

SINGLE FRAME HEROICS:
NEW WAYS OF BEING IN THE FICTION
OF YOSHIMOTO BANANA

Ph. D Thesis
Martin Ramsay
Swinburne University of Technology
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LEGEND

The following dates indicate significant periods in Japanese history referred to throughout this thesis:

Heian Period	794 - 1184
Kamakura Period	1185 – 1332
Muromachi Period	1333 – 1572
Momoyama Period	1573 – 1614
Edo (Tokugawa) Period	1615 – 1867
Meiji Period	1868 – 1911
Taisho Period	1912 – 1925
Showa Period	1926 – 1988
Heisei Period	1989– to the present

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material that has been submitted for examination in any other course or which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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ABSTRACT

Yoshimoto Banana's writing has received criticism for being superficial and a product of an empty capitalism. Despite receiving literary awards, Yoshimoto herself has consistently distanced her writing from 'literature'. This thesis argues that Yoshimoto's writing can be read as an example of a paraliterature that is significant because of the creative tension caused by its exploration of themes more often associated with 'literature' but borrowing stylistically from popular culture. By combining these elements, Yoshimoto's writing has generated not only a cultural divide between critics defending traditional culture and postmodern relativists who want to do away with critical distinctions such as 'high' and 'low' art, but also a constituted body of work that can be seen as a touchstone in a transitional society polarised by changing 'ideals of femininity'. As such her writing can be characterised as a 'separatist literature of inner space'. Since her debut Yoshimoto has quickly succeeded in not only finding success at the local Japanese level but also overseas and, therefore, she can be seen as a trans-cultural writer. Her success is thus helping to redefine contemporary literature both within Japan and overseas. Apart from critical and scholarly writing, media coverage of Japan-related issues is examined in both the Australian as well as the Japanese media in order to identify the context in which the general reader in Australia 'reads' Yoshimoto as a contemporary Japanese writer. In relation to it being seen as an example of postmodernism, mention needs to be made of the fact that Yoshimoto's writing is discussed as much, if not more, in popular media as it is in academic contexts and her writing is often invoked in discussions of contemporary Japanese society in the new media.

INTRODUCTION: A LITERATURE OF 'SELF-HELP'

Yoshimoto Banana, born in 1964, has written a number of novels, short stories and several collections of essays and interviews. Yoshimoto's writing is significant because it represents a departure from traditional Japanese literature. Yoshimoto's fiction not only features young characters living in a consumer society cut off from traditional social structures such as the family, work and marriage but also uses non-literary language and techniques more often associated with *manga* (*Japanese comics*). Whilst *shôsetsu* is a highly elastic category which can encompass a broad range of texts, Yoshimoto's writing can be seen as an example of paraliterature existing on the margins of traditional *junbungaku* (pure literature) and she herself can be seen as an example of a 'new breed' of high-profile writers in contemporary Japanese literature including Murakami Haruki, Murakami Ryu, Shimada Masahiko and Yamada Amy. *Moonlight Shadow*, *Utakata/Sanctuary* and *Goodbye Tsugumi* followed her first novel *Kitchen*, published in 1988. Other novels include *N.P.* (1990), *Kanashii Yokan* (1991), *Lizard* (1993) and *Amrita* (1994). After the publication of *Amrita*, Yoshimoto declared that the first phase of her career was over. She has since published several novels, collections of short stories and essays as well as several travel books. In 2001 her website YoshimotoBanana.Com was launched, which included e-mails from Yoshimoto's fans as well as a personal diary and photographs, which are all updated regularly. Many of these have subsequently been published in book form beginning with *YoshimotoBanana.Com* in 2002.

This thesis makes a critical bibliographical survey of the fiction and other writings of Yoshimoto Banana. Yoshimoto's representation of contemporary Japanese society is analysed in relation to recent studies by, among others, Takie Sugiyama Lebra, Sumiko Iwao and Nancy Rosenberger, which discuss the changing roles of women in Japanese society and the breakup of the traditional family. This critical discussion is supplemented with reference to articles published in both the Australian and Japanese media. It is through reading these articles and accessing other forms of media that most Australian readers, for instance, are not only informed about the development of social issues in Japanese society but are also provided with a context in which they 'read' Yoshimoto Banana as a contemporary Japanese writer. Such media commentary is relevant to this thesis. It enables Australian readers to place events in the lives of Yoshimoto's characters, such as their involvement with religious cults or else the kidnapping of children (both of which are explored in *Mizuumi* [*The Lake*] [2005]), within the context of current events in Japanese society. In this way not only can Yoshimoto be seen as a global writer, but her English language readers in Australia can be seen as part of a global community informing and being informed through a variety of traditional media, such as television, films and books as well as emerging electronic media.

