe Kenzaburō’s references to biblical narrative and tradition, Yoshimoto’s stories emphasize no theological or metaphysically philosophical arguments on spirituality. At the same time, she exhibits considerable skepticism

vis-à-vis organized religions and especially the New Religions. (“Japanese” 296-97)

This stance of Yoshimoto continues to appear in her works. Particularly, her criticism of new religions grows even further and is found in works such as *Honeymoon* (1997) and *The Lake* (2005). At the same time, her attention to the healing power of nature is developed further.

“Blood and Water” was published in 1993, when new religions in Japan were not recognized as a danger. Accordingly, compared with the protagonists in *Honeymoon* (1997) and *The Lake* (2005), the narrator of this story holds no strong criticism towards her father’s new religion—she understands her father’s faith and has no conflicts between her pious parents. However, as her final decision to continue life out of the commune implies, the author’s stance to religious life is, to some degree, negative. Thus, this work shows Yoshimoto’s first reaction to the topic of new religions. In the following section, I will examine “A Strange Tale from Down by the River” (1993), which deals with the theme of spiritual recovery with the help of nature.

1.6 “A Strange Tale from Down by the River” (1993)

“Ōkawa-bata kitan” (A Strange Tale from Down by the River, 1993) is a story about the young narrator who revives from despair with the aid of a river. The narrator, Akemi, is an *OL* (Office Lady) and a daughter of a company president. Before becoming an *OL*, the narrator belonged to a sex club. Though she quit going to the sex parties after coming down with a liver infection, this past of hers becomes a major distress when she finds true love in someone.

Akemi meets a man at his father’s funeral, the president of a firm her company had connections with. Akemi immediately senses that she and he share the same loneliness: “I could sense how alone, both spiritually and socially, he was feeling, despite the crowd of friends and relatives right there with him. I also felt that only I could truly understand his emotions that day,

and also, in some sense, that I already knew him and loved him” (“A Strange Tale” 128).⁵ Soon after the funeral, having felt the same, he contacts her. They start going out and get engaged after one year of dating.

Her fiancé lives in the apartment that overlooks the river. Akemi, who is distressed with her own past she keeps secret from him, is inspired by the river: “I always listened to the voice of the river, saying to me, ‘I flow along endlessly. I am constant.’ Those murmurs engulfed me, like a lullaby, which soothed me and my anxiety about our love” (“A Strange Tale” 130). Somehow, she feels at home by the river: “I knew that I was at home there, because the river flowed by outside the windows” (133).

Towards the end of the story, Akemi untangles her past and the reason why she feels “at home” by the river. Her father visits her and tells that her mother threw her into a river when she was a six-month-old baby. When her mother was pregnant, her father’s company failed, and he had a love affair, which made her mother fall into depression. Her mother went back to her parents’ house, which was located by a river. When he came to see her and Akemi for the first time after she was born, her mother was on the bridge. After talking, suddenly becoming hysterical and screaming, her mother threw Akemi into the river. Luckily, Akemi was found unhurt. After this incident, her father broke up with his lover and decided on his devotion to his own family.

Another shocking piece of news hits Akemi the same day. After her father leaves, Akemi and her fiancé go back to his apartment. While he is in the shower, Akemi finds a letter with no sender’s address and several pictures in it. The photos show the past of Akemi, who is naked with men. Wondering if he would break their engagement, Akemi becomes panicked. In order to calm

⁵ I abbreviate “A Strange Tale from Down by the River” as “A Strange Tale.”

herself, she sits by the window and looks out at the river. However, the look of the river scares her rather than calms her:

I stood up and went to sit by the window that looked out over the river. I wanted to get hold of myself before I saw him. I tried thinking about the negative emotions that swallow us up and death encounters that we can't even recall but the sight of the river glistening dark outside frightened me. It flowed by at a terrific speed. I couldn't think anymore, and instead just gazed out, blankly. ("A Strange Tale" 167)

Before she is ready, he comes out of shower and lets her know that he received the pictures a while ago but did not care. He also tells her that he finds no joy in anything like he does in Akemi, including his inherited business from his father, but after meeting Akemi his life changed:

"I'm just not into work anymore. I'm still young and I have no ambition. Do you know what that means? It means that I'm finished as a man, I'm deadwood. (...) I've felt that way ever since Dad got sick. (...)

So all I want to do is to see you, and be close to you. That's all. (170-71)

Reassured, she looks down at the river again. The river now looks different:

I shut the window, and then looked down at the river again. Unlike the river I had seen moments before, full of chaos and anxiety, the water now appeared calm and powerful, like an image frozen by a camera lens. It was peaceful, like the passage of time, flowing by, gentle and unchanging. It amazed me how utterly different things can look, just with a change of heart. (173)

Thanks to the river, she is now convinced that there is "something shining" within herself and has hope in life:

Suddenly it occurred to me that the river may have called me there. I would never, ever jump into the river, I promised myself. I felt sure, though, that it has summoned me to its banks, to this window, with the same pull as things that attracted me when I was younger. All those hidden forces, sinister motives, kindnesses, things that my parents had lost and found.

The river possesses the force to guide fate. I think that nature, buildings, and mountain ranges have some effect on our lives. Everything is intertwined and linked together, and within that mass of forces I have survived and will live on, not because of anything I've decided. With that realization, I suddenly felt something shining within me.

When I looked out from that window each morning at the river, I saw the water glistening, like a million sheets of crushed gold leaf, flowing by. The light within me was something gorgeous like that. I wondered if that was what people in the old days used to call hope. (173-74)

“A Strange Tale from Down by the River” was published in 1993, during the bubble economy in Japan. Akemi, the daughter of a company president, is depicted as a young individual, who lives in the materialistic world of Japan due to the bubble economy. Akemi has a sense of emptiness because of this materialism. As a result, Akemi tries to achieve something satisfying in the sex club but fails. What is worse is that her secret is exposed to her fiancé. However, the river helps her realize “how utterly different things can look, just with a change of heart” (173). With this realization, she gains a forward-looking perspective on life.

In terms of the healing ability of nature, the river has no special power. Its existence assists her realization that she should see things from a different perspective. When she finds out that her

fiancé knows about her past, to her, the river immediately looks “full of chaos and anxiety” (“A Strange Tale” 173). However, after being reassured that he does not care about her past, the river looks “calm” and “peaceful” (173). Thus, the river gives her a tip to live through everyday life.

In Japanese literature, rivers represent the concept of *mujō*, the Japanese traditional sense of transience. *Hōjōki* (My Ten-foot Hut, 1212), the representative essay by Kamo no Chōmei (1153-1216) from the Kamakura period, is the original reference of the concept of *mujō*: “The flowing river never stops and yet the water never stays the same. Foam floats upon the pools, scattering, re-forming, never lingering long. So it is with man and all his dwelling places here on earth” (31). In this essay, Chōmei suggests that life goes on as a river continues to flow with constant changes. It gives the image of a river’s quiet flow, which reassures one by teaching that one should let oneself keep flowing like a river, whatever happens in life. In reference to this traditional Japanese image of a river, the river in Yoshimoto’s story symbolizes merciful nature in that it let the narrator survive from drowning. It is also the place where all the mistakes of the narrator’s past are forgiven. Thus, nature in “A Strange Tale from Down by the River” represents a place of mercy and forgiveness. This type of presentation of nature continues in her other works, such as *The Lake* (2005). I will return to this topic later in this chapter.

1.7 *Amrita* (1994)

Amrita (1994) is Yoshimoto Banana’s first full-length novel that focuses on the issue of spirituality. In my article “Spiritual Recovery in Yoshimoto Banana’s *Amrita*,” I examined how in this novel Yoshimoto reacted to the topic of spirituality by differentiating herself from new religious movements, particularly Aum Shinrikyō. In this section, I will summarize the pivot of my argument in order to show how she continues to deal with the same issue of spirituality in her later works.

Amrita is in essence a story about the spiritual recovery of the young female protagonist. As a means of healing, Banana displayed “the healing powers intrinsic to everyday life” and remained critical of one’s pursuit of New Age type of healing (Ogawa Yuko “Banana’s *Amrita*” 221).

In the first chapter, titled “Melancholia,” the twenty-eight-year-old protagonist Sakumi loses her sister Mayu, an actress, living with Ryūichirō, her boyfriend. After suffering from a nervous breakdown, addicted to drugs, she quits her job and dies from a car crash, which Sakumi and Ryūichirō believe resulted from her voluntary suicidal action.

Sakumi has been depressed from the loss of her sister. The main part of the story of “*Amrita*” is set four years after Mayu’s death. At the beginning, Sakumi falls down the stairs, hits her head, and loses her memories. After losing her memories, Sakumi gains a supernatural power that allows her to see spirits. Ryūichirō, now her boyfriend after she sleeps with him by chance, invites her to visit his friends Kozumi and Saseko in Saipan. Both Kozumi and Saseko have supernatural powers: Kozumi is clairvoyant, and Saseko can heal dead spirits by her singing voice. They run a bar by the sea. Saseko is the popular singer there.

Saseko heals the spirits of soldiers who died from wars in Saipan. When she arrives in Saipan, Sakumi gets a heavy headache, which Saseko tells her is the mischief of ghosts. As Saseko sings by her, Sakumi recovers. Saseko's supernatural power is derived from her miserable childhood: she was born as an illegitimate child. When she was in her mother’s belly, Saseko sensed that she was and would be hated by her stepfather. Her pain grew, and “the voices inside her heart crying for her to get out was actually what allowed Saseko to start a new form of communication between herself and others” (*Amrita* 154). After birth, she was named Saseko (lit., a girl who lets anyone sleep with her) and lived as a prostitute in Japan.

Saseko stopped sleeping with men and now lives in Saipan and is healing the spirits of the dead with her songs. When she sings on a stage by the ocean, some thick air comes out from the sea but becomes fresh and light at once, and the ocean becomes calm. As she learns more about Saseko's lifestyle, Sakumi receives the impression that Saseko and Kozumi are like a "retired couple" who "left their country to spend their lives gazing out over the sea" (*Amrita* 198). The lifestyle of her psychic friends is to some extent equivalent to New Age movements such as Aum Shinrikyō in that they seek spiritual salvation outside of social reality: giving up seeking hope in Japanese society, Saseko continues to live in Saipan and pursues connections with the dead. Critically regarding the couple, Sakumi eventually distances herself from those with supernatural powers.

Sakumi's perspective on life is shown completely opposite to Saseko's: Sakumi instead finds hope in everyday life. After losing her memories, Sakumi resets her old self, who used to think that everyday life was dull. Her memory loss gives her chances to reevaluate her everyday life. The following lines indicate how she finds special blessings in mundane, everyday moments:

The memory finally came back to me. I was with these same people. We were in a classroom, and I'd fallen asleep.

(...) the smell of dry wood, the brilliant rays of the sun, the green outside the window, and those people all around me—all who had been with me from childhood. The fresh gust of wind rushing in when it was time for our break. Light bouncing off my pencil case and dancing on the ceiling above me. I knew that when I left that place the elements, everything that came together like tiny miracles, would never come together again. Pondering that thought, I could feel my newfound wisdom

wafted around me like the scent of a subtle perfume. That was the impression, just one more brilliant memory that seemed to pierce through my heart. (*Amrita* 50-51)

By recovering from her memory loss, Sakumi learns the preciousness of everyday life in which “everything that came together like tiny miracles, would never come together again” (50). Thus, the discovery of blessing moments in the everyday reality eventually leads her to spiritual recovery. After returning from Saipan, Sakumi completely retrieves her memories and savors every moment of everyday life. At the end of the story, Sakumi articulates her belief in miraculous energy from everyday life: she is now convinced that life provides a “limitless amount of sweet oxygen”:

It had always been out there, shining brightly. I just hadn’t reached out to touch it. But every now and then I felt surrounded by its presence. From right to left, from here to there, like water flowing downstream. Limitless amount of sweet oxygen. The more I took in, the greater the supply. Like a saint in the legends who reached out and took jewels from the sky, I had the same kind of talent for gathering miracles in life. There was no doubt about it. Those feelings had always been with me. (*Amrita* 360)

After her memory recovery, her half-brother Yoshio becomes lonely due to the loss of someone who truly understood him—Sakumi with her supernatural power: “I feel kind of lonely, but don’t know why ... I think the Saku-chan who lost her memory understood more of my pain” (*Amrita* 248). He stops going to school and actively makes psychic friends instead. He meets a young woman nicknamed Noodles and her ex-boyfriend Mesmer. Noodles had worked for a research institute in California. Having quit and come back to Japan, she pursues life without use of supernatural power. She met Mesmer at the same institute. Around the same time Yoshio

becomes friends with these people, Sakumi meets Noodles and Mesmer by chance. Sakumi hears from Yoshio that by using his psychic power, Mesmer appears in Yoshio's dreams frequently. Then, Sakumi and Noodles predict that Mesmer is inviting Yoshio to create a new religious group. But it turns out that Mesmer's actual intention is to invite Yoshio to join the research institution in California.

The last chapter, "Nothing has changed," was added after the main part of the story "Amrita" and was published in 1997 as a paperback version. In "Nothing has changed," the narrator tells the readers that Yoshio becomes a junior high school student and has no supernatural power anymore. This tells us that he has abandoned the sophistication of his supernatural power and instead pursues life in his everyday reality. Sakumi also narrates that Ryūichirō has cheated on her. Without becoming depressed, Sakumi is determined to let herself "flow endlessly through life" no matter what happens in life (*Amrita* 366).

Thus, Yoshimoto Banana concludes her full-length novel. The first part "Melancholia" first appeared in a literary magazine *Kaien* in April 1990. The main part "Amrita" was published monthly from January 1992 to October 1993 in the same magazine. "Melancholia" and "Amrita" were combined and published in January 1994 as a hardcover book titled *Amrita*. The last episode "Nothing has changed" was added to *Amrita* and was published as a paperback book in 1997. By depicting the narrator's conviction of hopes in everyday life, Yoshimoto stresses "her belief in the healing powers intrinsic to everyday life" (Ogawa Yuko "Banana's *Amrita*" 221). The writer continues to show such conviction in *Hachikō's Last Lover* (1996) and *South Point* (2008). Furthermore, in the final version of *Amrita*, by depicting the narrator's brother's decision to let go of his pursuit of spiritual life, the author displays her critical perspective towards New Age spirituality. It is conceivable that the addition of the last episode is due to the Aum Shinrikyō's

sarin gas attack on Tokyo Subways in 1995. She further develops her critical view in *Honeymoon* (1997) and *The Lake* (2005). In the following sections, I will first examine *Honeymoon* and then *The Lake*, which both deal with the topic of spiritual recovery in conjunction with the author's criticism of the new age cults.

1.8 *Honeymoon* (1997)

Hanemūn (*Honeymoon*, 1997) is a story about a young couple who struggle to find hope in their future. The narrator is the twenty-three-year-old woman Manaka, a part-time worker. Her husband Hiroshi is the same age, also a part-timer. *Honeymoon* focuses on Hiroshi's spiritual recovery. As a means of healing, the author emphasizes the importance of being out of everyday life by traveling and the discovery of reconnection with nature.

Manaka and Hiroshi are childhood friends who live next to each other in Tokyo. When they were eighteen, they got married. But they did not live together right away since Hiroshi lived with his grandfather, his last family member. When Hiroshi was little, his parents went overseas to pursue a new religion in California and left him at his grandfather's place, never to come back. His mother disappeared after their divorce, and Hiroshi lost touch with her.

The situation with Manaka's family was also complicated. Her parents divorced when she was a child. She now lives with her father and stepmother. Her biological mother lives in Brisbane with her Australian husband. Although she gets along with her stepmother, Manaka also keeps in touch with her actual mother.

When Manaka was seven, her father and stepmother got married and built a new house. After moving into the new house, Manaka started to keep a dog named Olive, and treated her as her younger sister.

Honeymoon is divided into eight episodes. Each episode is titled with a centered topic of each episode. The title of the first component is “Manaka’s garden,” and the author, from the very beginning of the story, exhibits her belief in the healing power that nature has. In this first segment, Manaka narrates the life philosophy she has learned through her backyard. In her backyard, there are a variety of natural forces, such as trees, flowers, plants, and vegetables, that her stepmother is growing. Whenever she has free time, she sits on the garden rock and comes to contemplate how small she is in the world of nature. As she surrounds herself with her little nature, she feels as if she is assimilated into the garden and becomes convinced that she is a part of nature. Wherever she is and whenever she feels nervous, she pictures herself in the garden and regains energy. Thus, knowing she belongs to nature empowers and heals her no matter where and when she faces problems.

Contrary to Manaka, Hiroshi has nothing that can heal his lonely mind. However, traveling and contact with nature at the destination eventually leads him to spiritual recovery. There are two symbolic “honeymoons” which help the young couple overcome their hardships. The first honeymoon was an unplanned trip to Atami and Ito when they were freshman in high school. Manaka heard that Hiroshi’s father and his friend from the religion in California would come to see Hiroshi and invite him to join the religion. On the night she heard it, Manaka had a dream that Hiroshi was killed in his home. The following morning, she desperately asked him to go on a trip together and left home for Atami. During the trip, they met a taxi driver who kindly offered a tour of watching moonlit Mt. Fuji, which inspired them to go back home and deal with reality.

They came home, only to learn that Hiroshi’s father did not visit, but only his friend. The friend of his father came to Hiroshi’s house in order to say that Hiroshi was not able to become a leader of the religious group, even if Hiroshi might have wanted to. Until the death of his

grandfather, Hiroshi lived with the fear of the death of his grandfather. For this, although he was supposed to enter a vocational school to become a pet trimmer, Hiroshi ended up not applying and instead shut himself in his home with his grandfather.

In the beginning of the story, Hiroshi's grandfather dies and his despair deepens. As Hiroshi and Manaka expected, his father does not attend the funeral. After the funeral, Manaka helps clean the room, where there is a western style altar his parents left. In the urn on the altar, an infant corpse is found. Hiroshi cries, thinking that it is his brother or sister. Then, Hiroshi confesses that his father committed a group suicide recently: his father and the other religious members took drugs and set fire to their house. At the end of the day, Manaka makes *kamaage udon*, a noodle dish served from a pot with dipping sauce, for Hiroshi at his house. However, the *kamaage udon* gives energy to his body but not to his soul—unlike *Kitchen* (1988), Yoshimoto's first story, where a pork-cutlet energizes the boyfriend of the narrator in the end. Now, Hiroshi has a sense of fear of losing Manaka and even has a thought of dying together (*Honeymoon* 96).

After staying with the depressed Hiroshi, Manaka also falls sick, both physically and mentally. On the suggestion of her stepmother, Manaka and Hiroshi go on a trip to Brisbane, where her birth mother resides with her new husband. The latter half of the story is about their second honeymoon.

The trip to Brisbane first opens up the hearts of both Manaka and Hiroshi. On the night they arrive in Australia, Manaka has a dream that Hiroshi goes to the Netherlands alone and she misses him. In the dream, Manaka is mentally dependent on Hiroshi. By this dream, Manaka truly understands Hiroshi's distress, his fear of losing someone significant.

Hiroshi confesses two things Manaka did not know: that he is capable of understanding what animals think and that he has had a feeling of guilt for being a son of the man who killed

children and ate their corpses for his own religious fulfillment. His father and the male members make a child with the female founder of the religion, let the child die of hunger, and eat the corpse of the child, which they believed had some special power that can be used in the hereafter. Although he suffered from this sense of guilt, thanks to Manaka's dog Olive, Hiroshi could manage to survive: "I hated myself for pretending not knowing the horrible incident my father was involved with. But even such times, Olive told me with heart and soul that only the world where there is Manaka and my grandpa is my reality" (*Honeymoon* 163).⁶

During the second honeymoon, dolphins give them a fresh perspective on life. On a cliff, the ocean looks dignifying and awe inspiring to Hiroshi and Manaka. They are impressed to see the dolphins, who look as if they are playing, in such a severe place to live in: "This enormous ocean, the cosmos, is the space where the dolphins live. (...) I came to realize that dolphins are not cute pets but wild creatures who survive in the severe world" (*Honeymoon* 150). Manaka comes to reconfirm the life philosophy she learned from her garden: "The ocean is enormous that it looks like a gigantic cloth swinging in the wind. Nature moves the hands of a clock as it changes the scenery. It moves at the exactly same speed and with exactly same method as my garden in a larger scale. There is the same clock here as well" (153). Manaka and Hiroshi, identifying humans with the dolphins who struggle to survive in everyday reality, are encouraged to live through life:

"How small is the island floating on the ocean! I've never thought how enormous the world around it is. If I didn't look from that tall place, I would never have known how vast the ocean should be." Hiroshi said.

⁶ Yoshimoto, Banana. *Hanemūn*. Tokyo: Chūkō Bunko, 1997. Kindle e-book. I abbreviate it as *Honeymoon*. Translation is mine.

Like the choppy gray ocean looking horrible and limitless is the playground of dolphins, things that happen in the world where we live, in this horribly vast world, may look trifle and barbarous plays from the god's point of view.

(...) In the ocean, the thick soup of life, no matter how rough and trifle things are, they are occurring at the same time. Things like that, everything included, if you look out them from a high place like the cliff, they would look ridiculous, puny, and strong like the dolphins playing in the waves. We may look swimming and playing in the gray waves of the severely cold ocean and will eventually disappear from this gigantic world and melt into somewhere.

That would look like a beautiful thing like we have just impressed by the view.

(*Hanemūn* 164-165)⁷

The idea they learn from the ocean in Brisbane is animistic. This work shows the author's own view of nature. According to Japanese animistic and Buddhist tradition, all lives in nature are divine and humans are a humbling part of the vast openness of nature. Note that the author, however, stresses the sameness between the wild ocean in Brisbane and the narrator's own domestic garden in the backyard of her parents' house. The awe-striking otherness of the nature in Brisbane is thus reduced to something domesticated and intimate that she can easily relate to.

Anyway, the awareness of belonging in nature gives the characters a hopeful perspective on life. On the way back to where they stay, Manaka comes to think that the world is open to them and there is hope in their way ahead: "I don't have a job, skills or hobbies I can be passionate about. Hiroshi is also a silly person who says he can communicate with animals. But this beautiful

⁷ Yoshimoto, Banana. *Hanemūn*. Tokyo: Chūō Kōronsha, 1997. I abbreviate it as *Hanemūn*. Translation is mine.

world is fairly open to anyone. Wherever we are, there are plenty of hopes” (*Honeymoon* 154). At the end of their trip, Hiroshi suggests that they should start to keep a pet when they go back home and is determined to restart his career as a pet trimmer. This is indicative that through the trip he gains a new perspective on life with hope and ambitions.

Thus, *Honeymoon* (1997) is a story about the journey of a young couple’s spiritual healing. Unlike her works like *Kitchen* (1987), in *Honeymoon* (1997), as a means of spiritual recovery, being out of everyday reality is valued rather than a simple and direct appreciation of everyday life. In regard to being out of everyday life, Yoshimoto Banana makes a clear distinction between two kinds of extraordinary experiences: traveling in order to come back and live in this reality in a better way and traveling to go away from reality in pursuit of religious goals. While Manaka and Hiroshi accomplish spiritual revival through traveling and become ready to live in society, his father sought salvation by pursuing extreme religious interests, which lead him to even kill his own infants. By depicting Hiroshi’s father’s actions in such a gruesome way, the author hints at her strongly negative view of New Age cults like Aum Shinrikyō. Aum Shinrikyō created a commune outside of society, and in the name of its religious truth, Asahara justified the random slaughter of ordinary people in Tokyo. Contrary to Hiroshi’s father’s combative activism, nature, which inspires Hiroshi, is depicted as something much more peaceful. It invites him to come back to society with a positive sense of hope. Thus, two years after Aum Shinrikyō’s sarin gas attack, in *Honeymoon*, Yoshimoto Banana warns of the danger of new religion. Moreover, this work shows that the author becomes more articulate in terms of her belief in the power of nature. Yoshimoto further develops the theme of animistic spiritual recovery in her later works, such as *Ōkoku sono ichi* (2002).

1.9 *The Lake* (2005)

Mizuumi (The Lake, 2005) is a love story between a thirty-year-old woman and a man of the same age. Like *Honeymoon* (1997), this work also critically depicts New Age cults. It focuses on the healing process of the young man who has an experience of being abducted by a religious cult.

The narrator is the mural painter Chihiro. She is a daughter of an unmarried couple. Chihiro's father is the president of a small import-export company, which he took over from his father, in a provincial town on the outskirts of Tokyo. Her mother is an owner of a ritzy club in the entertainment district of that same town. Her parents never officially married due to the disagreement of his relatives: they were against it because of his wife's job. Therefore, Chihiro grew up as "an acknowledged but illegitimate child" (*The Lake* 10). This fact tormented Chihiro until she left the town for Tokyo. She entered an art college in Tokyo and started to live there after graduation.

The story begins with Chihiro's narration that she had a dream of her mother, who died a year ago, for the first time in a long time. A year after her mother's death, Chihiro became friends with Nakajima, who lived in an apartment across from Chihiro's. As they exchanged greetings over the windows, they started to talk with each other. At the beginning of the story, Nakajima visits Chihiro's apartment and stays over for the first time. During his stay, Nakajima confesses that he is impotent. Spending more time with him, Chihiro gradually finds out his past that triggered his trauma.

The first half of the story focuses on Chihiro's recovery from the loss of her mother. Spending more time with Nakajima, who is an enthusiastic researcher of chromosomes and Down's syndrome, Chihiro regains her energy by discovering a passion for her job.