This thesis analyses many of the novels and short stories published in the first phase of Yoshimoto's career (1988 – 1994), most of which have been translated into English. Therefore it is the English language texts which are analysed and discussed from this period. From the second phase of Yoshimoto's career (1994-) only *Argentine Hag* and *Hard Luck/Hard Boiled* have been translated into

English. Therefore, the analysis of many of the novels and short stories as well as interviews, essays and diaries published from this period are analysed using my own translation of the Japanese texts. Dates of publications will refer to English translations or the original Japanese publication where translations into English are not available. Where Japanese names are referred to in this thesis, the writer's surname is followed by the given name. Long vowels in Japanese words will be marked with macrons.

Yoshimoto's postmodern style

The changing role of women, the absence of adult authority figures and finding a new way of being are all themes in Yoshimoto's novels, reflecting a society in a state of transition. Ambiguity is also a key element in Yoshimoto's non-realist mode of writing, thus, identity, whether based on gender, family or nationality seems to be little more than a frontier or a border to be crossed. This, together with Yoshimoto's embracing of elements of *kawaii* (cute) culture in her writing, is a defining feature of what can be called her postmodern style. By this I mean a style that critiques binary oppositions to do with gender and identity and subverts dominant modes of being that have been presumed to be neutral. Postmodernism is a term that has been much debated. Selden and Widdowson argue that while there are 'many postmodernisms' (1993, 187) the two most influential theories of postmodernism concern 'the dominance of the sign and loss of the real, and a scepticism towards the 'grand narratives' of human history and progress' (1993, 179). Postmodernism, it needs to be acknowledged, then, is a term that is widely used in many fields such as architecture, history and cultural studies and

specifically its use refers to modernism and implies some contrast or change from it. However, as William J. Tyler (2008) discusses in his study of Japanese modernism, many features that are considered to be postmodern in literature such as the absence of traditional plot development, the disintegration of traditional forms of identity and the breaking of taboos, can be identified as features of modernist literature. For the purposes of this thesis, the use of the term postmodern will refer to a literary style which borrows heavily from non-literary and predominantly pop-cultural sources. Thus, Yoshimoto can be considered postmodern in the sense that she was influenced in her development as a writer by *shôjo manga* and *anime* as well as the writing of Stephen King. This borrowing and the fact that like Murakami Haruki, Yoshimoto is writing for an international as well as a Japanese readership, makes her writing part of what Leith Morton, in his study of contemporary Japanese culture, describes as a 'hybrid culture' (Morton, 2003, 8). Most significantly, however, the term postmodern as it is being used here implies a greater prominence given to female writers. Whilst women writers such as Murasaki Shikibu, Sei Shônagon and Higuchi Ichiyô are considered to be in the canon this is not the case for many other women writers. Postmodernism has led to a decentering of the literary landscape in Japan away from the writing of educated middle class males educated in Tokyo. Part of Yoshimoto's achievement is to have helped achieve for Japanese women writers what Elaine Showalter has described in the English context as a 'literature of their own' (Showalter, 1978, 33). This has partly led me to describe her writing as an example of a 'separatist literature of inner space' despite it sharing little in common with the convictions of nineteenth century feminists.

Because of its association with popular culture, Yoshimoto's writing has been dismissed by some critics who do not see it as being serious or worthy of being seen as literature. Yoshimoto herself eschews seriousness in her writing and has described it as fables. I argue that despite the attitude of these critics and the pronouncements of the author herself, Yoshimoto's interest in healing, the search for spiritual meaning and a reconnection with nature has an added significance at a time when urbanisation is accompanied by the breakdown of community and family structures. Moreover, because these ideas have relevance internationally, her writing can be seen to have a trans-cultural appeal. Yoshimoto's writing explores themes which have long traditions in both Japan and the West. The creative tension caused by dramatising these themes in the lives of contemporary characters, using language and techniques borrowed from popular culture, has helped define contemporary literature. Her writing stands at the centre of a debate about what value we place on writing that resists easy and convenient definitions. Must literature be difficult and appeal to an elite? This thesis argues that whilst Yoshimoto's writing needs to be read as an example of paraliterature, it is redefining what we understand as literature in the sense that it shows that writers can address the traditional concerns of literature in the idiom and vernacular of their peers. In this sense Yoshimoto is a writer for this world, now.