Although the cause of her mother's death is not clearly told, it is predictable from the narration of her dream that her mother died of a nervous breakdown: she sacrificed herself in order

to survive in the town. In the dream of Chihiro, her mother tells her that in order to maintain her bar's reputation, she forced herself to have a series of plastic surgeries, although she did not want to: "I didn't want things to be that way. (...) I hated the idea of having plastic surgery done so I'd look young again (...). But when people told me I should do something, I started to think that maybe I had to, and so I would" (*The Lake* 19). Moreover, since she relied on her husband, as Chihiro's father was too busy to see her and his daughter, she lost her temper: "Of course I didn't want to be always griping at your dad. But I worried constantly that he might drift away from me, so I clung to him as hard as I could. I knew there were the other ways, beside anger, to show what I was feeling, but the anger just came" (19). By continuing such mental unstableness, she led herself to her own death in the end: "Somehow I'd ended up on this path there was no turning back. (...) In the end, I died before anything could change" (19).

Nakajima also lost his mother, but a long time ago—he has a habit of sleeping with his mother's used *mochi-ami*, a wire rack for toasting *mochi*, ever since. Sharing the same experience of sorrow, Chihiro and Nakajima become close friends. Although she did not tell him about her mother's death, he noticed it immediately after she returned home from the funeral. Chihiro felt "at ease" when Nakajima said he waited for her to come home because she had had a sense of fear that she has nowhere to return to after losing her mother: "all the things I'd had to confront in such a short space of time, and the fear that maybe I no longer really had a home or a family to go back to—all that lifted, just a little, and I felt free, at ease" (*The Lake* 31).

Nakajima is a PhD student whose research topic is chromosomes and Down's syndrome. He eagerly works on his research, day and night. Coming home and seeing how he lives each day doing only what he likes changes the way she used to see the world and her future: "After I started spending time with Nakajima, I became clearly aware, for the first time in my life, of the way I

had always looked at the world, and of how I wanted to see it in the future. It was because he was so steadfast” (*The Lake* 39). Before becoming close with him, Chihiro had blamed herself for being unable to sympathize with her mother, and that has kept her from pursuing what she really wants:

I’d always felt bad, somewhere in my heart, about my inability to sympathize with my mom who had tried in her own wishy-washy way to accommodate herself to society, and remained like that until she died. Of course you have to sympathize with her—she was weak, she was only human. Out in the country, people aren’t as tough as they are in the city. Living alone in Tokyo as I do now, I’m starting to forget what it’s like, but in the countryside those social connections still matter, and that’s the world Mom belonged to . . . *See how you arrogant you are?* I had told myself. *You’ve got to change that.* And I’d believed it. (*The Lake* 39-40)

As she begins cohabiting with him, Chihiro realizes that without knowing it, she has forced herself to lead the same life as her mother:

But after I met Nakajima and saw how he dove into each day, though only doing the bare minimum, only what he liked, I realized that I was exactly like my mother—the way she tried to be what others wanted her to be, because she was afraid to be different. I had that same fawning impulse, too.

And when it occurred to me that being that way really wasn’t going to help me through the rest of my life, I realized that from now on, my mom’s life and mine would have to be completely, unmistakably different. (*The Lake* 40)

Thanks to Nakajima, Chihiro is now ready to make a new start by letting go of all the constraints she has put on herself involuntarily: “Tremulously peeling back that film of false sympathy, I

discovered a smooth new willingness to let bygones be bygones forming like new skin underneath” (40).

The latter half of the story gradually reveals Nakajima’s past. He also lost his mother, but in his case, when he was a high school student. After meeting Chihiro, he gains the courage to deal with his traumatic past. Nakajima asks Chihiro to go to see his old friends together. His friends Mino and Chii are a brother and sister leading a frugal life in a hut by the lake, three hours north of Tokyo by train. They earn a living by spiritual reading: Chii foretells, looks into Mino’s eyes, and says her prophecy into his heart telepathically since she has been bedridden for ages due to a chronic illness in her kidneys.

Nakajima asks them if he will be able to work for the prestigious research institute in Paris after graduation. Chii’s answer is that Nakajima will be in Paris next year. Visiting his old friends with the help of Chihiro and Chii’s answer encourages him to pursue his career: “After I graduate, I’ve decided I’d like to get a scholarship and go to the Pasteur Institute as soon as possible. Just a little while ago I didn’t think I could, but now I do—in part because Chii assured me I’d be able to do it and in part I’m with you now, and somehow that makes me feel like I can” (*The Lake* 111). His decision to go to Paris indicates that he is in the process of recovery.

Nakajima suggests that Chihiro should also go to Paris with him, since there are a lot of art schools there. At first, she is unsure if she should go to Paris with him; however, after accomplishing her mural painting and gaining confidence by doing so, she is motivated to go to Paris and enhance her artistry by broadening her knowledge of fresco by visiting museums there. After coming back from the trip, Chihiro starts to work on her mural-painting. Her old classmate Sayuri, a piano teacher at the Infant Development Center, asks Chihiro to paint the wall of the Center. On the wall, Chihiro paints a few frolicking monkeys. On the left third of the wall, she

adds a big lake and four monkeys around it—“A monkey brother and sister, and a mother monkey and her son”—that symbolize Mino, Chii, Nakajima’s mother, and Nakajima, respectively.

During the work, Chihiro faces two hardships: first, conflicts with city officers, and then her painting of monkeys which look like ghosts, scare the children. Since the building is getting old and would require a lot of money to repair, city officers suggest that the whole structure might well be torn down, although local people are against it. In order to save the building, Chihiro devotes herself to getting credit for her artistry by getting interviewed by a magazine publisher and providing the city mayor with credible references from her art school. Succeeding in saving the building makes her confident as a working woman with passion and motivates her to do her best work on the wall.

Children at the Center, however, say that the monkeys painted on the wall look like ghosts. Chihiro also has had an impression that the models of the monkeys, Mino and Chii, looked unreal. In order to know more about them, Chihiro visits them without Nakajima. This trip to the lake gives her vivid details of the lives of Mino and Chii and Nakajima’s past—and ultimately artistic inspirations for her career.

From Mino, Chihiro gets to know that Nakajima was the nation-wide known child who was kidnapped. He was nine years old when he was abducted on his way to a summer camp in Izu. The group that took Nakajima was like a cult: there was a leader, and people gathered to listen to him preach: “Their goal was to live in accordance with certain principles, and create a new, ideal humanity” (*The Lake* 159). They established a commune deep in the mountains and had a self-sufficient lifestyle. Nakajima was “trained by people who wanted to create a race of super-humans” (178). People there were all nice to him, and he led a hedonistic life in the commune.

Before her second visit to Chihiro, Mino and Chii seemed like ghosts living in the unreal world. This is why the monkeys on her mural painting looked like ghosts. Mino says that the reason why they looked otherworldly was that she saw through the eyes of Nakajima, who regards them as a part of his past. Sensing that Chihiro sees the lake as a dream-like space, Mino explains that the place is also part of reality where they actually live a life:

“The truth is, time hasn’t really stopped for us. Things are constantly changing, even if the change happens so slowly you don’t notice. (...) It’s extremely rare for Chii and I to really grow close to someone. People are afraid of us, because we have a different sort of smell. And people scare us, too. But we’re living our lives, just like everyone. We *live* in this place” (*The Lake* 157)

After coming back to her apartment, Chihiro adds more colors to make the monkeys look alive. By doing this, the painting becomes popular with the children at the Center and people in the town. Gaining more confidence, she is determined to go to Paris and visit museums to see artworks with her own eyes. She also now wishes to learn more besides painting: “After all, I’m most interested in frescos.... If I have a chance, I’d love to learn about restoration, too—there’s so much I want to do!” (*The Lake* 140) Her revival is owed to Nakajima: “It’s all there for me to study, from now on. I owe that to you: it’s only after we met that I’ve started wanting so badly to go and learn more about the things I’m interested in” (140).

As Chihiro returns from her trip to the lake, Nakajima immediately senses that Chihiro now knows his past and begins to recount it in detail: the group reached his memories with hypnotism and drugs and tried to make him believe that the place they were in was not in Japan. It was Mino who told the truth to him and encouraged him to escape. Thanks to Mino, Nakajima got to sneak out of the commune. Panicked, wandering in the wood, he found a stable with five horses lined up

in their stalls. The horses calmed him down: “The horse just kept looking at me, it didn’t seem to be thinking anything, his eyes were like two lakes, so gorgeous, drawing me in. (...) That horse, with its wild, natural eyes, brought me back, made me alright. I pulled myself together again, got a grip” (175). The place was a clubhouse of a riding club. He was picked up by the owner who had seen his mother on TV: his mother made herself available to TV and magazines and tried every possible way to find him. After he was picked up, Nakajima and his mother went to live in the house by the lake on their doctor’s advice. On the suggestion of Nakajima, Mino and Chii began living in the same house. Nakajima and his mother spent years in the house by the lake. Walking around the lake every day made the parent and the child recover gradually.

At the end of the story, Chihiro and Nakajima go to see her completed mural painting. On their way, they promise to go to Paris together next year to advance their careers and visit the lake again and the horses that saved Nakajima.

In *The Lake*, the Tokyo-dwelling couple accomplish their spiritual recovery through revisiting the lake. In the case of the narrator, Chihiro let go of the obsession with her home after meeting Nakajima. After her mother’s death, she almost completely loses connections with her hometown, though she keeps in touch with her father whom she occasionally sees. Before becoming friends with Nakajima, she had a sense of emptiness because there was nowhere she felt she belonged and nothing she can be passionate about. However, by cohabiting with Nakajima, who lives strongly without family and friends and passionately works on what he is passionate about, she realizes that she does not have to be like her mother, who held on to the town to the point of sacrificing her whole life. Thanks to Nakajima’s influence, Chihiro begins to work on her painting with more passion and pursues her originality in her art. Revisiting the lake alone is key for her new inspiration. In the end, without being stuck in Tokyo, she starts to have visions of

going to Paris with Nakajima and is determined to better her artistic skills by immersing herself with new inspirations in a foreign country. As for Nakajima's recovery, thanks to Chihiro, he gains the courage to visit the lake and has a realistic, forward-looking plan for his career and future. By revisiting the lake and talking to his psychic friends, Nakajima is certain of his will to live and pursues what he wants to do in his near future.

Inheriting the same theme from *Honeymoon* (1996), *The Lake* (2005) depicts a story of spiritual recovery of a person who escaped from a cult. The cult group that abducted Nakajima is depicted like Aum Shinrikyō, which brainwashed the followers in the detached commune. A decade after the Aum's sarin attack, the author wrote this story with empathy for cult survivors, probably in response to the news about the hardships of the Aum survivors after the incident: the story stresses this difficulty but ends with Nakajima's spiritual recovery.

In terms of his psychic friends, Mino and Chii are depicted as cult survivors, who are kept from joining the society. As Chihiro sensed the first time she visited, they remain invisible to people in society. By drawing them as people who "live" like all others, she reminds people of the existence of marginalized survivors in society.

Like her previous work, such as "A Strange Tale from Down by the River" (1993), *The Lake* also deals with the theme of spiritual recovery in connection with the image of water as a key symbol of healing nature. The lake is the place where Nakajima has memories of his cult experiences and his beloved mother. Revisiting the lake with the help of Chihiro finally gives a hopeful outlook to him. His decision to go to Paris is indicative of his recovery. Thus, like *Honeymoon* (1997), in *The Lake* (2005), Yoshimoto Banana exhibits her recurrent motifs—a cult survivor, a young couple, nature's healing power, and in the end, a hopeful restart to life.

1.10 *Hachikō's Last Lover* (1996)

Yoshimoto Banana, in the latter half of the 1990s, reinforces her belief in the power of everyday reality for one's spiritual recovery. In the following sections, I will discuss how the author develops her belief in everyday reality by examining *Hachikō no saigo no koibito* (*Hachikō's Last Lover*, 1996) and *Sausu point* (*South Point*, 2008).

Hachikō's Last Lover stresses the importance of an individual pursuit of spiritual happiness and criticizes religious movements by organized groups. In the story, the eighteen-year-old narrator Mao was raised in a religious environment. Mao has a grandmother, who is the leader of the religious group. Her grandmother was a psychic who could make a prophecy and heal someone's illness. Before Mao was born, a lot of people came to her grandmother and started to live with her and created a religious community. Mao's grandmother named her place "Merciful Village (*Itsukushimi no mura*)."⁸ At the beginning of the story, when Mao is fifteen, her grandmother dies. Conflicts arise over a successor of the religion between Mao's mother and a friend of her grandmother. Mao is not a believer and despises her religious mother, who is now obsessed with the issue of the successor. Mao is capable of seeing a spirit of her grandmother but does not tell her mother, who persistently invites her to succeed "Merciful Village" together. Mao does not know who her father is, although she is convinced that someone in the religious group is her father.

Since childhood, as she was not a believer, Mao did not trust anyone but her grandmother because she knows her grandmother has negative views of the cult organized by exploiting her psychic power: her grandmother had no intention to begin a cult in the first place and wants to end it within her generation. Before death, her grandmother foretells Mao's future:

⁸ Yoshimoto, Banana. *Hachikō no saigo no koibito*. Tokyo: Chūkō Bunko, 1996. I abbreviate it as *Hachikō*. Translation is mine.

“You will become crazy or an artist. No matter how hard people here ask you, you should not succeed this religion. Otherwise, you will surely become mad. Drawing will do good for you. You cannot hang like now. Goal is far. But key is a boy from India. The name is....um....the name of the great dog....oh yes, Hachikō. The name of the boy is Hachi. You will become his last lover.” (*Hachikō* 18)

Her prophecy is realized when Mao turns fifteen: Mao meets a boy named Hachi from India and develops a relationship with him. After her grandmother’s death, fed up with her own mother, Mao leaves home. As she is sipping a cup of coffee, hopeless at a donut shop, Mao meets Hachi and “Mother,” his so-nicknamed girlfriend. Invited to stay at their place, Mao starts living with them.

Hachi is also a religious person. His biological parents were Japanese hippies and abandoned him in India, though the reason why Hachi was abandoned is unknown. His foster parents were faithful believers in a nameless blind saint and sometimes donated buildings and food for poor people as a religious mission. Before Mao meets Hachi, his parents had a prophecy that they would find a Japanese boy and should adopt him, which would bring them good karma. His foster parents died when he was thirteen. Since their death, Hachi traveled around India and then came to Japan and began living in Tokyo. He is determined that he will go back to India in two years because of his religious mission: when he was ten, Hachi attended a ceremony performed by the saint that his foster parents believed in. At the ceremony, the saint told Hachi that he would meet every Indian guru and eventually seclude himself in a mountain in India.

“Mother” is also a quasi-psychic high school student. At the beginning of the story, “Mother” dies. Right before she dies, Mao and “Mother” are alone in the apartment. “Mother” senses that she will die the following day, so she kisses and caresses Mao and expresses her love

for her. The following day, “Mother” dies in a traffic accident: she rides a bike in Hakone and slips off the mountain. After the funeral for “Mother,” instead of going to see Hachi, Mao goes back home since it is too hard for her to deal with the death of “Mother.”

After two years, when she turns seventeen, while her family is out of town, Hachi visits her home and invites her to live in his apartment. As they start living together in his apartment, their relationship grows. The relationship not only becomes a love relationship but also develops into a student-teacher relationship: Hachi teaches Mao how to free herself from obsession with words. His enlightenment eventually leads her to a reevaluation of herself. At the beginning of the story, she narrates, “The time of the day I was with Hachi was also the time I could date with myself” (*Hachi* 19). Before becoming intimate with Hachi, Mao felt a sense of alienation from herself. Since she is known as a person from “Merciful Village,” Mao is aware that she is disliked by her people. Due to this, when she first meets Hachi, she explains “too much” about her home environment in order to justify how she is actually different from the people of her home:

“You give me too much explanation. Why?” Hachi said.

“Because it was the environment I have to explain in order to be myself.” I said.

“See? You explain again.” Hachi laughed.

(...)

I want to be free. (...) I want to dive deeper and deeper and be emancipated.

Since this time, I stopped explaining. I thought if I explain further and further, he will understand even my blood. But it was just my emotional dependence. (...)

Standing on my own feet as an adult, at that time, for the first time in my life, I fell in love with my soul. Even a moment, if you have rich love time with yourself, your

antipathy for life will disappear. Thank you, Hachi. I will never forget these important things you have taught me. (*Hachi* 164-178)⁹

Relying on words means relying on rationality or consciousness. From Hachi, Mao learns yoga, meditation, and some skill that separates pain from the body. These practices also help keep her from obsession with consciousness. When teaching, Hachi tells Mao that a master of those skills does not put teaching into words because once it becomes words the effect will be weakened (502). Thanks to Hachi, she comes to be able to find a balance between consciousness and instinct. This skill improves her drawing.

After starting to live in his apartment, Mao starts drawing, as her grandmother's prophecy foretold. By drawing, she is able to free her subconscious, and it ultimately helps her love herself:

I polish the rough rock I found on my own. Until the harmony I create starts to play.
I am obsessed with it. Drawing, like sand-play therapy, exposes my emotional wounds a lot of times. In order for myself not to be obsessed with Hachi, I thrash around only inside myself. Playing with suffocating colors, I fall deeper in myself and take control of myself. At the same time, something inside me is healed, and myself from my subconscious appears onto a canvas. It is relaxing and just breathing without thinking this and that. (...) The less cautious I become, the more I succeed in it. This is how I could become friends with drawing and myself. (*Hachi* 442-451)

⁹ Yoshimoto, Banana. *Hachikō no saigo no koibito*. Chūkō Bunko, 1996. Kindle e-book. I abbreviate it as *Hachi*. Translation is mine.

Learning how she can work on drawing with such sensitivity not only improves her drawing skill but also helps her know herself better. In this way, when Hachi departs, without collapsing alone, she can keep looking forward.

The second-to-last chapter is entitled “Owari, hajimari,” meaning “The end, the beginning.” After Hachi leaves, Mao moves into her new friend’s apartment. Thanks to the new friends Hachi introduced her to, Italian art critic Alessandro and his Japanese girlfriend Miki, Mao is convinced of her resilience: “More good things, exceptionally wonderful things, are waiting on me. (...) Something fun and interesting are surely on its way like the time I met Hachi” (*Hachikō* 142). This idea of Mao’s suggests that the end of something yields the start of something new and becomes the important realization for her to get through the sorrow of separation from her significant other.

In the last episode entitled “*Kuri*,” or chestnut, Mao returns to school and plans to go to art college. Mao and Alessandro shop for Miki’s birthday present. As the fall season comes, they stop by a chestnut shop on a street in Shibuya. Walking and eating chestnuts with a new friend gives her a fresh perspective:

Hachi is not dead. He is alive...this moment, under some different sky (...) up until now. I have been terribly sad of being away from him, but now I am overjoyed with tears by this realization that we are both blessed by the same magical “now” like golden sunshine is piercing between clouds. (*Hachikō* 146)

Mao starts to see the street “like a colorful palate” and ends her story as follows: “As I spend more time like this, I will not forget Hachi soon but will eventually. I think it is a sad thing but at the same time a wonderful thing” (*Hachikō* 146).

In *Hachikō's Last Lover* (1996), in terms of how the author responds to the issue of spirituality, one could see spiritual motifs dominant in the story: Mao's grandmother is a psychic; Mao is capable of seeing the spirits of the dead; Hachi pursues religious living in the end. The author's stance towards new religions remains the same: the protagonist does not follow any of the spiritual paths. Instead of succeeding her grandmother's religion or going to India with her boyfriend, the protagonist chooses to stand on her own two feet with the aid of her new friends. Like her psychic grandmother, whose life is guided only by listening to prophesying voices and Hachi, who is determined to follow his saint's words of returning to India, Mao herself is a believer in the power of destiny; she only follows inspirations coming from the above. However unlike the other two, Mao chooses a secular and individualistic path to pursue her spiritual happiness. Mao may be the hero who most articulately reveals Yoshimoto's interest in the issue of religiosity—a life should be guided by religiously driven inspirations but the learning should be practiced independently from the group activism of a cult movement. This notion is continued in *South Point* (2008), the story of the son of Mao and Hachi. The publication of *South Point* affirms the fateful reunion of Mao and Hachi. The love for destiny is a recurring topic in Japanese literature. I will examine *South Point* in the next section in terms of how the authors concludes the story of Mao and Hachi.

1.11 *South Point* (2008)

South Point (2008) is a story which clearly displays one of the author's major traits—the traditional Japanese “love for destiny”—with the aid of nature, in the South Point in Hawaii.¹⁰ The “love for destiny” is a Japanese traditional motif as in “Tsutsuizutsu” (children at the well) from *Ise*

¹⁰ Yoshimoto, Banana. *Sausu pointo* (South Point). Chūkō Bunko, 2011.
Translation for this work is mine.

Monogatari (The Tales of Ise) written in the early Heian era (Harris). “Tsutsuizutsu” is a story in which a man and a woman, childhood friends who played around the well, reunite after each living separately for years and eventually marry. Yoshimoto’s *South Point* is associated with the idea of “love for destiny” of “Tsutsuizutsu.”

The narrator of *South Point* is the young woman Tetora, a quilt artist, who lives independently in Jiyūgaoka, Tokyo. The story depicts the spiritual recoveries of Tetora and her childhood male friend Tamahiko. Both are in their mid-twenties. While it is a story of the pure love between Tetora and Tamahiko, *South Point* is also a story about Tamahiko’s parents Mao and Hachi, the protagonists in *Hachikō’s Last Lover* (1996). Yoshimoto concludes the story of Mao and Hachi in a hopeful way in *South Point*.

The first half of the story focuses on her first love, when Tetora is twelve years old. Until she is a freshman in junior high school, Tetora and her parents live in Ueno, Tokyo. Tetora meets Tamahiko in six-grade class. They immediately hit it off due to their eccentric home environments: her father’s successful business is well-known in the town, while Tamahiko’s father is rumored that he is an Indian who runs a religion. Tamahiko lives with his homosexual male housekeeper, a student of his father who helps people in Katmandu, Nepal. His mother is a picture book artist and lives in Milano. If one has read *Hachikō’s Last Lover*, one can immediately tell Tamahiko’s father is Hachi and his mother is Mao, and Tamahiko is their son.

Due to her father’s bankruptcy, Tetora and her mother run away from Ueno and move to Gunma, where her mother grew up, leaving her father in Tokyo. Her mother starts running an organic food store and cafe. She is also a buyer of organic vegetables, miso, and beeswax. Now she lives with a ten-year-younger American boyfriend and continues a hippie-like lifestyle in Gunma, breaking up with Tetora’s biological father.

Living by himself, Tetora's father becomes an alcoholic, catches a liver disease, and dies when Tetora enters high school. After the death of her father, Tetora becomes lonely. Her only consolation is seeing Tamahiko, who occasionally visits her from Tokyo. However, after a year of their long-distance relationship, Tamahiko says that he will leave for Hawaii to live with his mother.

Until high school, Tetora lives with her mother and her mother's boyfriend in Gunma. However, since he attempts to rape her, Tetora decides to leave for Tokyo where there is an art school she is interested in. After moving to Tokyo, Tetora stops contact with Takahiko since she is distressed with the situation of her home and her father's death.

Since graduating from college, Tetora makes a living as a shaman-like quilt artist. The mother of her friend from high school held a workshop on Amish quilting at her mother's cafe, and that triggered her motivation to start quilting. Developing her own style, Tetora quilts based on her client's life story: she comes up with colors, patterns, and symbols according to each of her clients' stories.

One afternoon when she shops at the supermarket, Tetora sheds tears without realizing it: She hears a ukulele song whose lyrics are exactly the same as the letter she gave to Tamahiko before she ran away from Ueno. The music is from the Hawaiian fair in the supermarket. Tetora learns that the song is sung by Yukihiro Yoshimura, a Hawaiian singer. Since Tamahiko's last name is also Yoshimura, Tetora comes to speculate that Tamahiko is now dead and his brother sings for his deceased brother. However, Tamahiko actually disguises himself as Yukihiro, his older brother who died a year ago from leukemia, without publishing his songs. In place of Yukihiro, Tamahiko produces CDs and holds concerts. Before becoming a singer, Tamahiko was a guitarist for his band. Tamahiko does not tell Tetora about it until she arrives in Hawaii.

Tetora contacts the Hawaiian singer and meets him in Tokyo. Tamahiko in disguise as Yukihiro asks Tetora to make a quilt about his deceased brother. In order to do research about Yukihiro's life, Tetora goes to the Big Island, Hawaii.

On the first day that she arrives, Tamahiko invites Tetora to go to see the sunset at South Point, the southern tip of Hawaii Island—where a miracle happens: at South Point, Tetora realizes what Tamahiko has been lying and truly reunites with her first love. South Point is also a special place for Mao and Hachi. After Hachi left for India, Mao went to Italy and started a publication of children's picture books through Alessandro's good offices. One day as she visits her friend in Hawaii, Hachi is also in Hawaii for his spiritual training with Kahuna, Hawaiian priest. At South Point, Mao and Hachi met by chance and stayed together for two weeks. During the stay, they were given Tamahiko. Since Mao already settled in Italy and Hachi in Nepal, they both left Hawaii and did not see each other—until next time they saw each other by chance again on the Island of Hawaii. Until then, Mao did not mention Tamahiko and raised him by herself. The second time they saw each other, Hachi and Mao were given Yukihiro and officially married in Hawaii. Although they married, Mao and Hachi do not live together. They each pursue what they each want to do: Mao opens workshops occasionally in Hawaii, while Hachi is based in Nepal healing people with his supernatural power for free.