Criticism of Yoshimoto's writing suggests at one extreme that it is either the product of late capitalism and therefore a part of the culture of 'empty signs' (Treat, 1995), or else that it reflects the changing nature of Japanese society by showing young women making alternative life-style choices (Awaya and Phillips, 1996). Yoshimoto's writing might be dismissed as being shallow by some critics,

but this thesis argues that in her early writing Yoshimoto created a new type of heroine in contemporary Japanese fiction. This heroine challenged the status quo of a male dominated society not through confrontation, but through an adolescent fantasy world in which 'cuteness' is the defining feature. Cuteness, however, as Kinsella (1995) points out, is a very effective form of subversive political behaviour. The notion of the submissive Japanese female is challenged in Yoshimoto's fiction not so much by the aggressive behaviour of her characters, but through their refusal to accept 'adult' roles. Yoshimoto's heroines find themselves cut off from traditional family ties and are free to engage with the world on their own terms. Generally speaking, they disparage the world of the corporate male in which women are traditionally regarded as little more than wallflowers. Instead, they find employment in alternative settings, which are idealised. Yoshimoto's intention is not to create accurate descriptions of 'work' (kitchen sink realism) but to explore alternative forms of work which reflect the desires and fantasies of young women. This is a key element in Yoshimoto's non-realist mode of writing and it reflects the changing world of young Japanese women who enjoy an economic power unprecedented in the lives of their parents. Not all of Yoshimoto's heroines, however, are young girls. Some are women in their twenties, university graduates or married women. As Yoshimoto's writing has matured, so too have her characters. Obviously there is more to Yoshimoto's writing than a pastoral fix prescribed by a J-Pop novelist traducing literature to the level of a T-shirt manifesto. In addition this thesis argues that rather than cuteness and a deliberate shallowness, it is the key themes of loss, death and finding a new way of being that dominate her writing.

Early success and a sense of impasse

Despite consistently distancing her writing from 'literature', Yoshimoto has won a number of major literary prizes which are listed prominently on her website. In 1987, Yoshimoto Banana won the *Kaien* magazine New Writer Prize for her first novel *Kitchen* when she was twenty-three years old. She was also nominated for the prestigious Akutagawa Prize. Yoshimoto had previously won the Nihon University Department of Art's Prize in 1986 for her novella *Moonlight Shadow*. Despite this critical success early in her career, there were questions raised about whether Yoshimoto's writing had a future. The Japanese critic Shima Hiroyuki published an essay in 1988 entitled 'Can Yoshimoto keep writing?' in which he argued, based on a reading of *Kitchen* (1988) and *Utakata/Sanctuary* (1988), that Yoshimoto's writing was 'disposable' (Shima, 1988, 152). He also describes Yoshimoto's writing as 'lyric sheets', and compares it with popular song lyrics written by Janis Ian, Suzanne Vega and Joni Mitchell. Shima argues that it deals with 'trivia' even if this 'trivia' is set against a background of tragedy in which the death of a close friend or a family member is a 'constant refrain' (155). The end result of the style that Yoshimoto has embraced, argues Shima, is the end of the line for Japanese novelists. For Shima, the 'extended adolescence' that Yoshimoto explored in her early novels such as *Kitchen* and *Utakata/Sanctuary* led to an impasse. She could not continue in this vein indefinitely. He suggested that Yoshimoto consider the Canadian singer Joni Mitchell as a model for her development as a writer. In particular, he pointed to the growing maturity of Mitchell's songwriting from 'Circle Game' (1970) to 'My Secret Place' (1988), which he suggested Yoshimoto could emulate.