At the end of the story, Mao completes Yukihiro's quilt, which helps heal his family and his girlfriend. Promising to return to Hawaii soon, Mao goes back to Tokyo.

In *South Point*, in terms of spirituality, unlike her previous works, the author's criticism of religious cults is not shown. Hachi refines his supernatural power and helps heal people in Nepal. However, the plot does not show him become almighty: he is unable to cure his own son. He also has not organized a religious group nor become a leader of a cult.

Instead of the author's criticism of New Age cults, *South Point* stresses the "love for destiny," which is affirmed by the two couples: Mao and Hachi, and Tetora and Tamahiko. Visiting South Point brings those couples back together. South Point is described as a sort of power spot, where couples of true love are destined to be reunited. Also, this is a story of spiritual recovery, which happens in connection with the space of a special power in nature. Therefore, one can contend that this work is Yoshimoto's typical story where her characters spiritually revive with the aid of nature. In *Yumemiru Hawaii* (2015), her collection of essays regarding her stays in Hawaii, Yoshimoto Banana describes South Point as follows:

South Point gives scenery of the end of life. (...) This place makes you want to go back to the human world. (...) It is the place which reminds us of how small humans are. (...) After I die, I will miss humans. South Point let us experience such feeling before death. (41-44)

Like "A Strange Tale from Down by the River" (1993) and *The Lake* (2005), in *South Point* (2006), Yoshimoto comes back again to the image of water as a privileged healing spot. As the above quote well indicates, South Point is a traveling destination for nature in such a way as for the travelers to come back to their everyday lives all refreshed.

1.12 Summary of Yoshimoto's Works

Yoshimoto has been both praised and criticized for her unique writing style. In terms of her writing themes, the author repeatedly encourages us to reevaluate tradition and make good use of it for the contemporary. As mentioned, while Saitō Minako argues that Yoshimoto is in the style of Western girls' novels, Ōtsuka contends that Yoshimoto adopts Japanese folklore. In Yoshimoto's works, one finds combinations of those existing themes. Like Western girl novels, basically, Yoshimoto's works are stories of girls' coming-of-age. Also like Japanese folklore, her stories contain

traditional themes, such as the traditional *mujō* concept, blessing moments in everyday life, and inspirations from nature.

In terms of her spirituality, Yoshimoto's characters believe in spiritual inspirations. However, unlike religious persons, her protagonists do not seek transcendental enlightenment. Instead, they respond to inspirations that celebrate the details of everyday life. The author constantly shows her distaste for groups like cults but values individualistic inner growth. Her animistic belief in nature also constantly appears in her works. Awareness that one is protected and survived by nature often becomes inspiration for her characters' revival. While traveling to meet powerful and wild nature is her frequent topic, she is also strongly inclined to small nature in everyday life. Among the motif of nature, images of water are recurring as symbols of nature's healing power.

In addition to healing through nature, the traditional motif of "love for destiny" is one of Yoshimoto's recurring themes. In her works, such as *Hachikō's Last Lover* (1996) and *South Point* (2008), her characters have a destined encounter with their childhood love. More generally speaking, her protagonists make decisions based on whatever they think would be their destiny. As a result, their life goes along positively. Thus, Yoshimoto Banana continues to write stories in such a unique but literally traditional way. Thus, Yoshimoto recurrently writes stories of contemporary young people. They are growing-up stories of modern individualistic characters, whose spiritual development is guided by their essentially old-fashioned sensibilities.

CHAPTER 2. OGAWA YOKO

2.1 The Author, Ogawa Yoko

Ogawa Yoko was born in Okayama in 1962.¹¹ She was raised in a detached house owned by a branch of Konkōkyō, a Japanese religion originating from the Shinto faith. The author lived with all her relatives near the church, where her paternal grandfather was the priest. Her mother's family were also believers in Konkōkyō.

Ogawa was a bookworm from young age. In childhood, her favorite book was *Home Medicine Dictionary*, though she also enjoyed reading *The Complete Works of the World Literature for Boys and Girls*. Influenced by these books, she began writing stories while very young. At the age of eleven, Ogawa and her parents moved to a newly built house in a neighboring town and started to live as a nuclear family. As a junior high school student, Ogawa was the type of a girl who could always be found reading a book in the library rather than hanging out with friends. In the school library, she read the *Diary of Anne Frank* (1947), which became a lifelong writing inspiration. This encounter with the words of Anne Frank motivated the young Ogawa Yoko to become a writer.

When in high school, Ogawa liked reading poems written by contemporary poets such as Hagiwara Sakutarō, Tachihara Michizō, and Ōoka Makoto, as well as *Manyōshū*, the collection of ancient poems. Then, she decided to pursue her bachelor's degree in Literature at Waseda University. In her college days, she lived in the women's dormitory of Konkōkyō. She joined the Contemporary Literary Society and read works of Japanese contemporary writers such as

¹¹ Regarding Ogawa's earlier life before her debut, I refer to the following two books: Kawamura Minato, Hara Zen. *Gendai josei sakka kenkyu jiten*. Tokyo: Kanae Shobō, 2001.; Takanezawa, Noriko. *Gendai josei sakka dokuhon 2 Ogawa Yoko*. Tokyo: Kanae Shobō. 2005.

Murakami Haruki, Kanai Mieko, Ōe Kenzaburō, and others. Ogawa wished to be engaged in the literary world after graduation but failed in finding a publishing-related job in Tokyo and had no choice but to return to Okayama.

In Kurashiki, Okayama prefecture, Ogawa found work as a secretary for Kawasaki Medical School. In 1986, at the age of twenty-four, she married an engineer who worked for Kawasaki Steel Corporation. Due to marriage, she quit her job. However, following her marriage, she again took up writing novels. In the first collection of her essays, *Yōsei ga maioriru yoru* (1989), Ogawa mentions that she gained more time for writing once she became a housewife.

It was 1988 when she made her official debut in the Japanese literary world, winning the Kaien New Writer's Prize for her publication of "Agehachō ga kowareru toki (When A Swallowtail Falls Apart)." This work was her graduation project which she re-edited prior to applying for the award. During the writing of her first novel, she also gave birth to a son.

Beginning in 1990, Ogawa continued to gain more attention not only from the Japanese literary world but also from Japanese readers in general. In 1990, she received the prestigious Akutagawa Prize for "Ninshin karendā (Pregnancy Diary)." Among female writers in their twenties, Ogawa was the first female author to be presented with this award since the postwar era. Becoming a bestselling book, her publication of *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* (*The Housekeeper and The Professor*, 2003) made the author a popular novelist in Japan. For this work, the author was awarded the Yomiuri Literary Prize and the Japan Bookseller's Award. In 2004, she received the Izumu Kyōka Prize for *Burafuman no maisō* (*Brahman's Burial*) and the Tanizaki Prize for *Mīna no kōshin* (*Mīna's March*) in 2006. In 2012, with her publication of *Kotori* (*Little Bird*), she received the Ministry of Education Art Encouragement Prize.

Ogawa became a well-known author not only in Japan but also overseas. The author obtained a multitude of literary awards internationally, and her short novels appeared in the prestigious literary magazine *The New Yorker* (August 30, 2004; December 26, 2005). One of her short stories was adopted for a French film (*L'Annulaire*, 2005), which has also become available in English speaking countries (e.g. *The Ring Finger*). In 2017, four of her works were translated into English: *The Diving Pool: Three Novellas*, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, *Hotel Iris: A Novel*, and *Revenge: Dark Eleven Tales*. Thus, Ogawa Yoko has become a professional writer recognized world-wide.

In her early stories, Ogawa repeatedly depicted young female protagonists' psychological conflicts and radical resistances to growing up to be adult women; assuming that they will become part of the sexualized and gendered space of relationships with men out of necessity. In her works published after *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* (2003), the author wrote about the quiet life of adults who remain carefree from sexual conflicts. She also depicted people who peacefully accept death in her works, such as *Burafuman no maisō* (2004) and *Kotori* (2012). These works were highly acclaimed both by the general readers and literary circles.

Shōjo, or girlhood, is the key topic of Ogawa's works, based upon which her female protagonists respond to their lives sensitively and with nuance. In this chapter, by focusing on the theme of girls (*shōjo*), I will examine her early works, "Agehachō ga kowareru toki (When A Swallowtail Falls Apart, 1988)," "Daivingu pūru (Diving Pool, 1989)," and "Ninshin Karendā (Pregnancy Diary, 1990)," as well as her representative work of the second half period, *Mīna no kōshin* (Mīna's March, 2006), which contain rich details exploring the world of girls.

2.2 A Contemporary Young Woman's Collapse in "When a Swallowtail Falls Apart" (1988)

The number of female writers in Japan has increased during the postwar years. Since the late 1980s, a number of young female authors gained recognition in the world of literature by receiving literary prizes. For instance, Yoshimoto Banana, at the age of twenty-three, won the Kaien Newcomer Writers Prize in 1987 with her debut work *Kitchen*, which immediately became a bestseller. In the following year, Ogawa Yoko, twenty-six years old at the time, received the same prize with "Agehachō ga kowareru toki (When a Swallowtail Falls Apart)." In 1990, Ogawa received more attention by winning the prestigious Akutagawa Prize with "Ninshin karendā (Pregnancy Diary)." In 2004, Kanehara Hitomi and Wataya Risa, both twenty years old, were awarded the Akutagawa Prize with "Hebi ni piasu (Snakes and Earrings)" and "Keritai senaka (The Back I Want to Kick)", respectively.

It was the 1970s when the number of female authors reached its peak in Japan. The number of women writers continued to grow and produced numerous popular works. Although female writers, both of previous generations and of the contemporary, tend to focus on similar feminist issues, their expressions are different from each other. Female writers of previous generations, ranging from prewar to the 1970s, are fierce and furious. Hiromi Tsuchiya Dollase states that the attitude of the contemporary female writers is "playful" regardless of the seriousness of the topics they choose to deal with (Tsuchiya 755). According to Tsuchiya, "through their playful narratives, the authors deconstruct various social systems, recreating them into new ones." She maintains that the writers' "casual tone of voice" covers up the seriousness (756).

Saitō Minako coined a new female literary genre, *L-bungaku* (L-literature). According to Saitō, "L" ("eru" in Japanese) connotes ladies, love, and [Women's] Liberation (*L-bungaku* 2). Saitō states that this genre was spontaneously born when the authors' thoughts met the readers' needs (4). *L-bungaku* authors commonly "empower the female readers" (*L-bungaku* 3). The

definition of the *L-bungaku* is: 1. The author, readers, and protagonist are all female; 2. The story has to be a realistic novel excluding sci-fi, fantasy, mystery, horror, etc. (*L-bungaku* 93). Saitō provides four examples of *L-bungaku* writers: Ekuni Kaori, well-known bestseller novelist in Japan; Kawakami Hiromi, who has been awarded multiple prestigious literary prizes; Yamamoto Fumio, who gained recognition by receiving the Naoki Prize; and Yuikawa Kei (*L-bungaku* 93). These authors are a part of the initial postwar generation, born between 1945 and the 1960s, who are now ranging in their thirties and fifties (*L-bungaku* 93). Saitō claims that this generation has grown up with *shōjo shōsetsu* (girls' novels), which stylistically influenced their *L-bungaku*.

In a world of *shōjo shōsetsu*, the protagonist is often a young female orphan, who has one good female friend and a female enemy, as well as male friends who are depicted as inferior. In short, *shōjo* stories depict the development of a young cheerful protagonist, who is free from gender roles, values female friendship, and despises men. Saitō argues that these types of stories were destined to be a hit among the female readers, who were implanted with the gender ideology that a “woman’s happiness depends upon marriage,” which permeated through Japan’s rapid economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s (100). Following *shōjo shōsetsu*, *cobalt* (originally, *kobaruto*) *bunko* was popular among women who were in their late teens to early twenties during the 1980s. *Cobalt bunko* is the new girls’ novel genre whose casual writing style is similar to *shōjo manga* (girls’ comics). Thus, Saitō argues that inheriting the content of feminist story from girls’ novels and the casual style of writing from *cobalt*, the *L-bungaku* was born out of the popular cultures of girls.

According to Saitō Minako, there are two types of *L-bungaku*: *datsu-shōjo* and *chō-shōjo*. The prefix *datsu* means “to get out of” and *chō* means “to go beyond.” The former is a story in which a female protagonist tries to grow out of the realm of being a girl by falling in love with

someone. The latter is a story about a young female protagonist who is swaying between marriage and career. Both types of stories are in essence about a girl's self-search. Saitō mentions that young women in contemporary times face "not-so-serious identity crisis" (*L-bungaku* 107). Specifically, the factor behind their crisis is the result of "romantic love ideology" (*L-bungaku* 107). Basically, it is a modern notion in which women are to marry someone and produce a child, thereby achieving her promised happiness. The "romantic love ideology" was diffused between the early 1970s and the end of rapid economic growth (*L-bungaku* 107).

Ogawa fits Saitō's definition of a *L-bungaku* author in that she was born in 1962, the initial postwar generation, and grew up with girls' novels such as *Little Women* and *The Secret Garden* (Ogawa, 2010). However, Ogawa's stories are neither *datsu-shōjo* nor *chō-shōjo* type stories. Rather than "getting out of" or "going beyond" the realm of being a girl, Ogawa's young female narrators try to remain a girl who neither decides her identity nor sticks to what she thinks her identity is.

Ogawa's debut work, "When a Swallowtail Falls Apart" (1988), is a story about a young female narrator, who, deprived of her girlhood freedom due to unexpected pregnancy, refuses to grow up to an adult woman. In the next section, I will examine her debut work and explore her newness among the contemporary Japanese female writers. In order to distinguish her newness, I will compare "When a Swallowtail Falls Apart" (1988) with a work of a female writer from the prior generation, who were prolific between the 1940s and 1970s. First, I will show common features shared by the female writers of the previous generation using *Onnamen* (*Masks*, 1958), written by Enchi Fumiko (1905-1986), as an example from the prewar generation.

In Enchi's *Masks* (1958), the middle-aged protagonist, Mieko, is a researcher of Genji's lover Rokujō in *Genji Monogatari* (*Tale of Genji*), who becomes a vengeful spirit to haunt his

other lovers to death. Mieko ends up like Rokujō by getting revenge on her husband. Mieko was married to a man from a prestigious lineage of landowners in Niigata. Every man in her husband's family had cheated with the tenant farmer girls. Unexceptionally, Mieko was cheated on by her husband. Being forced to have a miscarriage by her husband's lover was the salt in the wound. Mieko's boiling anger turned into a cool-headed plot of terminating his paternal lineage, which historically betrayed women. Mieko had an affair and gave birth to twins, Akio and Haruna. Akio married Yasuko but died in an accident. Conspiring with the daughter-in-law Yasuko, Mieko tricks Ibuki, a married man who seduces Yasuko, to sleep with Haruna who was born with mental retardation. At the end of the story, Haruna dies in childbirth and her baby is handed over to Yasuko, not to Ibuki, the baby's actual father. Regardless of whether pairing a man and a woman works as a marital couple, Enchi's story proves that women are capable of bearing a child. Thus, the story takes advantage of women's reproductive power and successfully subverts the male-centric system of *ie*—the traditional Japanese family system in which the eldest male figure, usually a father, is supposed to be a leader of a house and has the authority to make decisions regarding matters of his family. Dealing with matters of the *ie* system is one of the shared traits of female authors' works published in the 1950s. Also, this story creates an eerie atmosphere that gives a fierce and furious impression, which is one of the common features for the works from the 1950s to the 1970s.

According to Mizuta Noriko, the stories of the postwar generations were narrated through a mother's or wife's voice (*Haha to musume*). Enchi's *Masks* is a representation of what Mizuta termed, "mother's tale by a mother (originally, *haha ni yoru haha no monogatari*).” Protagonists of "mother's tale by a mother," challenge patriarchy, which is derived from the family system in Japan. The number of nuclear families increased in the postwar period. Within the house of a

nuclear family, the woman's role was to give birth to children and raise them with affection. This gender role was taken for granted due to *ryōsai kenbo* ("good wife, wise mother"), an official role imposed by the Meiji government, whose ideology has remained ever since. As Japan underwent its modernization after 1868, the nation reformed its policies, which resulted in excluding women from the public sphere. According to Dina Lowy, within the role of "good wife, wise mother," women were only members of a nation who served the country through their roles within a house—by supporting the husband and raising their children.

In postwar times, as they gained more opportunities to work outside the home due to the nation's industrialization, women regarded motherhood as an "obstacle" (Mizuta 135). Women were forced to choose between staying at home raising children or working outside the home independently. Their obstacle was enforced by a system of family in which men have far greater authority. Enchi's story turned this disadvantage into an advantage; a woman can be a mother, whether she is inside or outside the family system. The story overturns the family system and shows the significance of women's reproductive power.

Inheriting them from the previous generations, Ogawa Yoko extensively discusses gender issues in her works. "When a Swallowtail Falls Apart" (1988), Ogawa's debut work, reiterates this characteristic. The story depicts a young woman's crisis, which is caused by her pregnancy. In the story, the protagonist, Nanako, is a young woman in her early twenties, seemingly a senior student in college. The protagonist lives with her grandmother, named Sae, who suffers from dementia. Nanako was raised by her grandmother since her father's passing. When her father's brain tumor was discovered, Nanako's mother had an affair with another man, made a child with him, and subsequently left her husband and the protagonist. The story begins when the protagonist delivers her grandmother to a hospice with her boyfriend.

On the day she leaves her grandmother, the protagonist realizes that she is pregnant and starts to see the world differently. The pregnancy dramatically changes her sensitivities—towards her grandmother first, then her boyfriend. The narrator of the story inserts memories with her grandmother intermittently. Her recalled memories are all associated with senses of fear, guilt and anger, which all stem from her mother.

Recalling memories of her grandmother, Nanako thinks that her grandmother despised her mother. Nanako had a habit of peeping through a door gap to watch Sae pray to God on a *kamidana*, a household Shinto altar placed on a high shelf. Nanako thinks that Sae prays to God in order for herself not to bear hatred towards Nanako for being a daughter of her mother: “Sae’s curling up back denies me (Nanako). Because Sae always sees my mother in me. Because Sae loathes my mother. Because my mother was pregnant with another man when my father got a brain tumor. She prays to save herself from feeling hatred against me” (“Agehachō” 94).¹² As she sleeps with her boyfriend, visions of Sae flash through her mind. Due to her mother’s disloyalty, Nanako has been scared of becoming a mother. Also, because she only had her grandmother, the only family member who took care of her, Nanako’s insecurities grow after she realizes her own pregnancy.

Nanako’s boyfriend, Mikoto, does not notice any changes happening in Nanako’s body. Five days after they have sent Sae to the hospice, Nanako and Mikoto meet again for the first time since they sent Sae to the hospice. When asked how she is doing without her grandmother, Nanako mentions that she frequently asks herself where Sae has gone. Nanako also states that she regularly wonders if she is in reality. Mikoto replies that the reason why Nanako thinks that way is that she is in “moratorium” where she has no fixed position in society (106). Being in the same state of moratorium, Mikoto is uncertain of his status as well, but he decides on his own. He tells Nanako

¹² Translation regarding “When a Swallowtail Falls Apart” is mine.

about how he chose his reality. One day when he fell from a rocking chair and hit his head. However, he could still see himself sitting on that chair. Laughing at himself, he said, “I should not have fallen from that chair” (108). Then, he visualizes himself sitting on the chair like nothing happened (109). Hearing this story, Nanako says, “But that’s just you wanting to obscure your own mistake, right?” (109) Mikoto replies, “That’s fine even if that is the case. I’m free to believe which “me” I want to believe” (109). This is how Mikoto decides reality and his status; he believes the power of his imagination, which can overwhelm the reality he is physically bound to.

Mikoto is a part-time poet. At the end of the day, he gives his poem to Nanako. The content of his poem is as follows: There is a noise that he cannot ignore. He searches for it in the town. One time, he goes to a party where he hears a variety of noises. However, none of them is what he is looking for. As he almost gives up, a young woman sitting across the table beckons him. The woman is “like a girl, a ballerina, or an athlete” (“Agehachō” 116). As he approaches her, he finds a swallowtail in her palms. She brings it close to his ear, and he hears the noise of it fluttering its wings. Although the noise was not what he was looking for, he toasts and shouts, “Yahoo!”, because he does not want her to be sad.

After getting home, Nanako finds a picture of a girl in the magazine where his poem was printed. In the picture, there is a young woman with long soft hair that has “bigger eyes, nose, and lips” than Nanako. She irritatedly asks herself why on earth he forgot the picture in the magazine, if the girl in the picture let Mikoto hear the noise, and if she has ever elated his heart. Nanako speaks to the girl in the picture: “You hear the noise in my belly. The gloomy noise that never ends...What Mikoto is really looking for is this noise (...). I will let Mikoto hear the noise and invigorate him” (“Agehachō” 119). Nanako’s frustration is resulted from the young woman in the picture—the young girl who Nanako can never become again. As she imagines herself letting him

hear the noise, Nanako envisions that while toasting the girl, he would say, “Unfortunately, this is not the true reality” (119). Nanako continues to wonder, “Are you saying that the baby is not true reality? Like disregarding yourself falling from the rocking chair, are you denying what is happening inside of me?” (120). Repeating these questions at home alone, Nanako hits her stomach many times. Unlike Mikoto, Nanako cannot deny her reality, which is her pregnancy, since it is already happening. Contrary to Nanako, not realizing a slightest hint of her pregnancy, Mikoto as a single man can freely decide what he wants to be.

On the eighth day after Sae left, Nanako buys a specimen of a swallowtail. She says in her mind, “I can hear the noise. The slight noise my baby makes when breathing (...) how many doors are you (baby) going to open up inside me? But you are not me” (“Agehachō” 132). Looking at the girl in the picture, Nanako smashes the swallowtail with anger. The story ends with the smashed swallowtail falling on her calendar. The swallowtail symbolizes the protagonist’s *shōjo-sei* or girlhood and the reason why she breaks a specimen of swallowtail is that she is distressed with her own future. The swallowtail is something that flies freely. Therefore, the specimen of it symbolizes that its freedom is deprived. Aware of the fact that she is pregnant, distressed with the reality, she takes out her frustration towards the specimen of swallowtail. When this is applied to the protagonist, that means that her freedom as a young girl is deprived.

The protagonist resists becoming like her mother and grandmother. Given that the protagonist is about twenty-two years old in 1988 when the book was published, one could assume that her mother gave birth to her in the late 1960s. Her mother is the first generation who experienced the Women’s Liberation Movement. Taking this assumption into account, Nanako’s mother is the extreme case who underwent the Women’s Liberation and stepped out of the family system, prioritizing her own happiness outside the conventional marriage system. The

protagonist's grandmother is depicted as a strict mother who always wore a kimono. Presumably, she was born in the prewar era and served the role of “good wife, wise mother.” By taking her grandmother out of the home, the protagonist symbolically tosses traditional images of “wise mother” away from the home and chooses not to be like her grandmother. Regardless of her resistance to being like the two mother figures, Nanako has no choice besides becoming a mother. Stripped of her freedom as a girl, the protagonist faces her identity crisis.

Thus, the story depicts a girl distressed with her reality. Since her family is all gone, she has no *ie*. She wants to create *ie* on her own but is unable to do it partially because her boyfriend is no more than an immature boy unreliable to the young woman. And in the middle of transition between girlhood and womanhood, she has no “fixed position in society” (“Ageha” 106). The ending suggests anxiety and mental unpreparedness, which puts her in a state of panic in the end.

In this section, I have examined two Japanese female authors. Both authors deal with the issue of women and pregnancy. In the former work, the family system in the postwar era highlighted the unequal gender relationship, which led the protagonist to conspire revenge on her husband. The protagonist made use of a woman's having a womb to challenge the patriarchy. The latter novella depicts a girl's mental breakdown, which is caused by her unexpected pregnancy. Contrary to Enchi's work, Ogawa's tale of women's reproductive power is not useful—it is only an “obstacle” for the young woman.

In his book *Maturity and Loss—Collapse of Mother* (originally, *Seijuku to sōshitsu—haha no hōkai*), Etō Jun examined “collapse of mother” from male protagonists' views. The time of Ogawa's story corresponds to the postwar period in which the traditional *ie* system was collapsing. The collapse of the *ie* system includes the collapse of motherhood, as well. The young protagonist in Ogawa's story is exposed to the reality of a contemporary family in an effectively ironic manner.

She does not believe in the value of a good mother, neither does she have any ambition to devote herself to work. The story depicts a reality that the young woman face in contemporary Japan—the time of “collapse of mother.”

2.3 A High School Girl’s Search for Her Female Identity in “Diving Pool” (1989)

The theme of the mother-daughter relationship is one of the traditional themes passed down from the previous female writers (Mizuta 1995; Tsuchiya Dollase 2011). According to Tsuchiya Dollase, this tradition was initiated by the authors of the 1970s. She goes on to state that one of the features that contemporary, popular female authors share is that they write stories on mother-daughter relationships “from a daughter’s point of view.”

[M]any of the contemporary female writers depict them (stories on mother-daughter relationship) from the daughter’s point of view. In the 1970s, such writers as Tsushima Yuko and Ōba Minako gradually started to project the voices of daughters into their literature, featuring daughters (or young single women) as heroines in their works. They illustrated women’s desire to be free from the home and social oppression from the daughter’s perspective. In the literature of the 1990s, the daughter’s perspective is dominant. In a way, the women’s literature of the new generation can be symbolically termed as “daughter’s literature.” (Tsuchiya Dollase, 758)

In her works, Ogawa also depicts young female protagonists, who have psychological conflicts with their mothers and narrate the stories from the “daughters’ points of view.”

In “Diving Pool” (1989), Ogawa focuses on an adolescent girl’s distress. The story is based upon the character’s first love story, focusing on her psychological conflicts with her family, particularly with her mother. The protagonist, also the narrator, is a high school student named

Aya who is in love with Jun, a same-age high school diver. Aya's father is a priest and runs an orphanage, named the Light House, with her mother. Aya is their only child. Aya and Jun live under the same roof for more than a decade and attend the same high school. When they were four or five years old, Jun was brought to the orphanage by a loyal parishioner since his alcoholic mother had borne Jun out of wedlock and his father ran off when he was born.

Every day after school, Aya visits the indoor diving pool and spends a lot of time watching Jun from the bleachers at the edge of the diving pool. The story begins with Aya's narration on how much she likes to watch Jun at the diving pool: "I'm not thinking about anything or waiting for something; in fact, I don't seem to have any reason to be here at all. I just sit and look at Jun's wet body" ("Diving" 5).¹³ The diving pool is a "special place" where Aya can be alone while seeing Jun: "This is a special place, my personal watchtower. I alone can see him, and he comes straight to me" (6).

The diving pool is also the special place where she can be away from her home ("Diving" 6). When she approaches her house on the way back home from school, Aya feels that "there is always something irreconcilable between the house" and herself, which she "can never get past" (9). In the Light House, Aya is "the only child who is not an orphan" but was raised like an orphan. Aya narrates that this is "a fact that has disfigured my family" (11). Occasionally, she opens one of the photo albums and feels lonely and frustrated at the same time, convinced that she has been treated as an orphan in the Light House; flipping through a photo album, she realizes that none of the pages records her weight or length at birth, or contains the copy of her footprint or a picture of her parents and herself (12). Sometimes, she even thinks that it might have been better if she was an orphan so that she would have been adopted and change the current life.

¹³ I abbreviate "Diving Pool" as "Diving."

Aya realized this family issue through house-play with Jun when they were four to five years old. Aya played the role of a mother, and Jun the role of a baby. Aya broke off a branch from the fig tree, and brought the branch with the liquid ooze to Jun's lips. Aya made him sit on her lap and wrapped an arm around his shoulders, saying, "Time for milky!" ("Diving" 9). Jun, like a baby at the breast, pursed his lips and made little chirping sounds. At that time, Aya comments,

I felt myself suddenly overcome by a strange and horrible sensation. It might have been the fig milk or the softness of Jun's body bringing it on, but that seemed to be the beginning—though I suppose it's possible this terrible feeling took hold of me even earlier, before I was even born. ("Diving" 10)

The "strange and horrible sensation" is associated with motherhood in that she felt it came from "the fig milk or the softness of Jun's body."

Her family became her source of distress during the self-search. Aya narrates that since this experience, she had many similar moments and that she can never "hear the words "family" and "home" without feeling that they sound strange, never simply hear them and let them go" ("Diving" 10-11). When she stops to examine them, "the words seem hollow. Seem to rattle at [her] feet like empty cans" (11). To Aya, her biological parents, her actual family, are "like empty cans"; they are tangible, but there is nothing in them. Since that experience, Aya wished for only one thing, "a normal quiet family": "From the time of the incident with the fig tree, I wanted only one thing: to be a part of a normal quiet family" (12).

The family of the protagonist is not "normal" in that there are no father and mother figures. Although they are biological parents, Aya's parents are too distant for her to recognize them as her actual parents. As for her father, to Aya, he is an inaccessible figure like a dead person: "I gaze at

the photograph of my father just as someone might gaze at the altar from the pew” (“Diving” 12). Also, there is no dialogue between the protagonist and her father throughout the story.

Contrary to her father, her mother is too close for Aya; on a daily basis, she sees her mother because of dinner meetings. She has meals with two of the oldest orphans, Jun and Reiko, who is her fifteen-year-old roommate, the night proctor, and her mother. Even though she is not disturbed by younger children, Aya still feels disgusted because of her mother. She feels that her mother “keeps talking out of breath” and does not “cast about for topics that would include everyone, preferring to talk about herself and her interests” from the moment everyone sits down until the meal is over (“Diving” 18). Embarrassed by her own mother, Aya feels like silencing the woman: “Her lips were like two maggots that never stopped wriggling, and I found myself wanting to squash them between my fingers” (18). Aya even wonders if her mother hates herself: “As she would grow increasingly excited and out of breath, I often wondered whether she in fact hated herself for talking so much” (18). Looking at her mother, Aya feels “nothing but cruellest sort of disgust” (19). Thus, Aya’s hatred towards her mother is stressed.

Contrary to Aya, who is fed up with her own mother, Jun treats her mother nicely. Instead of sighing, he listens intently to her overbearing voice, nodding politely, and even breaking in from time to time to ask a strategic question that encourages her to talk even more. Aya wonders “how he could be so kind” even though “life had treated him so badly” (“Diving” 19). Studying his profile, Aya worships his innocent warm-heartedness: “I prayed desperately to be bathed in his kindness” (19).

In order for herself to divest the frustrations, Aya bullies Rie, a one-year-and-five-month baby, the youngest orphan at the Light House. In a Sunday afternoon, when the church holds a bazaar, Aya is asked to look after Rie. Aya takes Rie out in the backyard alone, let her stick a

shovel into the mound, and watches her from a distance. Every five minutes, Rie stops and comes over to have Aya dust off her hands. Aya narrates that these repeated actions put her in a “cruel mood” (“Diving” 25). As she settles into these feelings, Aya hides herself behind the kitchen door. After a few moments, Rie notices she is left alone and starts to cry in earnest, leaving Aya feeling satisfied: “Her sobs were violent, seemingly about to rupture something inside her, and they were satisfying my cruel urge. I wanted her to cry even harder” (26). When Aya finally appears from behind the door, Rie cries even louder and comes running to throw herself in Aya’s arms. Aya narrates that such actions from the baby make her mood even darker; “The arrogance of Rie’s self-assurance restored my cruel thoughts” (27). Aya wants to “hear her cry louder” and “every kind of howl or sob she could produce” (27). Then, she puts Rie inside the large urn abandoned at the edge of the woods in the backyard. Rie screams and cries harder, and her tears satisfy Aya again: “Still, Rie’s terrified tears were particularly satisfying, like hands caressing me in exactly the right places” (28). Thus, by bullying Rie, Aya takes out her frustrations from home where she could not be the only child of her parents nor an orphan who is eventually adopted: “Every day of my life I had heard someone crying at the Light House. (...) And I had tried my best to love every one of them because I was the orphan no family wanted to adopt, the only one who could never leave the Light House” (28).

By bullying the baby, symbolically, Aya also attempts to extinguish her motherhood in herself. She bullies someone who is weaker and more fragile so that she would not wake motherhood in herself. Aya’s bullying escalates to the point where Rie’s health is endangered. On one occasion in the rainy season, when a fight breaks out over one of the toys and Rie begins to cry, Aya goes over to pick her up. As she sobs, Rie wriggles her fingers between the buttons on Aya’s blouse, “searching for the comfort of a breast” (“Diving” 36). At that time, Aya is confused

with her own motherhood: “Little children are like a different species, and I watched Rie the way another person might watch a rare specimen in a zoo. I wanted to pet her, to spoil her, but I didn’t know how to do it” (37). Then, Aya takes Rie to her room and let her eat a rotten cream puff she bought four or five days earlier. That night, Rie is delivered to the hospital.

The following day, as Aya is about to leave Jun’s indoor swimming pool, it starts raining heavily. When she is about to run out into the rain, Jun calls Aya’s name and stops her. Aya confesses her frequent visits to the diving pool and shares her distress that she finds nothing interesting to her: “I come here straight from class and just sit and watch. I don’t have anything else to do. I don’t exercise, I don’t do much of anything. I must seem like a useless old woman to you” (“Diving” 49). Jun consoles her by saying, “You shouldn’t be so hard on yourself (...). You’ll find something that’s right for you eventually. You just seem uncertain right now” (49). Just as he cheers her, however, Jun also punishes Aya. After rambling from topic to topic, Jun reveals that he knew Aya tormented Rie because he was always watching Aya. Astonished, Aya became speechless. In the end, they are locked out of the pool and leave for home together.

“The Diving Pool” (1989) focuses on a girl who struggles to handle her nervousness and the discontent stemming from her adolescence. Specifically, Aya becomes extraordinarily aware of power divisions in her home and has desire to gain power. She loathes her mother due to her mother’s power to manage the orphanage. Aya also recognizes her father as an authoritative figure who, from a distance, controls the large family. Since she is frustrated by her own powerlessness, the protagonist forces power-harassment onto the infant. However, she also wishes to yield to Jun’s power, admiring him who dives powerfully and beautifully. Furthermore, the fact that she is the only child, who is not an orphan, becomes a superiority complex, which drives her desire for power even more.

Jun is depicted as an opposite adolescent figure of Aya. Unlike her, by being absorbed in diving, Jun is calm and free from the adolescent issues. He is written as a perfectly balanced boy, who takes on child-like innocence with adult style calmness, consistency and strength. Thus, he is idealized as someone who surpasses the protagonist. Jun's perspective is succeeded by the author's adult male protagonists in her later stories, such as *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* (Professor and the Housekeeper, 2003) and *Kotori* (Little Bird, 2012).

2.4 A Young Woman's Search for Her Female Identity in "Pregnancy Diary" (1990)

In 1990, the author gained recognition in the world of Japanese literature by receiving the prestigious Akutagawa Prize with her publication of "Pregnancy Diary." In this work, Ogawa, inspired by female writers from previous generations, deals with the female identity of a young college student. In this section, I would like to closely look at how Ogawa Yoko deals with the young female identity in the "Pregnancy Diary" (1990). In order to see how the author inherits the theme of female identity and distinguishes herself from the previous authors, I will compare her work with "Lonely Woman" (1977), written by Takahashi Takako, one of the leading female writers of the 1970s.

In the 1970s, women in Japan were in pursuit of their own sexuality, as they learned through feminist movements that their sexuality was historically structured by men. According to Yonaha Keiko, through the feminist movements in the 1960s and 1970s, women recognized the necessity to redefine being a woman on their own.¹⁴ Yonaha states, "In the historical discourse in which men were active in nature and women passive, women were men's object of pleasure, a

¹⁴ Yonaha, Keiko. "Onna no sekushuariti: gendai-shōsetsu ni hyogen sareta onna no saga." *NEW FEMINISM REVIEW Onna to hyogen*, Vol.2, pp.72-95, 1991.
Translation regarding this article is mine.

container to bear children, and a commercial product of marriage” (72). Yonaha maintains that “through a variety of women’s movements, it turned out that these discourses were irrelevant to the sexual natures but contingent upon social and cultural structures” (72).

In the historically structured gender discourse, particularly, women’s reproductive nature was regarded as their natural instinct in which they were to feel joy in bearing and raising children. Such male delusions created *bosei shinwa*, the so-called myth of motherhood. Influenced by the feminist movements, women writers of the 1970s strived to redefine female identity without male perspectives. Female authors such as Kōno Taeko (1926-2015), Takahashi Takako (1932-2013), and Tomioka Taeko (b.1935), resisted the myth of motherhood, exploring their own female identity.¹⁵ Those female writers depicted malice from independent women towards the male-centered society which created the misconception of femininity. Protagonists of those female writers are middle-aged, single career women who do not pursue marriage and childbirth and have strong grudge against men. In the following section, I would like to examine Takahashi Takako’s “Lonely Woman” (1977) and display the shared features of the female writers of the previous generation, who were prolific in the 1970s.

Takahashi’s story takes place at a time when there has been no rain for a long period. Women in the story, neighboring housewives, make a fuss over the extremely dry weather. This dry weather intensifies the women’s frustration and thirst for something hopeful to happen.

The protagonist is a single office lady who bears a flame of anger towards the male society where the myth of motherhood permeates. From the beginning of the story, the protagonist’s strong aversion to children is clearly expressed. The story starts when Sakiko, the protagonist, hears a fire

¹⁵ See, for instance; Kōno, Taeko. *Yōji gari*. Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1973.; Tomioka, Taeko. *Sūku*. Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1980.

siren at night, bearing a strange excitement. There are a series of arsons at local elementary schools. She obsessively “envisioned countless young children shrieking, roasting to a crisp in that inferno with no exit” (Takahashi 15).

That night, a policeman visits her apartment, entering her hallway without saying anything. As she is informed he is a policeman who is investigating the arsons, Sakiko pretends as if she knew about the arsonist and enjoys tantalizing the policeman, a metaphor of a traditional man who is exercising his authority. The policeman comes to doubt Sakiko, since she says with conviction, “I think it (the arsonist) was a woman” (Takahashi 10).

As her interest grows and he is about to leave her room to explore for the real arsonist, Sakiko finds the old newspaper covering her shawl. She is “strangely attracted to the headline” LONELY WOMAN (Takahashi 19). In the Home section of the paper, the article describes “lonely woman” in London as follows:

In the foggy city of London, you sometimes see a certain type of woman. She is no longer young, nor is she old. (...) Usually she is walking by herself. (...) She wanders around through the huge metropolis as if she has nothing to do. (...) they all bore the same mark. They exuded a peculiar blend of decay and vigor. (...) There is only one phrase to describe such a woman. In the sprawling city of London she is called a “lonely woman (Takahashi 19-20)

Sakiko instinctively senses that the arsonist is such a person. “‘Lonely woman.’ That was the name of the imaginary female arsonist” (20). Murmuring in a low voice, “Lonely woman,” her desire to go out to meet the arsonist vanishes.

After reading the article, Sakiko identifies herself as a “lonely woman” and fantasizes that she is the arsonist. As the policeman visits her apartment the following day, she pretends as if she was the arsonist and enjoys answering his inquiries.

She continues to mock men. The following day, she has a date with her male co-worker. On her date day, she goes to a café earlier than their appointment time. From a distance at the café, she is able to observe her colleague and sees how long he will wait for her. Two weeks earlier, she had the same kind of date with another man. She enjoys watching the men annoyed by waiting for her: “How much more exciting this sort of encounter was to her than actually meeting a man and conversing with him!” (Takahashi 29)

Her enjoyment is, however, interrupted all of a sudden. There is a line of people waiting for seats available. Suggesting that she share the table, a waiter indirectly urges her to leave. Although she does not answer to the waiter, a young man and woman sit down across from her. In the shared seat, Sakiko notices looks of annoyance on faces of the couple: “the pair seemed to be glancing hostilely at her, since she gave no sign of budging (...). The faces of the young man and woman sitting across from her turned toward Sakiko and glared reprovably” (Takahashi 29). Then, she also feels as though her colleague was glaring at her with condemnation like the couple in front of her:

She felt as if the reprovng stares being directed at her by the young couple who had happened to sit down across from her were actually being directed at her by the man with whom she had a date. The man had taken possession of the eye of the couple in front of her and was now glowering at Sakiko. (21)

Moreover, she is reminded of the policeman who cast the same cynical eyes on her: “And another image was superimposed on that one: the menacing looks that investigator had given her” (21).

Filled with resentment, she reimagines children being burnt while screaming in pain for consolation: “The imaginary arson, with its vivid flames and smoke and children’s screams, resumed its part-painful, part-pleasurable burning inside her” (21).

At the end of the story, Sakiko hears someone say, “I set the fire!” The voice is from a myna bird of her neighbor, an old housewife. By hearing the bird’s voice, Sakiko intuitively and instantly knows that she is not the only one who has frustration against the male society. As the policeman approaches to her, Sakiko resists the urge to say, “Things already seem to be out of control. (...) Because not only I but the old woman next door has begun to go mad” (Takahashi 32).

Thus, in Takahashi’s story, the protagonist’s fantasization of burnt children represents her rejection of motherhood as her female identity. Also, the imaginary fire on children symbolizes her flame of anger towards the society where single independent women are not welcomed. Note that at the cafe where she observes her colleague at a distance, the waiter prioritizes a young couple over the unmarried protagonist. The protagonist who refuses motherhood is, as a result, a “lonely woman,” left alone at the bottom of society. However, the lonely woman does not seem to be alone as the article about “lonely women” in London suggests that there are a number of “lonely women” in the societies all over the world. As mentioned, the ending also suggests that the protagonist and her older female neighbor shares the same frustration towards the society. Nonetheless, the ending of the story, which takes place in somewhere dry and without rain for consecutive weeks, suggests that nothing for the women will happen soon—no rain, no rainbow.

In “Pregnancy Diary” (1990), inspired by the previous female authors such as Takahashi, Ogawa deals with the same issue of female identity. However, Ogawa’s female characters are, unlike the previous writers, young women. Also, unlike those prior writers, women in Ogawa’s

story do not bear strong grudges against men—this is ascribed to the background of her story, which takes place in the contemporary society where gender equality is encouraged. Due to this, without men’s influences, Ogawa’s female characters examine their identity on their own. Instead of expressing women’s malice towards men, “Pregnancy Diary” focuses on the reactions of young women towards pregnancy.

In “Pregnancy Diary,” the story is portrayed as the diary of the narrator, a college student. Since her parents died from disease earlier, the narrator lives with her pregnant older sister and her brother-in-law in her parents’ house. The diary starts when her sister is about to leave for a women’s clinic. The pregnant sister is restless, figuring out how many temperature sheets she should bring. Coming back home, she informs the narrator of which she is now six-weeks pregnant.

The narrator’s diary is a record for the process of her older sister’s pregnancy leading to childbirth with detailed descriptions of her severe morning sickness and a series of nervous breakdowns. A lot of scholars in Japan examined this work and focused on the otherness of the fetus of the narrator’s sister. According to Mizuta Noriko, “*Ninshin karendā* (Pregnancy Diary) shows how the alienation between mind and body brought about by pregnancy is aggravated by technology” (“Women’s” 96):

The pregnant older sister of the story’s protagonist is troubled by terrible bouts of starving and binging, a controllable sense of displacement, and the attendant physical chain reactions. These troubles all start with the appearance of an alien—the fetus of her child, as revealed in a photograph taken ultrasonic scanner. Technology had invaded her womb before she was ready, giving her an image of her fetus on film to take home. (95)

Mizuta maintains that the new technology such as ultrasonic examination “leads her to the alien world inside of her body where the hostile other within awaits to destroy her” before she is mentally ready, and she is forced to see “the inside of the womb” which “is a foreign world that threatens the pregnant woman, and the fetus is an other living there” (96). In addition, Kurata Yoko also sees the fetus as an alien or cyborg, a foreign substance with a fictional figure, and argues that “Pregnancy Diary” is one of the first novels which clearly fought back to the motherhood myth in the postwar times. Thus, these scholars focus on the otherness of fetus, which invades the unready mind of pregnant sister, but not the narrator’s psychological issue. I would rather like to focus on the narrator’s resistant reactions to her pregnant sister and examine how the author deals with the young woman’s female identity in “Pregnancy Diary” (1990).

The narrator describes her older sister in a condemnatory way, as if she despises her. The voice stems from her disappointment in her pregnant sister who is losing the girlhood (*shōjo-sei* or *shōjo*) in her. In the beginning of the story, the narrator describes the childhood memories with her sister. When they were girls, the sisters used to play in the backyard of a hospital, *M clinic*, which her sister decided on for her future childbearing. Her description of the childhood play represents the girls’ innocent freedom, which invigorated the young sisters: “There was a carefully tended lawn behind the building, and we loved to roll down it. As I rolled, glimpses of green grass and dazzling sky alternated in my vision, blurring to a pale turquoise. Then the sky and the wind and the earth would recede for a moment and I felt as if I were floating in space” (“Pregnancy” 59).¹⁶ After playing in the garden, they climbed on stacks of empty boxes and secretly stared through the window into the examination room together, whispering to each other about how excited they were to see inside of the hospital. The sisters share these memories of girlhood as

¹⁶ I abbreviate “Pregnancy Diary” as “Pregnancy.”

outsiders free from an adult woman's reality. The narrator believed that the sister and herself shared the same identity as *shōjo* until her sister married and became pregnant.

The sister's world is the closed space where no one else is welcomed. To the narrator, her brother-in-law is a disturbing invader to the sisters' world which is supposed to be exclusive to these girls. Due to this, the narrator expresses her loathing against her brother-in-law intermittently throughout her diary. From the beginning, she disdains him. The narrator writes that she knew that "he was a bit dull" from the first time she met him at his dentist's office. When she got a cavity, she went to his dentist's office as suggested by her sister. As he appeared and met her, the narrator immediately knew how nervous he was; with exaggerated politeness, he gave a running commentary on the state of her mouth. Then, she wondered to herself "whether this poor man, wrapped in his mask and his white jacket, was really going to marry my sister" ("Pregnancy" 92). As the tip of his finger ran over in her mouth, she "fought the urge to bite down" with all her might (93).

The narrator in her diary expresses her resistant reactions to her transforming sister, who is about to completely grow out of being a girl. Feeling disgusted, the narrator writes about her sister's pregnant body. To the narrator, her body starts to look like "a giant tumor" (*Ninshin* P.64). Furthermore, the narrator starts to regard her sister as an "uncanny" being (*bukimi na* in original Japanese text, *Ninshin* 59). In the psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud's term "uncanny (Das Unheimliche)" means the state where one feels mysterious for a familiar object. The author's choice of the word "bukimi" suggests the connotation of the Freudian "uncanny." Also, it is associated with abjection, Julia Kristeva's coined psychoanalytical theory that a child feels a sense of horror when detaching from his or her mother. The narrator's sense of "bukimi" towards her sister occurs due to her mental detachment from her sister, whom, in her psychology, she thought

she was connected with by shared girlhood memories. These expressions indicate the narrator's unwillingness to acknowledge the fact that her sister is becoming an adult woman growing out of girlhood.

In addition to the detailed observations on her sister's body, the narrator describes the mental breakdowns of her sister. As soon as the morning sickness starts, her sister complains about macaroni and cheese that the narrator made: "Doesn't the sauce on the macaroni remind you of digestive juices? ... The noodles are strange, too. The way they squish when I bite into them makes me feel like I'm chewing on intestines, little slippery tubes full of stomach juices" ("Pregnancy" 67). In addition, in one day during the twelfth week of pregnancy of her sister, as the narrator fries bacon and eggs, bursts into tears, screaming "Can't you *do* something? ... Butter, grease, egg, pork—I can't breathe!" (73-74) Due to the morning sickness, her sister's "nerves and her hormones and her emotions seem all out of whack" (76). By focusing on her sister's nervous breakdown, the narrator attempts to see her sister's confusion resulted from her pregnancy.

Thus, the whole story is depicted as if the narrator wishes to reverse the time before her sister's marriage, pregnancy, and childbirth—to the time when the sisters were girls. The highlight of the story is that the narrator makes jars of grapefruit jam for her sister. The narrator works part-time at a supermarket and happens to get a lot of American grapefruits. One of the stock staff spills a whole cart of eggs on the grapefruits so they become disposals. Making a jar of grapefruit jam, the protagonist remembers about what she learned at a conference that her fellow-students dragged her to a few months earlier. In a presentation she attended, the protagonist learned that American grapefruits are highly carcinogenic and possibly damage human chromosomes. At the end of the story, her sister goes into labor. The story ends with the protagonist climbing the fire escape in the hospital and goes to meet her "sister's ruined child" ("Pregnancy" 105).

Neither the narrator nor her sister celebrates the pregnancy. The younger sister refuses to lose the shared girlhood and the sisterhood bond. As a result, the narrator builds her spite to the point where she starts to entertain the idea of how American grapefruits *may* affect the baby.

Ogawa's "Pregnancy Diary" (1990) deconstructs Saitō Minako's notion of "pregnancy novels." In *Ninshin shōsetsu* (Pregnancy Novels, 1994), examining popular modern novels, Saitō Minako argues that a number of modern novels carried stories about unwanted pregnancy and thereby created a sub-genre, which Saitō coined "ninshin shōsetsu" (pregnancy novels). According to Saitō, modern "pregnancy novels" unfold stories in which a woman, who want to bear a child, and a man, who does not want to have a child, contend for childbirth. In such stories, a man eventually overpowers a woman, compelling her to have an abortion.

In Ogawa's "Pregnancy Diary" (1990), the narrator's sister is apparently "a woman who wants to bear a child" since she recorded her body temperature for two years. However, her emotional disturbances throughout the story emphasize her intense anxiety towards her own pregnant body, which lives its reproductive instinct. In this sense, the narrator's sister is not like the modern women in Saitō's "pregnancy novels." Also, unlike the men in "pregnancy novels," the husband of the narrator's sister is by no means a forceful man who insists on neither bearing a baby nor having an abortion.

Ogawa's destruction of Saitō's *pregnancy novels* is a result of the contemporary gender-equal society—as a plausible excuse of the contemporary society where gender-equality is encouraged, Ogawa sets the husband of the narrator's sister as someone not influential to the family. The narrator's brother-in-law is supposed to be the leader of the house due to the Japanese traditional *ie* system. However, he is depicted as someone who does not have such conventional masculinity. Moreover, as a result of the encouragement of gender-equality, the narrator's sister is

not necessarily ready to play a domestic role. Nor does she work outside the home independently. Furthermore, his parents, who visit the narrator's house for every seasonal and conventional event, have little impact on their son and daughter-in-law's nuclear home, unlike a traditional, modern Japanese family.

In terms of Etō's theory of "collapse of mother," this story caricatures the difficulty of contemporary women, who cannot have a role model neither in a woman managing the home nor in a mother who raises children due to the absence of an authoritative male figure. As mentioned, before gender-equality was encouraged, a male figure in a family was a leader who controlled his home. Since such figures are missing in the contemporary society, women cannot articulate the role they have to play at their homes.

In this section, I have examined two different postwar female literary works Takahashi's "Lonely Woman" and Ogawa's "Pregnancy Diary." While Takahashi's protagonist challenged men and male-centric society, Ogawa's women hardly have such intentions and merely reacting negatively to the transformations of the pregnant body. The story focuses on the narrator who tries to protect or regain the shared girlhood—because it is the realm where she and her sister are protected from being sexualized and being exposed to the male-centered society. Takahashi's protagonist, already in the framework of the men-versus-women binary system, hopes to subvert the power balance between men and women. As it is the sanctuary where she and her sister can deviate from such system, Ogawa's narrator holds on to staying *shōjo*.

As examined in the previous sections, thus, Ogawa's writing interests converge on young women in the contemporary society. Her characters in the early works are obsessed with the girl in them and resist growing up. In *Mīna's March* (2006), the author deals with the topic of pre-

adolescent girlhood, which she depicts positively. In the next section, I will examine this work in depth.

2.5 *Mīna's March* (2006)

Since her debut in 1989, Ogawa has dealt with the theme of girls. In the latter half period of her writing career, the author discontinued dealing with the theme of girls. Instead, she started to positively depict adult men's quiet life, which is free from sexual conflicts. For instance, *Hakase no aishita sūshiki* (The Housekeeper and The Professor, 2003) focuses on a retired math professor with a memory disorder. He is unable to retain his memories for longer than eighty minutes. The story is narrated through his housekeeper; a single mother with a son. The housekeeper admires the innocent passion of the professor, who joyfully overcomes his disabilities through his love for mathematics. For another example, *Kotori* (Little Bird, 2012) is a story about a pair of elderly brothers who live happily in their secluded space. The elder brother is capable of speaking the languages of birds but is unable to speak with people. The younger brother takes care of his brother. These brothers are depicted as marginal people who are out of contact with society. However, they live peacefully in their closed world, doing only what they want to. These elderly male protagonists in her later stories are depicted like innocent and naive children, who focus on what they are passionate about.

In terms of the author as a storyteller, Ogawa began taking on an omniscient view. In the early works, the author seemed to identify herself with the girl narrators/protagonists, who are mentally unstable due to the adolescence. However, since the publication of *Neko o daite zō to oyogu* (Swimming with an Elephant while Holding a Cat, 2009), her viewpoint altered. Instead of standing on the shaky viewpoint of an adolescent girl, the author began depicting mature male protagonists through an omniscient narrator.

Mina's March (Mīna no kōshin, 2006) is told from viewpoint of the forty-something narrator, who reminisces about the experiences of her twelve-year old self. The format of the story stresses that the narrator calmly tells her story from a distance with the careful outlook of the whole story. The enhancement of Ogawa's writing skill is perhaps due to her own experiences in aging. Between the debut year of 1989 and 2006, she went through child-birthing, becoming a mother, and being in her forties.

Among her works published in the latter half of her career, *Mina's March* (2006) is an exception of how she deals with the topic of girls. This work exhibits her mature development of the theme of *shōjo*, which she has consistently dealt with. *Mina's March* displays the author's belief in the power of girlhood experiences, which eventually help the girls accomplish coming-of-age. In this section, I will examine how Ogawa deals with the theme of girlhood in *Mina's March*.

The story is narrated by Tomoko, a twelve-year-old girl from Okayama and takes place in Ashiya in 1972. The story of her year-long stay at her cousin's home is narrated through the voice of grown Tomoko, who is presently in her forties as of 2006. Ogawa herself was forty-years old in 2006. The narrator's perspective reflects Ogawa's own as a mature professional author. Tomoko's family consists of her mother and herself, with her father having died from cancer when Tomoko was seven. Since the death of her husband, Tomoko's mother has made a living working at a sewing factory and dressmaking at home on the side. In order to sophisticate her skills, she decides to go to a dressmaking school in Tokyo for a year, apart from Tomoko.

The story starts when Tomoko comes to live in Ashiya with her cousin's family, leaving her home in Okayama. Tomoko had just graduated from elementary school and began junior high school in Ashiya in 1972. Contrary to her sobbing mother, Tomoko is excited to live with her

aunt's family because, to Tomoko, her cousin's family is like a family she had imagined since childhood. Tomoko grew up in a frugal environment, living in a rented house in Okayama. Her fantasy of the fairytale family was first motivated by the made-in-Germany stroller which her aunt sent to her when she was born. As she grew up, looking at the stroller, Tomoko often fantasized as if she was actually a princess somewhere in Europe, kidnapped from a castle.

Her childhood fantasy is realized as soon as she meets her uncle at Ashiya Station. Her uncle, half-German-half-Japanese, leaning on his Mercedes Benz in his stylish suit, waits for Tomoko. She is also amazed at his house built in Spanish style, which, in her eyes, looks like a castle she had imagined. Her fantasy goes on until she notices the issue of Mīna's family.

Contrary to Tomoko's mother-child family, her cousin's family is rich and international, and has a remarkable lineage. The father of her uncle has a tremendous career and his house was built by his father, who was the second-generational president of a beverage company. Before owning the company, he studied at Berlin University during his mid-twenties. There, he met and married Rosa, a German woman, and brought her to Japan. As soon as he returned to Japan, he developed his company by selling a health drink, *Fressy*, and built the house in Ashiya in 1927. During the twelfth year of marriage, Rosa gave birth to her son named Erich-Ken, Tomoko's uncle.

Tomoko's uncle traced almost the same path as his father except that he married a Japanese woman, Tomoko's aunt, a research assistant for the Fressy factory at that time. After coming back from studying in Germany, Erich-Ken boosted the sale of Fressy by refining the package design and succeeded his father's position. Immediately after marriage, Tomoko's aunt gave birth to her son, Ryūichi. And seven years later, Mīna was born.

Before Mīna was born, her grandfather owned a small zoo park, Fressy Zoo, in the garden. On the tenth birthday of Erich-Ken, his father bought a pygmy hippopotamus from Liberia and

named her Pochiko. After Pochiko came to Ashiya, he bought more animals such as peacocks and Taiwanese monkeys. Although after two years, due to the World Wars, Fressy Zoo came to an end, Pochiko survived and continues to be treated as a member of the family. Mīna in particular telepathically communicates with Pochiko. However, Pochiko is not only her playmate. Mīna, an eleven-year-old elementary school girl with asthma, is believed to be incapable of walking to school due to her illness. Therefore, Mīna goes to school riding on Pochiko.

Mīna's family is described as an inclusive family. In addition to a variety of animals, they include individuals who are not directly related, Yoneda and Kobayashi. Yoneda, the housekeeper, is in charge of the house, mainly playing a motherly role rather than Mīna's actual mother. Since 1916, when Mīna's grandmother Rosa came to Ashiya, Yoneda has worked for the family. Yoneda and Rosa are now both eighty-three years old. They became close friends and are almost like twin sisters. Kobayashi is the gardener whose father was a keeper for Fressy Zoo. His job is basically taking care of Mīna, and he takes her on Pochiko to school every day. Also, on the occasions of her asthma attacks flare, it is Kobayashi who takes her to a hospital due to the absence of her actual father.

Absence of her father is an obstacle for Mīna. In the eyes of the young Tomoko, her uncle is a handsome gentleman whom she wishes to have as a father. All the adults in the family seem to know the reason for his absence, so does Mīna and her body quickly reacts to her father's absence. The evening when Tomoko moves in, her uncle stays at home. However, soon after school starts, he leaves home and is beyond the reach of his family for almost a month. Immediately after his absence, Mīna gets an asthma attack and stays a night at hospital to recover. This repeatedly happens to Mīna when her father is out of the house.

Mīna's predicament is thus derived from the absence of her father. Her way of relaxing herself is to write short stories on matchboxes. Mīna creates short stories, inspired by a picture on a label of the matchbox which she carries every day to ignite the lamp in the "light room." Avoiding her asthma attacks is the top priority for the family. The family blindly believes that the health drink, Fressy, and this "light room," where bulbs around a pot are hung from the ceiling radiates rays of lights, are the secrets to her health. Mīna is in the habit of being exposed to the lights as a remedy for asthma. In the early summer, Mīna invites Tomoko into her room and pulls out countless boxes from beneath her bed. In each box, a matchbox is attached on the bottom and her story is scribed around the matchbox. Her matchboxes are brought by Mīna's first love, "Wednesday boy"; a deliveryman who brings a carton of Fressy and also an empty box of matches on Wednesdays. The first of Mīna's stories that Tomoko reads is about an elephant who fails to play seesaw with children. On the picture of the matchbox, an elephant and children are on seesaw—Elephant is below, and children are above. Mīna reflects her feeling of fear towards death in this story. Mīna's story on the sticker is as follows:

Elephant was always looking at the children playing on the seesaw. Hoping to play like them, Elephant asked the children to play on seesaw together. The children agreed to play together. However, immediately after Elephant sits on the side of seesaw, it stops moving. Elephant remained below, and children were high above Elephant. Not giving up, Elephant catches and places more and more children on seesaw. The scared children, high up from the ground, tell Elephant to get them down. But Elephant refuses and keeps kidnaping more children. If you see a red

seesaw, you should not get close to it. There might be Elephant and the children who can never come down. The end. (*Mīna* 116)¹⁷

This story suggests the nervousness of death of Mīna herself, who is sensitive to balance between life and death due to her asthma. When asked how she feels when having an asthma attack, Mīna answers as follows:

When I can no longer breathe, my eyesight shuts down. But, at the same time, unintelligible things come to be visible in my eyes. Although I feel like I have gone far away, I realize that I've actually come somewhere too close—inside my heart.... I sometimes feel like I should stay there without going back. But I always hear my mother's voice and come back to reality. Then I can no longer see the too-close things. (49-50)

According to her lines above, Mīna is aware of her own death, and sometimes she would almost give up on life. However, meeting with Tomoko in 1972, helps change Mīna from a sickly young female introvert to an independent girl with flexible perspectives towards the world.

The narrator, Tomoko, describes Mīna's skinny physique and stresses her frailty intermittently in the story. Due to her illness, Mīna cannot help but to be dependent on others. Mīna's dependence before meeting Tomoko is shown by her way of going to school; she believes that she is unable to walk a long distance without her pygmy hippo. Accordingly, Mīna, a bookish girl, cannot go to the public library on foot, either. Therefore, Mīna asks Tomoko to borrow books from the library.

Tomoko becomes a facilitator who connects Mīna to the outer world. Moreover, Tomoko is also the one who brings peace to Mīna's family by solving the issue of her uncle's absence due

¹⁷ I abbreviate *Mīna's March* as *Mīna*.

to his love affair. As a result, Mīna gets over her chronic asthma and becomes an independent girl who confidently “marches” to the outer world on her own. Furthermore, thanks to the memories with Tomoko, instead of becoming an introverted woman, Mīna ends up becoming an outgoing individual and establishes herself as a publisher in Cologne. Mīna also influences Tomoko to the point where Tomoko eventually becomes a librarian. Having grown up surrounded only by women’s fashion magazines, Tomoko was unfamiliar with novels. However, thanks to Mīna’s errands, Tomoko learns the joy of reading novels and experiences her first love as well.

In the morning of April seventeenth 1972, reading a newspaper, Mīna is shockingly informed from the newspaper that Kawabata Yasunari commits suicide by inhaling gas. Mīna, who is sensitive to the topic of death, wonders, “Why did he decide to leave the world where there are so many people who read his works?” (*Mīna* 84) As Kawabata’s suicidal news stirs her interest in his works, she asks Tomoko to borrow one of the works on her recommendation from the public library. Mīna has already read “The Dancing Girl of Izu,” *Snow Country*, and *The Old Capital*. But Tomoko has no idea which book she should borrow for Mīna. As soon as arriving at the public library, Tomoko asks a librarian, a college student part-timer, how to borrow a book and his recommendation for Kawabata’s work. Since he wears a turtleneck sweater, she secretly names him as *Tokkuri* (turtleneck sweater). Making a library card and conversing with him, drawn to his kindness, Tomoko’s first love begins.

The most highlighted event of 1972 in the story is the Munich Olympic Games. In the middle of July, Mīna is back home from hospital, fanatical about the Japanese men’s volleyball due to the television program “Road to Munich.” Influenced by Mīna, Tomoko also gets into men’s volleyball. Rosa and Yoneda also join, and the four women get together in a room to watch the men’s volleyball Olympic games.

The 1972 Summer Olympics was held in Munich, Germany, where Mīna's grandmother Rosa was born and raised until she left for Japan for her marriage. On September fifth, the Olympic games were interrupted by the "Munich Massacre" when a group of Palestinian terrorists broke into the Olympic Village where Israeli athletes rested, and killed an athlete and a coach. Then the group took the other nine athletes and their coaches and shut themselves with the hostages inside a room. The terrorist group called themselves "Black September." They demanded the release of Palestinians in prison in Israel and airplanes bound for the Arab countries. When a string of the blindfold people appear before the group on TV, Rosa gets heartbreakingly shocked as if she knew the ending of this breaking news. The terrorist group and the Western German armies exchanged fire with one other and, in the end, all the hostages were killed as Rosa expected. This incident reminds Rosa of her twin sister, who was a victim of Jewish persecutions. After watching the news, Rosa goes into her own room and gently rubs the picture taken with her sister in 1938.

Mīna's created story of a pair of seahorses symbolizes Rosa's tragic past. The picture on the label is a pair of seahorses sitting on a crescent moon. Mīna's story is as follows:

A pair of seahorses sit on crescent moon, which is becoming smaller every second. Hoping not to separate, the seahorses tie their tails together. However, when moon finally becomes a new moon, the seahorses get separated, falling down into different oceans. The seahorses forget where they came from and start completely new lives. When they look up to the sky and find the crescent moon, each of the seahorses feels like they are remembering some scene they might have seen before they were born. They are never able to recall their memories on moon, but wander alone at the bottom of the sea. (*Mīna* 157)

This story symbolizes the life of Rosa and her sorrow over separation with her twin sister.

Significance of women's pairing is stressed throughout the story. Rosa's belief in the power of a pair of women is clearly expressed in her room where there are a lot of pictures of herself with her twin sister, and her cosmetics whose brand labels are also twin sisters. Furthermore, when Tomoko visits Rosa's room, as soon as she knows Tomoko's *kanji* name (written as 朋子), Rosa tells the girl that she likes it because there are two moons standing side by side. Rosa tells her that the moons in her name are irreplaceable, equal to each other, and not lonely because they have each other.

Although Rosa lost her sister, Yoneda becomes like her twin sister. Yoneda is unmarried and is out of touch with her relatives and friends. Rosa and Yoneda are opposite in appearance and personality; Rosa is fashionable, interested in cosmetics, and unfamiliar with housework, while Yoneda is uninterested in fashion and cosmetics but familiar with housework. They sleep in rooms next to each other. When they sing together, it becomes perfect harmony. Moreover, several years after Tomoko leaves, Rosa suffers from dementia and Yoneda is the only one who understands what Rosa says even though she speaks only German which Yoneda does not understand. Likewise, Rosa's philosophy is applicable to the female pair of Tomoko and Mīna and is consistently emphasized throughout the story. Through sharing the same girlhood memories, Tomoko and Mīna influence each other. Instead of remaining an introverted bookish person, Mīna eventually becomes a mediator between Japan and overseas for publishing translated books. In Tomoko's case, Mīna's errands motivated her to become a reader and a librarian in her future.

According to Saitō Minako, in *shōjo shōsetsu* (Japanese novels for girls), a protagonist, often a young female orphan, has one good female friend and a female enemy (*L-Bungaku* 100). Unlike *shōjo shōsetsu*, The girls in Ogawa's works do not confront female friends. Instead, by pairing with another girl, Ogawa's girls can get over issues such as the problems with the family

and their first love. This feature *Mina's March* (2006) displays is one of the new trends of girl culture. Contemporary works, such as Takemoto Nobara's *Shimotsuna Monogatari* (English title as *Kamikaze Girls*, 2002), Iwai Shunji's *Hana to Arisu* (Hana and Alice, 2004), and Yaguchi Shinobu's *Swingu gāruzu* (Swing Girls, 2004), already reflected this trend in their novels and films. Unexceptionally, Ogawa's *Mina's March* is easily one of the works which shows the same tendency.

As for the family issues, in *Mina's March* (2006), the author exhibits her belief in Shōwa (1926-1988) family beliefs where there is a strong bond among family members. Particularly by displaying the significant influence of the father's absence to the family, the author expresses appreciation for a father's figure. The father in this story is not authoritative, unlike patriarchal families in the prewar times. Rather, the father is someone who maintains balance in the family. Every time Tomoko passes her uncle's room, on his desk, she finds broken things such as a necklace from Rosa, a mechanical pencil from Mīna, and a blender from Yoneda. The longer his absence is, the more broken stuff there appears on his desk. When he comes back home, Mīna's father repairs everything on his desk and returns it all to where it belongs. As represented by this, his role is to repair issues and maintain balance of the family.

The mother figure in this story is technically Yoneda, who manages the house. Therefore, Mīna's mother does not work inside the home. She does not work outside either since her husband is a president of a beverage company. Although she does not have any work-related issues, Mīna's mother is discontent about her husband who is often absent from home. However, she does not confront her husband. In this sense, she is a typical postwar-time wife and mother. Mīna's mother is stationed in the smoking room in the house in Ashiya. In order for herself to destress, she looks for typographical errors in a variety of written materials with a glass of wine, alone. Asked how

she can find a misprint by Tomoko, her aunt answers, “You just need to closely and carefully examine letter by letter. It is like digging up a precious stone. But sometimes, I find something far from a gem.” Then she passes a copy of her husband’s company pamphlet for public relations. There, Fressy is misprinted, written as “Nurressy.” She also sends a letter to the Olympic headquarter regarding a typographical error she finds when watching the Olympic game. Contrary to her husband, who fixes issues in the house, she is interested in publicity and has motivations for correcting societal errors. In a way, she is like Gilbert and Gubert’s “madwoman in the attic,” who has the potential to be mad, pushed into somewhere out of society. Although she is interested in work outside home, Mīna’s mother is unable to have a place to contribute herself to the society. But she also shows something manly (see her drinking and smoking) and actually works as a sort of voluntary proofreader. It could be said that her willingness to contribute to society is later succeeded and enhanced by her daughter Mīna, who becomes an editor and publisher.

At the end of her stay in Ashiya, Tomoko engages in fixing the issue of Mīna’s family. Towards the end of the story, “Wednesday boy” no longer appears in Mīna’s house, replaced with another deliveryman. Mīna has an asthma attack again and gets hospitalized. In order to find Wednesday boy, Tomoko goes to her uncle’s factory without telling anyone. Tomoko takes the pamphlet on which her aunt marks a typographical error “Nuressy” and joins a factory tour which guides around the factory with a minibus. In a break time, Tomoko sneaks out of the tour and heads for the marshaling department so that she can find out where Wednesday boy is assigned. Tomoko is found and scolded by the section manager but gets to know that “Wednesday boy” quit his job due to his marriage which caused him to go back to his hometown to take over his parents’ business. While listening to the section manager, Tomoko catches a sight of his notebook page

which scribes her uncle's name and a list of places where he stays. She asks the section manager for his matchbox, receives it, and heads for the apartment where her uncle stays.

Arriving at the apartment, Tomoko notices his car is parked in front of the apartment. The number of the parking spot is 202, which she finds a sense of disgust. To Tomoko, the number 202 looks as if a pair of 2 is interrupted by 0. This also intensifies Rosa's theory, with the number 0 symbolizing the discord which interferes between Mīna's parents. Tomoko finds a mailbox of the room 202 and an unknown woman's name on it. On the bumper of his car, Tomoko leaves her aunt's pamphlet with a misprint "Nuressy" clearly marked in red.

As she arrives near Mīna's house, Tomoko finds all the family members waiting for her outside. She is surprised to find her uncle in the crowd and that no one asks her what she was doing. In the night, Tomoko finds her uncle staying home, fixing the broken things that have been left on his desk. Tomoko also finds the pamphlet she put on his car on his desk. As she leaves his room, she says to him, "Please fix the counter. And 'Nuressy,' too" (*Mīna* 304). Since this day, her uncle comes home every day. As a result, Mīna does not have any asthma attacks anymore.

The death of her pigmy hippo finally strengthens Mīna to the point of "marching" on her own. On Christmas in 1972, after celebrating, the woods near Mīna's house catch fire. The family leaves the house and stays at a bachelor apartment which her uncle's company owns. Fortunately, the forest fire does not affect their house. However, the Christmas becomes the anniversary of Pochiko's death. According to a veterinarian who took care of Pochiko for a long time, Pochiko died of old age, not because of the forest fire. Since this day, Mīna goes to school by herself without relying on her hippo. Her independence begins from this day as "Mīna marches by herself" (331).

The last of Mīna's story is indicative for her coming-of-age—she is no longer a fragile girl who is extraordinarily aware of death. As the day Tomoko is to leave is decided, Tomoko and

Mīna shut themselves in the light room and read the last story Mīna created. The label on the matchbox is a girl who holds a small glass bottle in her hands. It is the matchbox which Tomoko received from the section manager at the Fressy Factory. Mīna's last story is as follows:

There is a girl who wants to know what would happen after death. She collects a variety of dead things such as dead bugs and keeps them under her bed. She realizes that they will decompose but never completely disappear. One day, she learns through a book that shooting stars are dying stars. Then, the girl prepares an empty glass bottle, collects shooting stars in it, and covers it with a lid. The next day, for the moment when she looks at the empty bottle, she thinks, "Look! This proves that life becomes empty after death." However, as she shakes the bottle and carefully looks inside, she finds a droplet of condensation, which reflects her face. She learns that even when she dies, she will not disappear and realizes that things in this world never disappear but survive by changing shapes. Reassured by imagining that she will become a shooting star after death, she could sleep soundly. (*Mīna* 340-341)

This story presents that Mīna gets over her fear of death. Freed from such fear, Mīna is now a stronger girl, who "marches" by herself confidently. Before graduating junior high school in Japan, Mīna leaves for Switzerland and enters a boarding school. After graduating from the University of Frankfurt with a degree in literature, she works for a trading company and a Japanese embassy. At the age of thirty-five, in 1995, she establishes herself as a publisher in Cologne and mediates publication of Japanese translated works. Tomoko narrates, "The girl who could not go to school without Pochiko is now marching in a far land where I don't know" (344).

At the end of the story, the grown Tomoko and Mīna exchange letters. In her letter, Mīna writes that Tomoko should come and visit her place in Cologne with her parents sometime. In the

letter of Tomoko, who is now a librarian and has sons, Tomoko writes that she visited her uncle and aunt's house in Kurakuen and celebrated his seventy-seventh birthday. Tomoko informs that even though he had a surgery on his heart, her uncle looked healthy like nothing ever had happened. Tomoko also tells that after the celebration, Tomoko stopped by the Ashiya house where Mīna's family had lived decades ago. The house was transformed into a collective housing for a chemical company and it was hard for her to recognize where she spent the year 1972. By chance, she met the owner of the housing and got to look inside the site. Tomoko, as expected, was astonished at how the view changed so much that she could not even recognize where she is standing. However, there was only one thing she could recognize, a bayberry tree under which all the animals from Fressy Zoo were buried. In her eyes, the tree stood there as if protecting the burials. Tomoko ends her letter as follows: "Flowers of salvia bloomed under the bayberry tree. It looked as if seeds flew from Liberia where Pochiko was born and bloomed the red flowers" (*Mīna* 348). The pygmy hippo Pochiko is the key for Tomoko to access her memories of the Ashiya house. Pochiko was not only a pet but a member of Mīna's family. Compared with the contemporary family Ogawa depicted earlier, Mīna's family is, thus, an inclusive family where there are non-blood family and rare animals as their family members.

In terms of the topic of girls, Mīna is written as a prototype of *shōjo*, an innocent, unique girl. The girl meets another girl, whom she pairs with. By pairing with Tomoko, Mīna becomes strong. Rosa is Mīna's archetype. Rosa is also empowered by pairing with Yoneda and emphasizes their elderly but girlish kind of strength.

The world of *shōjo* in this story is multicultural and inclusive. Mīna's father, the only male figure in the family, is not excluded and not depicted as an authoritative father figure. Instead, he is described as a handsome and kind person who always wants to help his family.

Thus, *Mina's March* is the author's important work in which she wrote about the world of *shōjo* to the fullest. Unlike the girls in her former works, Mīna is depicted as a girl, who is younger and more innocent and coexists with the adults peacefully.

2.6 Summary of Ogawa's Works

Since her debut in 1988, Ogawa writes stories which focus on the theme of womanhood/girlhood, female identity, and *shōjo*. In response to the needs for girls' 'Initiation,' the author creates stories on young women and empowers female readers.

In the 1980s, girls in Japan resisted growing up, hopeless for their future. According to Ōtsuka Eiji, there was no 'Initiation' for girls, for a long time, contrary to boys (*Monogatari*). In *The Hero's Journey*, Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), an American mythologist, claimed that novels share a common structure in which a boy protagonist goes on an adventure and accomplishes his mission in the end. In the stories with this structure, in order for him to win the victory and grow up into his new self in the end, he is to first leave his hometown (The Departure), then to go through "The Initiation" where he would face a variety of hardships, fight battles with villains, and receive rewards for defeating them. In the end, he is to return home (The Return), be praised by the King, and finally become a hero. In his analysis on Miyazaki Hayao's film *Kiki's Delivery Service* (1989), Ōtsuka states that one of the reasons why the film became a huge hit was that it responded to the need for girl's Bildungsroman, which did not appear after the Meiji era (*Majo*). Also, his book *Monogatari chiyu ron—Naze shōjo wa katsudon o daite hashiru no ka* (Theories of Healing Tales—Why Shōjo Runs Holding A Pork Cutlet, 1991), Ōtsuka argues that in spite of wanting to become a new self, a lot of *shōjo* pursued 'The Initiation' for NOT becoming an adult. As an example of this, he discusses the girls' suicidal attempt incident in 1989 in Tokushima prefecture (*Monogatari* 107-122). This group of girls is composed of two of fourteen-year-olds and one ten-

year-old girl. These girls took four doses of cold medicines at one time in order for them to be spiritually reborn. After regaining consciousness, they explained the following to the police seriously:

School and home were boring. So, we discussed and determined we should die.

We, girls, were princesses in our past lives. In order to look into the previous world, we thought we should die. But we were too scared to cut our wrists and it would be too hard to drink bitter agricultural chemicals. Then, we decided on painkillers so that we could die without pain. (*Monogatari* 108)

This group of girls mentioned that they thought they could become girls again if they “die” once, but did not think that they would actually die. Ōtsuka reads this incident as the girls’ ‘Initiation’ for their spiritual rebirth as *shōjo*—girls want to remain *shōjo*.

Ogawa’s young female protagonists are similar to these girls. Her early stories focus on the issue of girl’s adolescence. Those stories deal with two different topics. On one hand, the girls in “When a Swallowtail Falls Apart” (1988) and “Pregnancy Diary” (1990), losing freedom as a girl, hold a sense of rage from their own powerlessness. On the other hand, her early stories contained a topic of “initiation” in the form of the young orphan boy’s efforts to grow up and the female protagonist’s admiration for him, a topic found in “Diving Pool” (1989).

Mīna’s March (2006) focuses on a pre-adolescent girl. For the first time in her writing career, in *Mīna’s March*, the author clearly argued the idea of certain experiences from girlhood inspiring her for growing to a woman. The power Mīna fostered through the pre-adolescent experiences becomes the source of inspiration for coming-of-age. It is noteworthy that Mīna’s way of coming-of-age is different from boy’s coming-of-age. In the case of male stories, a young man meets an enemy, battles, wins, and is acknowledged as an adult. In the case of *Mīna’s March*, first,

she was a girl who introvertedly deals with her fear of death. But eventually, she gets over the fear on her own and becomes strong both mentally and physically. Her matchbox stories indicate her process of growing up.

For her female readers, in *Mīna's March*, Ogawa exhibits her ideal adult women as their role models—women with *shōjo*-ness or girlishness. Mina's home is structured in a way that the *shōjo* in her sparks to the fullest. It is a place where she is isolated from the outside world and thereby is an experimental place to nourish her innocent life energy. By pairing with another girl, she gains more girlish, reckless power. The ending of the story suggests that when she eventually enters society, the shared memories of their girlhood spring energy to live through life without losing girlhood. Thus, Ogawa Yoko succeeds in teaching the female readers the significance of the power of girlhood and gives hopeful perspectives to them.

CHAPTER 3. KAWAKAMI HIROMI

3.1 The Author, Kawakami Hiromi

In this chapter, I will discuss how Kawakami Hiromi develops her themes by making an in-depth examination of her stories. Before examining her literary works, in this section, I will delineate how Kawakami became a writer. Additionally, I will explain how she gained popularity by giving a summary of her earlier life before her debut, which pertains to my examination of her works.¹⁸

Kawakami Hiromi was born in 1958 in Tokyo. When she was three years old, Kawakami and her family moved to California because of her father's biology work. Her father later became a professor of biology at the University of Tokyo. The family stayed in California until Kawakami turned six years old. After she returned to Tokyo, Kawakami entered a local elementary school and at the age of 10, she transferred to Futaba Gakuen Elementary School, a private Catholic school. She went to Futaba Gakuen up until high school and entered Ochanomizu University in 1976 at the age of 18, majoring in biology. While in school, Kawakami joined the Society of Science Fiction and published a private magazine entitled, "Kosumosu" (Cosmos in English). For her undergraduate thesis, she wrote about the motility of urchins' sperm. After graduation, Kawakami worked at the medical chemistry research center at the University of Tokyo as a researcher. During this time, she was an assistant editor for *NW-SF*, another magazine related to science fiction, under the chairmanship of Yamano Kōichi, and she published several literary works. After two years as a researcher, she became a biology teacher at Futaba Junior High and High School. In 1986, Kawakami got married to a friend that she met through the Society of

¹⁸ I refer to the following two books regarding Kawakami's earlier life to her debut: Kawamura Minato, Hara Zen. *Gendai josei sakka kenkyu jiten*. Tokyo: Kanae Shobō, 2001.; Hara, Zen. *Gendai josei sakka dokuhon*. Kanae shobō, 2005.

Science Fiction during her college days. She quit her job after four years of teaching. Although she had not written while working, she started writing again after marrying. One year after the marriage, she gave birth to her first son and then to her second son three years later. Due to her husband's job relocations, Kawakami often moved from place to place. She lived in a variety of places, such as Nagoya, Akashi, Yamato (Kanagawa), Hadano (Kanagawa), and Musashino.

In 1994 at the age of 36, she made her official writing debut with “Kamisama” (meaning God in English), and later received the Pascal Short Story Prize for new writers. The following year, thanks to her short story “Bā” (Old Lady) being nominated for the Akutagawa Prize, she gained more attention as a promising new writer. In 1996, “Hebi o fumu” (Tread on a Snake) won the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. Nonami Asa, who was also a new writer and debuted around the same time as Kawakami, won the Naoki Prize, which is another highly regarded literary prize in Japan. The fact that female writers won the two highly reputable literary prizes became a sensation, and it was said that the time of women in literature had finally come. In 1999, Kawakami won two more prizes, the Murasaki Shikibu Literary Prize and the Bunkamura Deux Magots Prize for a collection of short stories in *Kamisama* (1998). She was also awarded the Ito Sei Literary Prize and the Women's Literary Prize for a collection of short love stories in *Oboreru* (1999). In 2001, she published *Sensei no kaban* (The English translation is *Briefcase*.) (2001), which became a best-seller book that garnered three different publishers and sold more than 150,000 copies. After the publication of *Sensei no Kaban*, Kawakami won the Tanizaki Jun'ichirō Prize. It was adapted for a television drama by the writer and director Taruhiko Kuze. In 2007, Kawakami received the Ministry of Education Art Encouragement Prize with the publication of *Manazuru* (2006). Her works, thus, are not only popular among readers in general, but also highly deemed by writers in the Japanese literary circle.

As of late 2016, so far, Kawakami has published 16 collections of short stories and 13 long novels. In her first collection of essays, *Aruyōna naiyōna* (*Seems to be, not to be*, 1999), she mentions that the reason why she restarted writing after marriage is because she did not have anyone to talk to:

About since when did you start writing novels? I often receive such questions since my award of the Akutagawa Literary Prize.

The first time when I wrote a novel was when I was a university student. I wrote for the sake of my club's magazine. Since my club had a few members, we wouldn't be able to publish a magazine if I didn't write. (...) I wrote because I was told, "Write," but when I started writing, I found that there was nothing more fun than writing, and I began to think writing is a matter of serious concern. But once I graduated from university and started working, because no one told me to, "Write," I stopped writing all of a sudden. (...) I seriously have no autonomy.

The next time when I started writing something like novels was when I got free time after quitting my job due to my husband's job transfer. I lived in an unknown place in an unknown land and talked to no one for all day long. One time, I counted how many words I spoke since the morning as a trial. It was only one word "Dōmo (which is a casual way to say "thanks" in Japanese)." I said it to the girl at the supermarket's cash register. At first, I was so astonished that I wrote several letters to my friends. But I did not receive any replies for a long time. Then, I decided to write novels. (...)

After a while since then, because I bore children, I came to talk with more people. But because I was a clumsy person who could speak no more than "Good morning,"

“The weather is nice today,” or “Shower is the best remedy for rashes,” I got bored and started writing novels again. (...)

Because I knew it was hard to have someone read my writings, I joined a city-hosted course of composition. (...) It was a six-month course, and I had never received a positive comment once. Every time, my writings are marked, “What you are trying to say is unknown (=fumei in Japanese).” (108-109)

According to Shimizu Yoshinori, Kawakami’s motivation for her prolific writing career is triggered by her “fumei” characteristic that “unidentifies” her individuality (220). “Fumei” means unknown or unidentified. Shimizu maintains “being fumei” because Kawakami is unable to identify what on earth her ‘self’ is, nor is she able to adjust herself to the reality where she lives as a “wife,” “mother,” or “housewife.” The author has wandered, lived on, and created another *watashi* (self), which motivates her writing. (Shimizu 220). I agree with Shimizu’s statement in which Kawakami’s foremost writing motivation is to search her “unknown” self. Kawakami’s protagonists’ age depends on the author’s age at the time. Additionally, the background of her protagonist is also similar to the author’s. Likewise, as a result of personally dealing with the issue of the self, through her writings, the author seems to explore what her ‘self’ or her protagonist’s identity is.

3.2 Kawakami’s Theme: Sakaime, or ‘Boundaries’

The foremost recurring theme among Kawakami’s writings is a ‘boundary’ within the self. A lot of her works deal with this issue in a variety of different ways. Before developing the theme of the search for self, however, the author deals with the issue between the Self and the Other, in her debut work “Kamisama” (1994). Before making an in-depth examination of her debut work, I will

cite the author's essay titled "Sakaime," which means 'boundaries,' from the first collection of her essays *Aruyōna naiyōna* (1999):

There are boundaries among humans.

When I was very young, I had lived in a foreign country. There was almost no Japanese there. In my class, I was the only Asian. Everyone else was a Westerner.

Sometimes, I was forced to acknowledge that there was a boundary.

"Because Hiromi is Chinese (At that time, Japan was little known, and Asian people were all recognized Chinese.)," I was often told.

Because your hair is black, you are Chinese. Because you are Chinese, your way of eating a sandwich is backwards. (...) Because you are Chinese, you often wet yourself (I was the type of kid who often wet themselves. It was not "because I was Chinese," though).

Since I cannot see myself by myself, to me, the class was diverse. However, to someone else, the person who creates a boundary existed in the class—that was me.

A border was surrounding me. Among them, I am the only person. It felt strange. (...)

What on earth is something like a boundary?

There is a distinction where there is a boundary. In order to recognize things, we must distinguish things. There is no liking or disliking. But it is just that, simply, we need to set boundaries in order to distinguish things.

Originally, it is a "boundary" that was created for recognition. However, sometimes the thing like a boundary departs from its original objective and invites not only 'distinction' but also 'discrimination' or 'violence.' It is frustrating and sad. (...)

The action of putting up a border is perhaps the action of having a possibility to invite something problematic.

Because boundaries are something that invites such difficulties, we sometimes think of the idea that we should not make boundaries. It is still okay if one tries not to create boundaries by looking outside. But if one tries not to put borders, looking inside, then the idea soon directs something like “We should be all the same.” It is like insects hiding with the protective colors, and we come in a mood like “I will hide in everyone.” It would be very easy. But it is not necessarily fun. (88-89)

As this quote from her essay demonstrates, the author is aware of the existence of boundaries and perceives them as something that possibly provokes violence.

Besides such negative view towards boundaries, she also recognizes them as something that distinguishes oneself positively. Furthermore, she argues that one should not remove all the boundaries and hide behind something else. In the same essay, she mentions that her experience of living in a foreign country (the United States) helped her to realize that something to distinguish oneself from the Other, so-called ‘individuality,’ is of the utmost importance:

When I was called Chinese in the foreign country, was I sad? No, I wasn’t. I thought, “Okay, I am different from everyone else.” It didn’t seem that I was different in a “good” way, but I thought, “It’s okay.” It is because I am myself. To someone else, I might not be something “good,” but to me I am something “good.”
(...)

I never forgot the feeling of “I am something good” since then. That feeling was something that was most refreshing and invigorating.

I am not you, and you are not him. Summer is not spring, and fall is not winter.

Isn't it something quite tasteful? (*Aruyōna* 89)¹⁹

As the quote above implies, Kawakami believes in the power of individuality, which helped the author make it through the distressing days she experienced in a foreign elementary school. Such conviction is shown in her debut work. Her first work, “Kamisama (meaning God in English)” (1994) and its sequential story “Sōjō no chūshoku (Luncheon on the grass)” (1998), showcase the author's foremost argument for individuality, dealing with the issue of heterogeneity between the Self and the Other. In the next section, I will look into how she displays the belief of individuality in those stories.

3.3 “God” (1994) and “Luncheon on the Grass” (1998)

The stories of “Kamisama (God)” and “Sōjō no chūshoku (Luncheon on the Grass)” are, in essence, stories where the protagonist and a bear just go out on a walk together. The stories may sound child-like or fantastical. Nevertheless, if one replaces the bear with a person from a different race, the story will look like a pragmatic piece that focuses on the issue of discrimination in contemporary societies. In the story, the protagonist and the bear face “violence” that comes from the contact between the Self and the Other, specifically the interactions between humans and nonhumans. The protagonist expresses a positive attitude towards individuality, which is the same as what the author states in her essay “Sakaime (=boundaries)” in *Aruyōna naiyōna* (1999).

At the beginning of her first story, “Kamisama,” the bear moves into the apartment 305, in the narrator's neighborhood (“God” 4).²⁰ The bear is “an adult male,” “pretty big,” and very polite

¹⁹ I abbreviate *Aruyōna naiyōna* as *Aruyōna*.

²⁰ I abbreviate “Kamisama” as “God.” Translation for “Kamisama” is borrowed from Henmann, Kathryn. “Kami-sama.” *Inventory (Princeton University)*, no. 2, pp. 4-9, 2011.

(4). When he first moves in, the bear visits all the residents on the floor, giving the neighbors the moving-in soba noodles and ten postcards each, which is “a gesture that’s pretty rare these days”

(4). The narrator thinks he is very friendly, but simultaneously thinks “it must have been necessary for him to be considerate of the other residents” because “he is a bear” (4). On their way to the riverbank, the narrator asks the bear for his name. The reply the bear gives indicates that he is from a minority:

I didn’t know his name. When I asked him what I should call him, after he confirmed that he was the only bear living in the neighborhood, he answered,

“Since I don’t have a name here, and since there aren’t any bears around other than myself, it’s not like I need to have a name. If you need to get my attention, you can call me, ‘You.’ Yes, with a capital ‘y.’ When you say it, you can think of it as having a capital ‘y.’ But, well, please call me whatever you wish.” (“God” 5)

At the beginning, the narrator learns that the bear is a minority in the narrator’s living space. Thus, it explains why he is trying to be excessively caring about the neighbors. By remaking “a capital ‘y,’” the bear suggests the equal yet special relationship between himself and the narrator—calling the bear “Bear” would exclusively classify the bear as a nonhuman, heterogeneous other. When the protagonist and the bear go out on a walk-like hike together, the bear’s different ‘race’ becomes more distinctive to the protagonist. When such otherness is made evident, the bear is exposed to discriminatory violence. When they arrive at the riverbank, a child makes fun of the bear:

While we were standing there, a group of three people, two men and a kid, came over to us. They were all wearing swimsuits. One of the men was wearing sunglasses, and a snorkel was dangling from the other man’s neck.

“Dad, it’s a bear!” the kid said in a big voice.

“That’s right, it’s a bear,” Snorkel answered.

“It’s a bear!”

“Yes, it’s a bear.”

“Hey, hey, it’s a bear!”

This exchange was repeated many times. (...) The child pulled the bear’s fur and kicked him. Finally, yelling, “Punch!” he threw his fist into the bear’s stomach and then ran away. The two men followed after him lazily. (“God” 6)

Despite the child’s shameful behavior, the bear does not take it offensively but says, “There are many types of people in the world, but children are all innocent” (7). As this line suggests, the bear seems to have experienced and endured this kind of discrimination before.

In order to fit in with the human world, the bear has practiced human etiquette. He perfectly demonstrates human etiquette in front of the narrator. For example, he opens up a bag he has been carrying; takes out a small knife and a cutting board; slices open a fish; sprinkles on a few dashes of sea salt he seems to have prepared in advance; and then flips it over a few times so that it would dry by the time they go home. Also, he prepared and brought a loaf of French bread and that he had filled with a mixture of pate and radishes. He even offers a big towel for the protagonist to take a nap.

Nevertheless, he cannot fully control his own natural instincts. Before the narrator can reply to the bear, he quickly walks to the edge of the river, stares fixedly into the water, and suddenly reaches into the water. He grabs a fish and yanks it out of the water. The people fishing point their fingers in the direction of the bear and the protagonist while talking discretely among themselves.

Thus, when his differences appear clearly to others, the bear is afflicted with a sort of discrimination.

After having lunch and a nap at the riverbank, the narrator and the bear go back to their apartments. Before leaving for his own room, the bear asks her for a hug. The protagonist's description of the wildness of the bear, thereby the racial difference of the bear, is expressed in the following passage:

I looked up at the bear, waiting for his next words, but he fidgeted while remaining silent. He was a really big bear. This big bear made an embarrassed rumbling sound deep in his throat. When he spoke, he pronounced words the same as a human being. Whenever he laughed or expressed something vocally but without words, however, you could tell that he really was a bear.

“Could we hug each other?” the bear said. “It’s a custom in my hometown for when you say goodbye to someone you’re close to.”

I agreed.

The bear took a step forward, spread his arms open wide, circled them around my shoulders, and rubbed his cheek against my cheek. He smelled like a bear. He rubbed my other cheek in the same way and squeezed my shoulders once again. His body wasn’t as warm as I thought it would be. (“God” 9)

In this scene, the narrator is exposed to the wildness of the bear. However, it does not keep the narrator from having a close relationship with the bear. Their hug symbolically represents an emotional connection between individuals from two different races. In the interview with Homura Hiroshi, a Japanese poet, Kawakami Hiromi mentions that the best part of “Kamisama” (1994) is the moment the two hug because the narrator and the bear love each other for that moment (*Yuriika*

64). As proof of their intimacy, after the hug, the bear shares his own belief in “the God of Bears.” The bear says to the protagonist, “May the blessings of the God of Bears be poured down upon you” (“God” 9). The narrator then returns to her room and tries to “imagine what kind of entity the God of the Bears might be,” but she “really had (has) no idea” (9). The story ends with this sentence from her narration.

The physical contact was only momentary in “Kamisama” (1994). In the following story, “Sōjō no chūshoku” (1998), the letters exchanged between the narrator and the bear promise their permanent closeness.

In “Sōjō no chūshoku,” the narrator and the bear go out on a walk for the first time in a while. The bear takes the narrator to a field of grass, a place where she has never been before. The reason why he has invited the narrator to go on this walk is because he wants to say farewell to her. As soon as they arrive at the destination, the bear tells her that he has decided to go back home for good. As the protagonist asks for the reason why he has made such decision, the bear mentions that he cannot completely adjust himself to life there. During the picnic, the bear tells her of his struggles. He explains to the protagonist that he had not been accepted to any cooking schools, so he had to learn how to cook on his own. Furthermore, as of a short while ago, he had acupuncture. However, it did not work for him as his acupressure points are different from those of humans. During the picnic, the protagonist sees the bear struggle to control his natural instincts. Without realizing it, the bear eats the food with his hands. He apologizes and says, “I’m no good these days. I became incapable of adjusting myself” (“Sojō” 184).²¹ The narrator replies, “You don’t have to adjust yourself” (184). Afterwards, both become silent.

²¹ I abbreviate “Sōjō no chūshoku” as “Sōjō.” Translation is mine.

After a while, it starts to rain. The bear has prepared a beach parasol and shares it with the protagonist. Thunder approaches where they are, and the bear closes the parasol, saying that the “parasol would be dangerous” (“Sōjō” 186). Subsequently, the bear wraps his arms around the protagonist tightly. When the narrator tells him that she is scared of thunder, the bear laughs and says, “it feels good” (186). The narrator hears the sound of thunder through vibrations from the bear’s body. All of sudden, as he hears thunder, the bear roars: “The bear roared many times. I was scared. The thunder and the bear both scared me. The bear continued roaring in a god-like manner as if he completely forgot about me” (187). Note the way she describes the bear. Her narration suggests that she feels a sense of fear and awe for the bear, who now reveals his heterogeneous otherness.

After rain and thunder stop, the protagonist asks the bear what “the God of Bears” looks like. The bear answers that “the God of Bears” looks like a bear just like “the God of Humans” would look like a human. Then, he says with his eyes closed, “Humans and bears are different beings” (“Sōjō” 188). Keeping the bear’s roar in mind, the protagonist replies, “Yes, certainly” (188). Afterwards, they say goodbye to one another—this time without hugging.

The following summer, the narrator receives a letter from the bear. In the letter, the bear mentions that he no longer cooks and has gradually forgotten all the conventions that he had learned in the human world. The letter also states that the bear sometimes dreams of himself and the narrator lying on a grass field together while munching on fish skins. A charcoal drawing of them lying below fish-shaped clouds is attached with the letter. There is no name or address on the envelope; there is only a postmark that has almost disappeared. The narrator reads the letter multiple times and cries in bed, keeping the letter from the bear in mind. After crying, she writes a reply to the bear: “Thank you for your letter. Let us go to the grass fields for picnic again. Please

tell me how to bake an opened apple pie sometime. Take care” (“Sōjō” 191). The narrator writes her name and address, attaches a stamp on the envelope, and puts it in the desk drawer. Before going to bed, she prays to “the God of Bears” and then does the same to “the God of Humans.” The letters and the narrator’s prayers promise their permanent emotional connection between the two different beings. Although her letter is not sent to the bear, the narrator replies to the bear by praying to “the God of Bears.” Her undelivered letter and prayer to “the God of Bears” symbolize her emotional attachment to the bear. The bear, who starts to forget human conventions and begins to return to his instincts, chooses to protect and keep his racial identity. This ending is associated with the author’s essay “Sakaime,” which shows her belief in individuality. Her debut work, thus, affirms such conviction. The author sets the bear as a Disney-like humanized animal, who ends up stepping out of human culture. Kawakami keeps writing on the relationship between human and nature. We will consistently see that she describes it in such a way as for humans to learn from the heterogeneous power of nature, and not for humans to culturally appropriate nature.

The title of “Sōjō no chūshoku (Luncheon on the grass)” (1998) is associated the oil painting “Luncheon on the grass,” originally “Le Déjeuner sur l’herbe,” by the French painter, Edouard Manet. In the painting, there is a scantily dressed woman in the background and a nude woman with two fully suited men sitting on the ground having a picnic. The painting was exhibited in 1863. Manet’s nude woman stares at the audience as if she does not approve of anyone looking at her. The two fully dressed men are portrayed as though they ignored the nude woman, looking away. In Kawakami’s story, the bear corresponds with this naked woman. Both the bear and woman are depicted as if they did not belong to the place where they are, provoking the audience to feel a sense of uneasiness. Unlike the men in the painting, the protagonist in Kawakami’s story does not turn away from the bear’s dissimilarity, but instead, embraces it. Thus, in contrast with

the western painting, Kawakami's first work demonstrates the protagonist's contact with the Other and shows the author's respect for individuality.

3.4 "Tread on a Snake" (1996)

Kawakami Hiromi starts her writing career with "Kamisama" (1994), dealing with the issue of the "sakaime (boundary)" between the Self and the Other. From the publication of "Hebi o fumu" (Tread on a Snake, 1996), the author begins to develop the theme of 'boundaries'—within the self. Different from the bear, which symbolized the Other, the snake in "Tread on a Snake" stands for something "fumei (unknown)" inside the narrator's self.

The story deals with the narrator's self-search by focusing on the realm where borders between humans and nonhumans are blurred. The story sees multiple episodes of marriages between a human and a nonhuman. We will see that at the end of the story, the narrator's modern consciousness is "flooded" by mixing it with her inner animalistic or animistic drive.

At the beginning of the story, the narrator Hiwako encounters a snake: "In a thicket on my way to Midori Park, I stepped on a snake" ("Hebi" 1).²² This first sentence indicates that the narrator falls into the space of "sakaime." After stepping on it, the snake turns into a fifty-something woman, starts to live in Hiwako's room, and interferes in her life. The woman welcomes her coming home, cleans her room, cooks for her, and calls herself Hiwako's mother, even though her mother is alive and well in Shizuoka. Hiwako starts to feel comfortable with the woman and even feels like "the most natural thing in the world" for the woman to be in her apartment (6).

²² I abbreviate "Hebi o fumu" as "Hebi." Translation for "Hebi o fumu" is borrowed from Puente-Aguilera, Ana Deyanira. "Translating Hiromi Kawakami's "Tread on a Snake." MA Thesis, University of Texas at Austin, 2014.

The narrator, who has quit teaching biology at girls' high school after four years of working there, now works part-time at a Buddhist prayer beads shop. This shop is run by the aged couple Kosuga and Nishiko. Both age-wise and career-wise, the protagonist fails to find her basis to live in comfortably anywhere until she meets the snake:

Unlike when I spoke to Kosuga-san and Nishiko-san, from the very beginning there had been no wall to separate me from the snake, to make me feel distant. (...) when I was a teacher with my students and coworkers and such, and now that I thought about it even with my mother, my father, my brother—sure, it would grow thinner or thicker, the wall was there—and in some ways you could say that I could talk to them because there was a wall there.

But there was no wall between the snake and me. ("Hebi" 19-20)

She quits working at school because she feels a sense of uncomfortableness in being surrounded by high school girls. However, feeling distant from the aged couple at the beads shop, even after she left the girls' school, she is still unable to find a comfortable space. Career-wise, her social role was a teacher, but now she has no role she can assign herself because now she "just mind(s) the shop" ("Hebi" 1). Thus, self-questioning on her "fumei" self occurs in a subtle manner and continues endlessly throughout the story.

As the story progresses, the relationship between the protagonist and the woman grows closer. After two weeks had passed from the time when the snake appeared, the snake woman rubs her icy cheek against Hiwako's while wrapping her arms around Hiwako. The woman and Hiwako end up wrapping their arms around each other's bodies "like some set pair" ("Hebi" 26). Then, the woman invites her to the "world of snakes": "The world of snakes is warm, Hiwako-chan. (...) Do you want to come to the world of snakes, too, Hiwako-chan?" (26). Hiwako neither accepts nor

denies her invitation, shaking her head “in a way that could be interpreted just as much as a *yes* than as a *no*” (27). She then calmly peels her body away from the snake’s hug.

According to Julia Kristeva, in psychoanalysis, *abjection* occurs when a child detaches from his or her mother when growing up. In the scene above, Hiwako feels comfortable with the snake woman but tries to resist her invitation to the world of snakes. At this point, Hiwako goes through abjection: the childish side of Hiwako is attracted by the togetherness with the snake as a mother, while Hiwako as an adult struggles to keep a distance from the woman and the world of snakes.

The world of snakes seems to correspond with instinctive, anti-social, and erotic drives within the narrator. The scene above indicates the instinctive nature of Hiwako, who psychologically sways back and forth between being a child and being an adult. The following question from the snake stirs Hiwako’s anti-social aspect:

“Why did you quit being a teacher, Hiwako-chan?”

(...)

“I hated it.”

“What did you hate?”

“Teaching.”

“Really?”

“.....”

“That’s not true, is it?”

“It might not be right.”

“What was it *really*?”

(...)

“Maybe it was because I was exhausted”

There were not a lot of times in which students would seek something out from the teacher, but whenever I got the feeling that something was being sought from me I usually ended up giving them something that was not being sought. After doing so, I would become uncertain as to whether that was truly what I had wanted to give, and I would grow exhausted from that. Even the feeling of wanting to give something seemed like bullshit (“Hebi” 10-11)

The snake gives Hiwako the chance to look back on her past and tricks her anti-social aspect into appearing. As a result, immediately after the conversation with the woman, Hiwako narrates her true reason in which she was “exhausted” from the society where she could not get along.

The snake woman also triggers Hiwako to reflect on her sexual experiences:

It’s about being intimate with someone. The first time I go to bed with someone, I can’t close my eyes. They entwine me with their hands, and I wind my arms around that person, but even when the two of us begin to strive towards that feeling of losing our human shapes, I can’t let go of my human form. And despite the fact that our human boundaries are supposedly able to intermingle indefinitely with each other, I absolutely cannot close my eyes.

With my eyes still open, I simply watch as they move, as they confront me, as they yield to me.

Once the first time has passed and I’ve been with them a few times, I eventually begin to close my eyes, the previously tough, solid surface of my skin slowly beginning to run liquidly, and before I know it I unwittingly start to change form. Even though I do not try to reach that point, it happens anyway.

Once the time finally comes that I can reach that point, the other person always changes for an instant, into the form of a snake. (...)

I didn't know why it was that I did not turn into a snake while the others did, or if perhaps in reality I also changed into a snake when the others did. But even now I can vividly remember the chilling feeling accompanied by goose bumps that I would feel the instant they would turn into a snake. If I had turned into a snake too, then I wouldn't have gotten goose bumps like that. ("Hebi" 32-33)

The narrator was tired of being a teacher because she was too aware of the wall between herself and others. Her decision to quit school implies her desire to go to the world of snakes, where she only feels the warmth without wall. In terms of sexual experience, she was left alone, unable to become a snake. She felt a sense of uncanniness towards the men, who can easily become snakes. Unlike those men, her adult consciousness of a modern woman prevents her from becoming a snake so easily. Therefore, as the snake woman invites her to the world of snakes, her mind sways between desire to stay in rational side of her and desire to go into the world of snakes. When the snake says, "The world of snakes is warm." ("Hebi" 26), the warmth of the world of snakes suggests the space like this scene, the "world" where she would be carried away by her feelings and desires like her former lovers. While she is attracted by the world of snakes, the narrator ends up being left out of it.

At the end of the story, when the snake woman persistently invites her again and again to "the world of snakes," Hiwako finally denies its existence by saying, "There's no such place as the world of snakes!" ("Hebi" 50) After Hiwako's denial of the existence of "the world of snakes," the woman says, "I wonder if that's true. (...) I wonder if it's that easy," squeezing Hiwako's neck (50). Then the protagonist hears a crackling noise and the energy that is filling the room begins to

give off electrical discharges, and before long something starts dripping from the roof. The dripping increases, and the room begins to flood. The woman and the narrator start tackling each other in the water until the entire apartment building is streaming along with the muddy stream that cuts through Midori Park. Nevertheless, the woman and Hiwako are unwilling to compromise. The story ends with the sentence: “With terrible speed, the room streams on” (52). This last sentence implies that they unceasingly wrestle. Hence, the protagonist ends up being unable to settle the issue of her identity. Her tackling with the snake connotes a tangle between her modern consciousness, which values rationality, and her primitive animistic drive within, which is intensified by the snake’s seduction. Note that the story is filled with folkloric animistic images of *iruikon* or marriage between humans and nonhumans: the narrator’s great grandfather had run away with a bird woman, leaving his family behind; the Buddhist priest has a snake wife; and Kosuga’s wife at the beads store lives with a snake. The ending of the story conclusively unfolds the power of animism, which literally “floods” the entire text and overwhelms the protagonist.

Matsuura Hisaki, in his commentary on “Hebi o fumu” in the paperback edition of *Hebi o fumu*, states that the beginning sentence of “Hebi o fumu,” “The snake was soft, and because of that it felt like no matter how deeply I stepped down there was no end to it.” (“Hebi” 1), depicts the distinctive trait of the whole story (Matsuura 180). The feeling of “there was no end of it” is expressed throughout the story after the narrator is in contact with the world of snakes. As the ending suggests, the story ends with no ending—the narrator would continue to resist temptations from the snake, while obsessed with it. In agreement with Matsuura’s arguments, I conclude that Kawakami deepens the topic of the ‘sakaime’ (boundaries) by depicting the young woman’s continuous sway between her modern consciousness and a primitive impulse from within herself.

3.5 “A Story Begins” (1996)

Like “God” (1994), “Monogatari ga hajimaru” (A Story Begins, 1996) is a story in which a protagonist meets a nonhuman stranger: the young female narrator Yukiko, an independent woman who makes a living on her own, by chance finds *hinagata*, a living model, in the shape of a boy at a garbage pit in a neighborhood park. In this story, at the moment a human and a nonhuman meet, their pure love “story begins.” Like “God,” in this story as well, a human and a nonhuman interact and reach their emotional unification, and after a short period of time they separate in the end.

In “A Story Begins,” Kawakami creates her own “doll-love” story, which unfolds in a manner reverse to a Pygmalion story. Instead of a human puppeteer creating an ideal love out of his doll, the human protagonist here finds her ultimate unity with her doll when she changes into a doll.²³

As she finds it in the park, Yukiko brings the doll home, cleans him in the shower, clothes him, and lets him live in her apartment. *Hinagata* generally refers to a doll, a toy that children use for play. In the folklore and primitive religion, *hinagata* was considered as a shamanic object. Among toys civilized for safe use, the doll in this story is an item that holds a connection with primitive animism. In this way, from the beginning of the story, the author sets the doll as an existence which articulates its animistic connection.

After a month or so after she finds the doll, Yukiko realizes that the model is growing up both physically and intellectually. His body matures quickly from a junior high school boy to a young adult within a short period of time. As a result of her reading children’s books to him, he quickly becomes literate. Since she now knows that the model is not an ordinary model, but is

²³ Translation regarding “Monogatari ga hajimaru (A Story Begins)” is mine. I abbreviate it as “A Story.”

instead, a quasi-man, Yukiko names it “Saburō.” Saburō functions in such a way for Yukiko to reexamine her relationship with her boyfriend, Honjō.

Yukiko gradually gets drawn to Saburō—due to its no human-centric communication. Like the narrator in “God,” Yukiko is interested in the nonhuman, who becomes like a human, getting used to different cultures from his culture. Conversely, her growing intimacy towards Saburō makes her realize an awkward distance she feels about Honjō. On one occasion, during their once-a-week date, in the middle of the conversation, Honjō says, “I forgot to give the egg(s) to Kumagaya,” which confuses Yukiko makes her speechless:

“I forgot to give the egg(s) to Kumagaya.”

Honjō san said and stared at me face to face.

“I just remembered that, looking at your face.”

“The egg(s)?”

“I had to give it (them) and have him hatch it (them).”

“Hatch?”

“There is the wife of the brother of the senior of Kuamagaya’s uncle.”

“What?”

“It will do a good business.”

“.....” (“A Story” 18)

Yukiko, the narrator, feels that the conversation between them has “empty holes here and there,” and it feels as if she fell in a hole, and is speaking to his knees (19). During their following date, suddenly Honjō proposes Yukiko:

Honjō san hopes to marry me.

“What?” I said before I knew it.

“Will you marry me?” He suddenly started to talk about it, after he drank a cup of coffee, opened and closed his bag, and talked about his assistant manager’s career, as usual. (26)

Although the relationship continues after Yukiko rejects Honjō’s proposal, it deteriorates later when Honjō meets Saburō. After his proposal, Honjō visits Yukiko’s apartment and meets Saburō for the first time. In front of Honjō, Saburō pretends to act like a robot that does not have any autonomy. Afterwards, Yukiko and Honjō go walking in the neighborhood park with Saburō, and start quarrelling. When Yukiko walks behind Saburō, Honjō gets cranky and says incomprehensible things to Yukiko. Yukiko, then, finds herself uncomfortable with him:

“I have never wanted a model even once.”

“Neither do I.”

“Then why?”

“Well, it’s something like a twist of fate.”

“That is why you should put together all the four corners and elegantly fold and lie down.”

Again. We clashed with each other. I hear something like a buzzing noise in my ears during our conversation. I hear a sequence of noises like the chirping of cicadas, or the noise of an electric light while Honjō san slowly repeats, “collapse, collapse.”

(“A Story” 35)

Following this quarrel, their relationship deteriorates. After Honjō leaves Yukiko’s apartment, Saburō, who has watched their argument, tells Yukiko that their relationship is not “essential” (“A Story” 36). Yukiko then starts to process what Saburō has just said: whatever she says to Honjō,

to him, the meanings of her words are changed into something completely different: “It is like Honjō san and I are a computer with bugged Japanese software with its user” (47). As a result of the interaction with Saburō, Yukiko finally makes up her mind to end her relationship with Honjō:

“I’m okay if it simply did not work out. But if it was because of the model, I’m mad at myself,” Honjō san said more slowly.

“I’m sorry,” I said, dropping my eyes. (“A Story” 50)

After breaking up with Honjō, the relationship between Yukiko and Saburō becomes more intimate. Calling out each other’s name makes Yukiko go into a state of enchantment to the point of sleeping deeply:

Occasionally I say, “Saburō,” and Saburō answers, “What, Yukiko san?”

Reversely, Saburō says, “Yukiko san,” and I answer, “What, Saburō?”

We spend a greater part of nights by repeating this back-and-forth, and not moving an inch, we lie down, exhausted.

Exhaustingly and enthrallingly, our nights wear on, and in the end, we fall into a deep sleep separately, lying back-to-back.” (“A Story” 46)

The author expresses her ideal pure love in this scene—just sticking to each other and calling each other’s name forms the type of intimacy at the delicate threshold between innocence and the erotic. Their intimacy grows, but with no sexual development. As the story goes, they try to make love. However, it does not work out: kissing and caressing do not sexually arouse Yukiko. Instead, Yukiko has a *déjà-vu*-like feeling along with a sense of nostalgia that feels similar to the affection that a mother has for her child. Yukiko calls this feeling “a memory of primitiveness” (49). Given it reminds her of a sense of nostalgia and mother-like affection, “a memory of primitiveness”

implies a child's sensibility that adults lose when aging. In this way, Saburō leads her to a reevaluation of childish curiosity and positivity. "A memory of primitiveness" is also the state that she becomes aware of "sakaime" or borderline space, where all kinds of borders—between humans and nonhumans, culture and wildness, and adults and children—are blurred. Furthermore, the stress on the "memory of primitiveness" indicates that the relationship awakens in her a child with the original curiosity about being born and alive.

Instead of sex, Yukiko and Saburō find their ultimate unity in their own way—by just sticking to each other. Towards the end of the story, they visit a doll exhibition. While they walk back and forth, in front of a number of various dolls, Yukiko feels as if she becomes a doll. Saburō gradually slows down, and they completely come to a halt. Standing still, Yukiko and Saburō are falling into a sort of mesmerized state similar to a "deep sleep" ("A Story" 64). "In the state of deep sleep, they stare at each other" (64). Yukiko finds herself in his eyes and Saburō in her eyes, and their figures become an infinite sequence of themselves (64). This overlapped image of themselves symbolically represents the emotional unity of the couple. By depicting the overlapped image of themselves, the author expresses her ideal pure love here again—looking at each other without words is key for them to be emotionally united. Also, note that here, at the climax of the story, Yukiko becomes a doll. As a result, the relationship between Yukiko and Saburō is developed into an empathetic equal relationship. Unlike a traditional Pygmalion story in which the power relationship between a puppeteer and a puppet is articulated, Kawakami's story emphasizes her anti-human-centric perspective which allows her human and nonhuman characters to stand equally.

At the end of the story, Saburō dies—like her other stories such as "God" (1994), soon after reaching emotional unification, Kawakami's characters separate. At some point after their

visit to the dolls exhibition, Yukiko realizes that Saburō is quickly growing older. He ages about ten years a week, becomes dysfunctional, and in the end, turns back to what he was before. Yukiko keeps him for a month, then one day, she suddenly decides to throw him away in a remote park. After a while, she receives the announcement that she will be moving for a promotion. Before moving out, she goes to the park to see if Saburō is still there. However, she does not find him anywhere and cries alone. On her way back home, she tries to recall her memories with Saburō. Despite her efforts, she realizes that she has started to forget about Saburō. Yukiko, the narrator, ends the story with the following: “This might mean the way to live long. I tried to remember Saburō, but Saburō has already become a part of a story” (74).

“A Story Begins,” thus, starts with the human narrator’s contact with a nonhuman, *hinagata*. And soon after they reach their emotional unification, the nonhuman disappears. As examined in the previous section, the plot of “God” (1994) is similar: the narrator and the bear reach their peak when they hug each other during thunder, and immediately after this, they go separate ways. This pattern continues in “A Story Begins” (1996) and the following story *Sensei no kaban* (Briefcase, 2001) as well, and it becomes her typical story structure.

In terms of the theme of “sakai-me” (boundaries), like her previous stories, “A Story Begins” takes place on borderline realms—where borders between human and nonhuman, and between adult and child are all blurred. The story is depicted as a human protagonist’s temporary visit to this borderline realm of reality. As the title of this story suggests, this is where the author’s “stories” unfold.

3.6 *Briefcase* (2001)

Unlike the first three stories, which unfold relationships between human and nonhuman characters in an openly allegorical manner, *Sensei no kaban* (Briefcase, 2001) depicts a relationship between

two human characters in a mostly realistic way. However, with the publication of this work, the author returns to the theme of a “boundary,” in which all kinds of binary semantics are obscured. It is, like “*Monogatari ga hajimaru* (A Story Begins),” a love story that unfolds in boundary spheres between an OL woman and her retired high school teacher. Development of the love between them is slow and unconventional: in order for them to accomplish mutual love, they go back and forth between town and nature, reality and dream, and life and death.

Sensei no kaban consists of seventeen short stories. Each episode was published monthly in the magazine *Taiyō* from July 1999 through December 2000, and the collection of stories became a book in June 2001. The narrator, Tsukiko, is a thirty-seven-year-old OL. At the Japanese-style bar where she often goes after work, Tsukiko meets her high school Japanese literature teacher, *Sensei* (teacher). Sensei is seventy-something and retired. The story unfolds the love between Tsukiko and Sensei.

The narrator and her high school teacher are both independent, mature people who respect the independence of the other. For instance, both Tsukiko and Sensei prefer separating checks. In general, in Japan, the person who is seen to be socially superior pays for the check. Nevertheless, Tsukiko and Sensei ignore such social conventions. Their common respect for individuality allows them to get along while developing their relationship. The first episode below introduces such behavior:

That evening, we drank five bottles of sake between us. Sensei paid the bill. The next time we saw each other at the bar and drank together, I treated. The third time, and every time thereafter, we got separate checks paid for ourselves. That’s how it went. (...) We had a similar rhythm, or temperament. Despite the more than thirty-

year difference in our ages, I felt much more familiar with him than with friends my own age. (*Briefcase* 2-3)

Sensei's preference of pouring his own drink shows his independent nature as well. He does not like anyone to pour his drinks for him. On one occasion, Tsukiko fills Sensei's first glass of beer for him. The moment she tips the beer bottle toward his glass, he flinches more than slightly without saying a word. When the glass is full, he drinks it down in one swallow. When she picks up the bottle of beer to refill his glass, he sits up straight and says to Tsukiko, "Thank you, that's very kind. But I enjoy pouring for myself" (13). Also opposed to social convention, even after they officially starts dating, Tsukiko and Sensei keep polite speech.

Along with individualism, Tsukiko and Sensei share an animistic sensitivity, which also helps them develop a close bond. Sensei's intrinsic animist mind is revealed after the first reunion at a *nomiya*, or a moderately priced Japanese style bistro, where local customers come to eat and drink. When Tsukiko visits Sensei's house after drinking, Sensei lines up old used things, such as railway teapots, saying, "I just can't seem to throw anything away" (*Briefcase* P. 6). He even keeps dead batteries, saying "I feel pity for these batteries that worked so hard for my benefit, and I can't throw them away. It seems a shame to get rid of them the moment they die, after these batteries have illuminated my lights, signaled my sounds, and run my motors" (6). The fifth episode, "Mushroom Hunting Part 2," clearly shows Tsukiko's animistic sensitivity. When she and Sensei go mushroom hunting with the owner of their favorite *nomiya*, Tsukiko becomes aware that she is surrounded by all kinds of lives:

The area where I sat was slick with dampness. It wasn't just that the ground was moist— all around me, it felt like it was bursting—with the leaves on the trees, the undergrowth, the countless microorganisms under the ground, the flat bugs

crawling over the surface, the winged insects flitting through the air, the birds perched on branches, even the breath of the larger animals that inhabited the deeper forest. (...)

(...) Once my eyes had adjusted to the faint light, I realized that the undergrowth was alive with all manner of things. Tiny orange mushrooms. Moss. Something that looked like coarse white veins on the underside of a leaf. What must be some kind of fungus. Dead beetles. Various kinds of ants. Centipedes. Moths on the backs of leaves. (*Briefcase 41*)

Surrounded by nature, Tsukiko, who has felt loneliness, is inspired by nature's life force:

It seemed strange to be surrounded by so many living things. When I was in Tokyo, I couldn't help but feel like I was always alone, or occasionally in the company of Sensei. It seemed like the only living things in Tokyo were big like us. But of course, if I really paid attention, there were plenty of other living things surrounding me in the city as well. (*Briefcase 41-42*)

Thus, when she is surrounded by different walks of life, Tsukiko realizes that she is not alone—she is living among a range of different lives.

Sensei's animist sensitivity is reinforced by his reference to Buddhist saying. In the seventh episode, "Karma," when he runs into Tsukiko, Sensei introduces the Japanese proverb "sode furiau mo tashō no en," which means, there is always "a karmic connection," "a bond from a previous life" (*Briefcase 67*). He mentions to her, "Everyone's connected somehow, perhaps" (67). By introducing this Buddhist expression, Sensei is expressing his stance on what it is like living in the contemporary world. Instead of being completely individualistic, he is fully aware that he exists with others in the world where there are various kinds of people and life forms that all live next to

each other. In the same episode, after discussing the previous proverb, Sensei and Tsukiko go to their favorite *nomiya*. While enjoying themselves at the *nomiya*, a young drunk man approaches them and blurts out, “You two, just what are you? (...) It’s perverted, really. Act your age!” (68-69). Sensei was not upset by the drunk man. But instead, after the man falls asleep, Sensei steals his earring in memory of the happening that took place. In this way, Sensei celebrates what happened as a “karmic connection.”

Tsukiko is the one who first confesses her feelings towards Sensei. After her date with her ex-boyfriend in high school, Tsukiko and Sensei meet at their usual *nomiya*. Tsukiko unusually becomes heavily drunk and falls asleep. After waking up the next morning, she finds herself at Sensei’s house. As soon as she wakes up, Tsukiko determinedly invites Sensei to go on a trip and declares her feeling for him. All of a sudden, while declaring her feelings, thunder rumbles off in the distance, causing the space where they are to take on a dreamy state. Tsukiko is frightened of thunder, so Sensei draws Tsukiko close and holds her. During the thunderstorm, they keep asking each other if they are dreaming:

Sensei, am I dreaming? I asked.

It sure seems like it doesn’t it? he replied merrily.

If this is a dream, when will I wake up?

Hmm, I can’t say.

I wish I didn’t have to wake up. (*Briefcase* 111)

A huge crack of resounding thunder immediately follows a bolt of lightning, and Tsukiko continues to keep her body firmly on top of Sensei’s knees as he calmly rubs her neck. As this scene demonstrates, their physical closeness is further developed—at the “borderless” space where the reality and dream-like state are intermingled.

They grow closer in terms of physical distance. However, Sensei has someone whom he cannot forget. This is the reason why he does not fully commit himself to having a romantic relationship with Tsukiko. One day after Tsukiko's confession, Sensei invites her for a trip to a small island where his deceased wife's grave is located. His wife left Sensei and their son for someone else. After running away, she broke up with the man she fled off with. After dating several other men, she finally settled down with someone and came to the island. Then one day, she was struck by a car, a rare entity on the island, and died. This time, Sensei comes to the island, the only place where he can deal with his deceased wife, in order to commit to starting an official relationship with Tsukiko.

After visiting the grave of his wife, Sensei invites Tsukiko to his room. The description of their physical intimacy between Tsukiko and Sensei that night indicates the way in which the author perceives sexuality in relation to the theme of the Self and the Other. Tsukiko feels Sensei is "just an abstract presence" (*Briefcase* 126). That is, to the narrator, he is the Other who is so elusive she "could never quite get a hold on":

At some point, sitting beside Sensei, I began to notice the heat that radiated from his body. Through his starched shirt, there came a sense of Sensei. A feeling of nostalgia. This sense of Sensei retained the shape of him. It was dignified, yet tender, like Sensei. Even now, I could never quite get a hold on this sense—I would try to capture it, but the sense escaped me. Just when I thought it was gone, though, it would cozy back up to me. (126)

She seems to enjoy observing his elusiveness. When she wants to play with his elusiveness, Tsukiko just calls his name:

"Sensei" I said in a low voice. (...)

“What is it, Tsukiko?”

“Sensei, that . . .”

“Yes?”

“Sensei, this . . .”

“Yes?”

“Sensei.” (130)

During the nighttime on the island, they physically get closer. Tsukiko goes to Sensei’s room, and they drink *sake*. After finishing *sake*, they keep repeating “It’s very quiet” to each other (128). When they finally have nothing else to say, Tsukiko goes back to her room. Agonizing over her feelings for him, Tsukiko falls asleep, but wakes in the middle of the night. As she returns to his room, she finds Sensei making haiku poems. Without a choice, Tsukiko finds herself sitting next to him, writing poetry. After she writes out verses, exhausted, she lies her head down on Sensei’s futon and falls asleep. When she wakes up, she finds herself leaning against his arm as a pillow. Without thinking, she flees back to her room, dives under the covers, quickly leaps back out, and opens and closes the curtains. Afterwards, she returns his room. Sensei is waiting for her in his futon and invites her to lie next to him. He kisses her hair many times, touches her breasts, and continues to caress her.

Thus, the narrator goes back and forth between her room and his bed, and the couple merely continue foreplay. Also, their climax is not written throughout the story—even after they officially start dating. The final episode, “Briefcase,” briefly describes their first lovemaking experience but without any details: Tsukiko only narrates, “It was the first time Sensei had embraced me passionately and deeply” (*Briefcase* 175). In “Monogatari ga hajimaru (A Story Begins)” as well, the development of sexual intimacy is not essential nor the goal for the couple to express their

love. The intention that the author does not graphically write about the couple's unification suggests that she values sexual joy or meaning in the stage of foreplay-like process rather than an orgasmic moment. Thus, Kawakami presents her notion of Eros in a Levinasian manner, instead of the approach discussed typically such as by Georges Bataille (1897-1962). Lovemaking is most typically assumed to have a goal: reaching a single orgasmic state. According to Bataille, eroticism is the "dissolution" between the Self and the Other, destroying the individuality of the Self:

The whole business of eroticism is to strike to the inmost core of the living being, so that the heart stands still. The transition from the normal state to that of erotic desire presupposes a partial dissolution of the person as he exists in the realm of discontinuity. Dissolution-this expression corresponds with *dissolute hje*, the familiar phrase linked with erotic activity. In the process of dissolution, the male partner has generally an active role, while the female partner is passive. The passive, female side is essentially the one that is dissolved as a separate entity. But for the male partner the dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled, attaining at length the same degree of dissolution. The whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal lives. (17)

Contrary to Bataille, Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), takes individual differences between the couple as the core of their erotic fascination:

The pathos of love, however, consists in an insurmountable duality of beings. It is a relationship with what always slips away. The relationship does not *ipso facto* neutralize alterity but preserves it. The pathos of voluptuousness lies in the fact of

being two. The other as other is not here an object that becomes ours or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery.

(...) The caress is a mode of the subject's being, where the subject who is in contact with another goes beyond this contact. Contact as sensation is part of the world of light. But what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. (...) The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This "not knowing," this fundamental disorder, is the essential. It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something other, always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come [*à venir*]. The caress is the anticipation of this pure future [*avenir*], without content. It is made up of this increase of hunger, of ever richer promises, opening new perspectives onto the ungraspable. It feeds on countless hungers. (86-89)

As the quote above shows, in the Levinasian concept of Eros, one is attracted by his or her partner's mysterious elusiveness, and Eros vividly lives insofar as the couple endlessly and aimlessly pursue each other's mysteriously unreachable charms. In *Sensei no kaban*, by endlessly caressing each other's body without a pursuit of climax, Tsukiko and Sensei explore their erotic intimacy in a Levinasian manner. Thus, the two find their way of developing closeness while keeping their respect for each other's individuality.

The following episode "The Tidal Flat—Dream" starts with Tsukiko and Sensei finding themselves once again at the "border" between reality and dreaming. At such a place, they finally and truly understand each other and further develop their emotional connection with each other. In the episode, Tsukiko hears the camphor tree outside the window saying, "Come here" (*Briefcase*

135). Tsukiko's animistic instinct invites her to the "sakaime" where Sensei is waiting for her. As Tsukiko finds herself there with him and asks him where they are, Sensei explains that the place is "some sort of middle place" "like a borderline" (142). At the borderline, Sensei shares the story about his wife; Sensei's family had a dog. When the dog died, his wife did not shed a single tear. Rather, she seems almost resentful at their son weeping and at Sensei. After they buried the dog in their garden, suddenly his wife said to the son, "It's all right, he'll be reincarnated as me" (142-43). Less than a week later, in the middle of dinner, his wife suddenly started barking, which sounded exactly like the dog. Sensei angrily said, "Quit your stupid joke," but she did not pay attention. Sensei and his son lost their appetites and got up from the table. The next day, his son said to his mother, "Say you're sorry" and continued to demand an apology. Despite his efforts, she was completely indifferent. Since then, the relationship between his wife and their son became strained and never recovered. After graduating from high school, their son went to a university far away, and he rarely visited his parents' house. Around the time when the first grandchild was born, his wife disappeared. To Sensei, his wife is the Other of whom he can never capture. The description of his wife barking like their dead dog is the only scene written supernaturally in the story: the scene at the tidal area is depicted as the borderline space where his consciousness and subconsciousness are mingled. When his wife barked, he merely took it as a creepy joke. As he accepts his wife's enigmatic nature, the borderline space opens up for him. This episode reminds us of the experience of the narrator in "God" where she is shaken and awed by the bear's roar. Likewise, through the experience, Sensei comes to hold his wife's enigmatic nature in awe. Sharing his past with Tsukiko allows him to finally commit himself to the relationship with her.

After their experience at "the tidal flat," Sensei finally asks Tsukiko to seriously date him. Three years after they became steady, Sensei dies. Sensei leaves his briefcase to Tsukiko. When

she misses him, Tsukiko opens Sensei's briefcase and peeks inside. The story ends with Tsukiko's narration about Sensei's briefcase: "The blank empty space unfolds, containing nothing within. It holds nothing more than an expanse of desolate absence" (*Briefcase* 176). In Japanese original text, kanji 儚 expresses "desolate." (*Sensei* 270). The kanji indicates the state of borderline space they shared: the kanji 儚 means transient. The kanji is composed of two radicals of Chinese characters. The left segment means a person, and the right a dream. Therefore, the ending narration about his briefcase suggests that the space in his briefcase is somewhere one dreams transiently: the space in his briefcase is like "the tidal," a compact "borderline space." Thus, with his briefcase, Tsukiko will live on, dreaming about all of the good memories she had with Sensei.

3.7 *Manazuru* (2006)

Like *Sensei no kaban* (2001), *Manazuru* (2006) unfolds a story about an adolescent girl's mother, who seeks a balance in her life, in a basically realistic manner. But the protagonist frequently visits a place, Manazuru (used as the title of the story), which is described fantastically, and it contains a spirit-like woman, whom the protagonist interacts with. The narrator repeats trips to Manazuru, a town located in the Ashigarashimo District in Kanagawa. Through trips to Manazuru, she eventually finds a balance between desires to be an adult and a child, to live and die, and to be in reality and in a dream.

The protagonist, Kei, a forty-something year old writer, lives in Tokyo with her daughter, Momo, a sixteen-year-old high school student, and her mother. Kei's father died when she was young. By setting the three generations living under the same roof, Kawakami makes her protagonist deal with mother-daughter relationships from two different points of views—as a mother and as a daughter. Kei's husband, Rei, has been missing for more than a decade. The story

takes place twelve years after his disappearance. During Rei's absence, Kei has had an affair with Seiji, who is a married man and a father to three children. Similar to the setting of two mother-daughter relationships, Kawakami sets the contrast between Rei and Seiji in order to relativize Kei's obsessions with Rei.

Kei starts taking trips to Manazuru after she discovers Rei's diary where he mentioned "Manazuru" one month before his disappearance (*Manazuru* 55). Kei also found a private entry on another page of his diary: "A place I should never have come to" (63). Reading his entry, Kei remembers that she told to herself the same sentence when she gave birth:

A place I should never have come to. As I bore my child, during that time, I felt the terror of having taken just a step into that space. How linked was that feeling, I wonder, to the words my husband penned in his diary?

That feeling, after the birth, of being unable to return all the way, hasn't completely faded. It is with me, I think, until death. (65-66)

The quote above suggests that Kei shares the same experience of having been to "A place I should never have come to" with Rei. In addition to his diary entry, Kei recounts Rei's detachment from family: on one occasion, Rei scolded his three-year old daughter Momo, who had drawn on some of his important documents with crayons. Rei made her sit still and explained why what she had done was bad. After scolding, Rei felt that he could have never been a father. And he disappeared soon after this event:

I felt kind of like a father, he said that evening. You've been a father for years, I responded. He shook his head. It doesn't feel that way. It's not that easy.
(...) Not long after, he was gone. (69)

As the scene above suggests, Rei disappeared because he could not tolerate himself being an adult. During child-birthing, Kei has also “felt the terror of having taken just a step into that space (=“A place I should never come to”). She experienced the same feeling because she was becoming a mother, an adult, who is responsible for raising her child. In other words, Rei, who did not feel he had been a father, ended up disappearing because he had a desire to remain a child, rejecting the role of an adult, an adult who must play a father’s role. Sharing the same thoughts with Rei means that Kei also has the same desire to stay being a child. Swaying between being an adult and being a child, she starts to follow her husband’s tracks and begins trips to Manazuru.

In Manazuru, Kei reminisces over Rei. She recalls Rei talking about where he came from originally:

“Do you know where you come from? He asked. “Kei?”

Me? Where I come from? I repeated, unsure of his meaning.

Rei nodded, slowly.

Actually, he began, my first memory is very vivid. (...)

I was three years old, and I was trying to grab this bug from a tree in the garden. It was green, sort of a peculiar shape, long and thin. Only I couldn’t control my grasp, so I couldn’t really pick it off, I ended up grabbing it with my whole hand, and all of a sudden goo squirted out of the bug’s body. All over my palm, all sticky. I just squashed it.

So I went in with it, like that, to where my mother was, in the kitchen, and showed her my hand. She drew back from me. I knew it wasn’t me, it was the bug she was avoiding, but still it hurt me. The bug wasn’t alive anymore. I hurled it down on the

floor. The bright green of its body was very clear, I remember, against the floor's deep wooden hues.

That's a walking stick, my mother told me. You don't see them often.

I'd never heard that name, walking stick, before. My mother didn't back away again, she lifted the bug between her fingertips, her expression perfectly ordinary, and then she opened the kitchen door and tossed it out into one of the plants in the garden.

I wanted to get the juice off my hand, so I went over and rubbed my palm back and forth on the earthen floor just inside the door, in the entryway before you step up into the kitchen. I could see my mom, a shadow, looming overhead. She stared at me, very still. (...)

So that's where I come from, that scene with the walking stick. (*Manazuru* 119-20)

This scene contrastively describes the adult's and the child's reaction to the walking stick: For his curiosity, young Rei responds to the walking stick and brings it to his mother, while his mother, the adult, sees it as disgusting garbage, refusing to touch and see it closely. Seeing his mother unshaken and insensitive to the horror and amazement he felt as a result of the incident, he was "hurt." Like the juice from the walking stick, those hurt feelings cling to him until he becomes an adult and is translated into a desire to remain a child. However, as he knows it is impossible to stay being a child, he is inclined to disappear from his fault reality.

His disappearance to Manazuru probably means his suicide in Manazuru, where there are death images. Since she started trips to Manazuru, Kei begins to see something in the shape of a woman that is visible only to Kei. In Manazuru, "the woman" talks to Kei about a story "the girl who was strung up" in Manazuru and associates the place with image of death:

She was spirited away. The girl who was strung up. She was a good girl, really, a darling. She would go early in the morning into the hills to gather firewood, and in the afternoon she would collect clams and seaweed on the shore. At night, she swept, spun. She toiled without resting, and then one day she heard a voice in the woods. Tomorrow, it said, you mustn't go to the hills or the shore. (...)

After that day, she was never seen alive again. (*Manazuru* 93)

Given that *Manazuru* is the hereafter, Kei's voluntary trips to *Manazuru* seem implicitly pushed by her suicidal desire. The following memory Kei recalls indicates that she is drawn to Rei, because of his crudeness, probably driven by his child self, who challenges the code of adult decency:

I saw a camellia blossom fall. I had seen crimson petals scattered on the ground, like water drops, and I had seen those bulky blossoms capsized whole in dirt, but I had never actually seen one fall.

"Look," I said, and Rei, walking beside me, quickly glanced over.

"It dropped, huh?" Rei said, then bent and scooped the blossom up.

It was no different from when it had still been on the tree.

Without a word, Rei clenched it in his fist. Large petals fluttered down. Slipping through his bent fingers, a few petals at a time. Finally, only the yellow core remained. Rei crushed it, too.

"There's pollen in my hand," he said, opening his fist. The undone weave of stamens, pistil, calyx, and the fine petals at the center, fell more slowly than the larger petals. (...)

One of the fingers that had toyed with the camellia entered my mouth. For a moment the strong sweet scent of the flower's core wafted up, and then, without realizing what had happened, I was sucking. Sucking on his finger. (57)

The crashed camellia and the squashed walking stick are paralleled: Rei shows and lets Kei touch the crashed camellia much like what he had done to his mother. Unlike his mother, rather than withdrawing, Kei feels intoxicated and cannot help but to suck on his finger. Kei's reaction towards Rei suggests that she has the same desire to defend the child in her as well as the disdain against adulthood. Her repeated visits to Manazuru indicate her desire to be identified with Rei.

Thanks to her daughter Momo, Kei has, however, developed a strong sense of responsibility as a mother, as well as her desire for survival. By seeing Momo's adolescent vulnerability, rather than sympathizing with her, Kei is reminded of her own role as a mother: when Momo is not home late at night, Kei desperately looks for her. Following her instinct as a mother, Kei finds Momo. However, the adolescent girl reacts to her mother in a blunt manner:

"Momo," I called.

Ah. There was a small gasp, and beside the dog a slender shadow rose. Another shadow, next to the first, also rose.

"That's you, isn't it, Momo!" I cried, and the slender shadow rocked.

I ran over and clasped Momo to me. She resisted. Stop it, Mom. She pushed me away, hard. The next shadow watched me without moving. Who are you? I demanded, turning to face it. It's none of your business, Momo cried behind me. The shadow retreated, left, just like that. (...)

"Who was it?"

One last time, I ask.

Momo shakes her head. “I won’t tell.” She replies listlessly. We’ve been through this so many times, she’s weary of it. I begin to feel unjustified, I am bullying her.

“Will you tell me one day?”

I don’t know, she replies, her voice barely audible.

She knows. Now Momo knows. I think suddenly.

She didn’t know before. But now she does. Poor thing. I had pitied those who don’t know. But I was mistaken. Those who know are even more deserving of pity.

I lay my palm lightly on Momo’s wiry shoulder. She flinches, just slightly, and I sense that she is allowing my hand to remain there, suffering its weight. (*Manazuru* 82-84)

The scene above suggests that Momo is experiencing her first love. Kei regards her daughter as “Poor thing,” who now knows pain of first love. Seeing such adolescent vulnerability of her daughter leads Kei to affirmation of her own strength as an adult. She plays a role of mother, laying her “palm lightly on Momo’s wiry shoulder.”

Kei also sways between Rei and Seiji. Her sway expresses her duality—between being an adult and being a child and between survival instinct and suicidal impulse. Contrary to Rei, Seiji is a down-to-earth person, who is a family man with a wife and three children. Seiji keeps Kei from leaning toward a desire for death: when being with Seiji, Kei experiences infantile regression:

Rei drew me in, but with Seiji I can remain just as I am, endlessly, drifting. I am not lonely. Whether it is he who embraces me, or I who embrace him. And so, all the more, I remember the old loneliness.

“You look so forlorn,” Seiji tells me.

So I look even more forlorn. I do not mean to, but I am pulled back, deeper and deeper, into the lighthearted loneliness of the time, long ago, before it all happened, before I met Rei, when I knew nothing of the world beyond the cradle of my parents’ hands.(...)

I don’t want to go back. Was it this that Rei felt? No desire, maybe, to go back. Still caught in my uncertainty, the agony of it, in a flash, I have returned. (*Manazuru* 121)

The father-like Seiji reassures Kei. As a result, she becomes like a child who “knew nothing of the world beyond the cradle of my parents’ hands.” Although with Seiji, she is in “endlessly, drifting” comfortable state, Kei, as a forty-something mother, feels unhealthy about his dead-end affair, which she selfishly utilizes as a temporary shelter for her own regression. In the end, as a result, they end up breaking up.

Through interactions with her mother, Kei comes to realize that she alternates roles as an adult and as a child. As Momo stops talking to her, Kei and her mother have the following conversation:

Momo’s head is lowered, light shines in the fine hairs on her neck.

She hates it when I touch her, so I merely look.

“I won’t need a lunchbox tomorrow, Grandma. I’ve got cooking class.” Momo does not speak to me, only to Mother. She tries not to face me, either.

“Was I that way?” I ask mother.

“No, Kei, you weren’t so even.”

Even? I ask.

“That’s right. You’d be stubborn one moment, then suddenly relax. One moment you were a child, and then, the very next moment, you were an adult.”

“It’s that age, I guess?” That age. It’s easier, I guess, to brush it aside, if you put it away, my mother said hesitantly, squinting slightly, feeling way. It’s not that age, it’s just, well, the beginning, I think.

“The beginning?” The beginning of the end, maybe.

“The end.”

Yes. That little Kei isn’t here anymore, she’s someone else now, that kind of end.

“Come on, I don’t think it was a big event like that, was it?” I say, laughing. Mother laughs, too. It’s true, people don’t mature so easily. They can’t. It’s true, though, I suppose, even now, I’m not that consistent. We talk, back and forth, still laughing.

You want to touch Momo more, don’t you? Mother says quietly.

But it’s not so easy, is it, to get someone to let you touch them, she adds. I don’t know what she means, yet it startles me. I look Mother in the eye. Her expression is ordinary. Even your own child? Flesh and blood, carried in your womb? I ask, quickly. My goodness, Kei, now you’re the one being childish. Once again, Mother laughs. Whatever has come over you? You were the same way with me, you know, back then. There is a tension in the softness of her voice. She, too, has been hurt, by me. (*Manazuru* 140-41)

As mentioned before, when she is with Momo, Kei becomes an adult. Conversely, when she is with her mother, Kei becomes “childish.” Thus, Kei’s interactions with her daughter and her

mother cause her to realize that she needs to find a balance on her swaying desires to be an adult and to be a child.

“The woman” who follows her also articulates her another dual desire—between the desire to die and the desire to live. At first, “the woman” expresses Kei’s temptation to give up on living. In Manazuru, when she leads Kei to the place where there is no one but the two of them alone, “the woman” says:

Sometimes I got sick of living, the woman snapped. Hurried with work all day long, morning to night, without even realizing how haggard I had become, no idea of the things that make me happy, having no contact with the depths, too, simply counting the minutes, oh, it all got so tiresome. (*Manazuru* 117)

Without being seduced by temptation, Kei resists giving up on living. When “the woman” tosses her own babies into the ocean, saying, “I was always like that, sick of it all,” Kei replies, “Don’t talk anymore about being sick of it all, let’s just live our lives, effortlessly, without a thought” (118). As these quotes suggest, although “the woman” tries to urge her to give up on life, Kei rejects her.

“The woman” also tries to make Kei dismiss Rei and eventually leads her to go back to her reality. During the final trip, “the woman” takes Kei to a shabby house in a deep mountain in Manazuru. There, “the woman” shows Kei the scene of Rei making love with someone. The intention of “the woman” is for Kei to give up and forget Rei:

Rei presses the woman down, turns her at an angle, rolls her over, keeps going in, and out. It is uninteresting.

“Have you had enough?” I hear a voice, it is the woman from Manazuru.

“I don’t feel angry,” I tell her. Always turning to her for help.

“It’s been a long time.”

“Even though I still love him.”

“Even though you forgot him, ages ago?” I never forgot Rei, I tell the woman, and she snickers. You forgot. You don’t come to Manazuru for Rei, it’s for yourself.

(...)

I don’t recognize this man, I think.

See, what did I tell you, you’ve forgotten him. Again the woman snickers.

(Manazuru 188-89)

After the scene above, “the woman” transforms into Momo, who makes Kei want to go back to reality:

The woman presses her nose against the window, gazes out at the scenery. Just like a child. I think, and suddenly she assumes Momo’s form.

“No, not that,” I say, and she returns.

“Soft on your daughter, aren’t you.”

(...)

I want to be with Momo, I think. I don’t want to die, I think, strongly. I would pity her, if I died. She may have gone away from me, but she would cry if I died.

Mother, too, would cry. (189-91)

Thus, “the woman” works as something like her alter ego, who represents her suicidal urge. Unlike traditional ghosts such as Rokujō in *Tale of Genji*, Kei’s ghost is visible to her, converses with her, and helps her find a balance by objectifying her distress.

Interactions with “the woman” makes Kei return to her reality eventually. As soon as she goes back to Tokyo, she contacts Seiji. Together, they go to Rei’s hometown, Setouchi, where Rei’s father has recently placed a momentary tablet for his missing son. Following this trip, Kei comes to terms with everything that has been happening in her life: she finally decides to “file to have him declared disappeared” (*Manazuru* 208). And “the woman” disappears: “Nothing comes, anymore, to follow” (211). Disappearance of “the woman” is indicative that Kei, after understanding her dual desires, chooses to live her real life where she lives as an adult.

Thus, *Manazuru* (2006) depicts the narrator’s reality where her dual desires to live and die, and to be adult and to be a child are continually tangled each other. As a result of going through *Manazuru*, the “sakaime” (borderline space) between reality and dream, the narrator finds a balance in her life and becomes ready to live in her reality in the end.

3.8 Summary of Kawakami’s Works

Since her debut, starting with the topic of “fumei (unknown)” self, Kawakami Hiromi deals with the theme of “sakaime (boundary).” Her earlier stories are typically about relationships between a human and a non-human. Otherness of nonhumans is linked with nature, primitiveness, ultimately animism, which functions so as to open a realm of reality digressing from the rationality-based world visions.

Through interactions with nonhuman characters, her human protagonists are led to the “sakaime” reality, in which barriers of dichotomies—between reality and dream, the contemporary and the primitive, culture and wildness, adults and children, rationality and sensibility, and so on—are removed. And her protagonists learn there that their own ambivalence, swaying between life and death and between reality and dream, is actually the core of their personalities. Inspired by that realization, they are determined to survive and come back to the so-called everyday reality.

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I examined three contemporary Japanese female authors: Yoshimoto Banana, Ogawa Yoko, and Kawakami Hiromi. These authors exhibit new approaches to spiritual and/or emotional healing that counter the predominant transcendental type of spirituality, which prewar and postwar writers based their work on and which the New Age spirituality like Aum Shinrikyō also stressed. Instead of a transcendental jump from reality, the three contemporary authors try to pursue a type of soul search exercised in their everyday reality.

In Chapter One, I explored works of Yoshimoto Banana. The author mainly tells coming-of-age stories for her young target audience. In her works, her depressed female protagonists recover spiritually by establishing their connection with nature, which is considered an incredible blessing. The experiences of spiritual awakening Yoshimoto describes are often mildly and occultically dramatic, but she stresses that her pursuit is different from what is exercised by the New Age type of organized religious activism. For her, spirituality is a matter of pursuit and discovery by the individual; also, it should help people appreciate and happily live in reality, instead of escaping from it.

In Chapter Two, I investigated novels of Ogawa Yoko. In her stories, the time of girlhood, a period free from sexuality, is described as something privileged, in which girls experience life's joys and fears in a sensitive yet free-spirited manner. *Mīna's March* is the most comprehensive work that delivers Ogawa's message. The girlhood days, shared by Mīna and the narrator (who is her cousin), are richly described that they each later become well-balanced independent women. Girlhood is also a special time free from sexual relationships and communications. In her stories about female adolescent protagonists, they often fiercely resist sexuality, womanhood, and as well as motherhood. In Ogawa's stories, female characters grow up mainly through their relationships

with other people. The topic of their connections with nature as well as the topic of spirituality (in terms of its religious and supernatural implications) are not the focus.

In Chapter Three, I looked into narratives of Kawakami Hiromi. Her earlier works are fantasies about relationships between a human protagonist and a nonhuman character. In her later works which deal with relationship between two human characters, her female protagonists emotionally heal through realization that they are part of nature, which lets all kinds of living beings cohabit. Her protagonists are typically adults, who wander in a borderline realm between the conscious and unconscious and between reality and dream. Through realization of connection with nature, they come to accept their ambivalence as the source of their personalities. Kawakami believe in nature's healing power and stresses human animistic relationships with nature. However, unlike Yoshimoto, nature's blessings are not emphasized. Kawakami rather stresses that nature is an ever-changing force driven by an unpredictable chain of events, a force that humbles human souls in such a way as for us to realize that human lives are merely a part of it. Kawakami values the individuality and independence of her characters insofar as they help them to have a strong sense of identity by resisting self-centered and human-centric visions of self, humanity, and the human relationship with nature—visions generally assumed by the majority of people today. The major difference from Yoshimoto and Ogawa is that Kawakami's stories are about grown-up characters and the development of their mental maturity. Also unlike Yoshimoto and Ogawa, Kawakami does not focus on the issue of girlhood.

Although, Yoshimoto, Ogawa, and Kawakami commonly write emotionally and spiritually healing stories, each approach displays different stressed elements. Also, most of their stories usually end with hopeful messages for their protagonists' survival. Unlike the prewar and postwar stories, which I have discussed in the Introduction, the new type of soul searches they exercise is

not polarizing spiritual truth from reality: it is lived by their protagonists within their everyday survivals.

These three are popular especially among female readers because they are empowering. Unlike their previous generation of female writers, whose messages are often keen on critiquing the male-centric society, their (post)feminist messages are subtle in terms of gender tension; rather, they stress the importance of inner spiritual growth of women. I think the changes in the social environment reflect this difference. Compared to the postwar days, the contemporary society after the late 1980s was affluent and gender tensions subdued (although far from ideal). Note that all three writers are from average environments of their time: they are all married mothers, housewives who work at home.

One of the reasons I chose these three writers is: apart from their common theme of spiritual and emotional healing, they cover different age groups of women: Ogawa depicts preadolescent and adolescent girls, Yoshimoto writes about young women in their twenties to mid-thirties, and Kawakami deals with further matured women. They all share topics of spiritual and emotional healing, the mental growth, and the search for the female identity and independence. As a whole, they deal with a variety of topics the female readers would strongly be interested in—topics such as parents, families, friendships, boyfriends, sexes, pregnancies, marriages, job searches, as well as illness, aging, and death. Reading the stories of these three authors together allows us to reflect on the various ways of approaching the issue of spirituality in the common and mundane basis of everyday topics we can easily be related to today. I believe that these three are representative of authors who effectively respond to the spiritual and emotional needs of today's female readers.

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