Shima's concerns about Yoshimoto's ability to continue writing have not, however, been borne out. Yoshimoto's writing has moved beyond the 'extended adolescence' described by Shima to incorporate a range of social issues and her achievements have been recognised in a variety of ways. In 1995, Yoshimoto Banana was one of two Japanese women included in *Asiaweek's* list of 'Asia's Most Powerful Women'. These were women who were said to 'go beyond the ordinary to achieve the exceptional'. Yoshimoto was described as a 'rebel writer' and her first novel *Kitchen* was said to have captured the voice of 'alienated youth'. In 2000, Yoshimoto's *Collected Works of Yoshimoto Banana: An Author's Selection* was published in four volumes, titled 'Occult', 'Love', 'Death' and 'Life'. Moreover, to further consolidate her position as a significant writer, Kawai Hayao, the director general of the International Research Centre for Japanese Studies in Kyoto (1995 – 2001), interviewed Yoshimoto for N.H.K. television (later published as a book by N.H.K.)

Kawai, a pioneer of Jungian psychotherapy in Japan, was especially interested in interviewing Yoshimoto after many of his clients had told him how she was able to put their feelings into words. After reading *Tsugumi* (1989a) and *Amrita* (1994a), Kawai writes that Yoshimoto is able to 'express well and accurately the deep pain that young Japanese people are carrying around with them today' (Kawai and Yoshimoto, 2002c, 287). In the television broadcast, Yoshimoto is described as having written consistently about 'loss, rebirth and regeneration... capturing the hearts of many young readers'. In this way Yoshimoto's writing can be described as a literature of self-help. At a time of growing concern about young people, especially in relation to mental health, the breakdown of the family

and the need for educational reform, Kawai asked Yoshimoto about her childhood, her father and her writing. Kawai noted that many of Yoshimoto's characters are in their twenties and he asked if that is because she understands them since they are the same age. Yoshimoto replied that she can only write about things that she has experienced. She has tried writing about characters in their fifties but the results were not very convincing. In her mid-thirties she is writing about characters in their thirties and she expects to be writing about characters in their fifties when she is in her fifties (Kawai and Yoshimoto, 2002c, 29).

A trans-cultural writer

Yoshimoto, then, is a writer exploring new ways of being during a period of transition in which accepted conventions in relation to gender and identity are being questioned. This thesis makes the case that Yoshimoto is a trans-cultural writer on the basis of her search for spiritual truth and healing set against a background of postmodern ambiguity. Given the comments made by Shima at the beginning of Yoshimoto's career, her interview with Kawai provides an interesting counterpoint to the various positions that literary critics have taken in relation to Yoshimoto's writing. Whatever importance Kawai attaches to Yoshimoto's views, it needs to be pointed out, however, that his is not an assessment of the literary qualities of her writing. It is more a recognition that Yoshimoto's writing has touched a chord with a society and generation in a state of transition. However, given Kawai's background as a Jungian psychotherapist, it needs to be noted, as intimated above, that Yoshimoto's writing lends itself to

Jungian theory. For example, throughout her writing Yoshimoto explores a sense of identity that is compatible with Jung's archetypes. In *Kitchen* (1993), Mikage says about herself and Yuichi, 'aren't we really man and woman in the primordial sense, and don't we think of each that way' (66). Furthermore after exploring Extra Sensory Perception in her early writing, Yoshimoto explores communication between people, plants and animals in *Karada wa Zenbu Shitteiru (The Body Knows All)* (2000) and communication with stones in *Hard Boiled* (1999). Yoshimoto's writing clearly has affinities with Jung's sense of the psychic interaction between people and the natural world. Jung argued that as scientific understanding has grown the world has become 'dehumanized', resulting in people's sense of isolation in the cosmos and the loss of an 'emotional "unconscious identity" with natural phenomena':

These have slowly lost their symbolic implications. Thunder is no longer the voice of an angry god, nor is lightening his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of a man, no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied (Jung, 1964, 95).

Yoshimoto was born in the same year in which the above extract was published, and, in the second phase of her career, she is clearly interested in exploring people's relationship with the environment in ways which Jung claims have vanished due to 'scientific thinking'. As a result, Yoshimoto's characters communicate with plants and animals and, as is the case in *Hard Boiled*, stones do still speak to man. In the world of Yoshimoto's writing, her characters are increasingly turning away from the sterility of modern urban life and traditional social structures and seeking healing and a sense of well-being from the natural

world instead, thus reflecting the current transitional phase in contemporary Japanese society.

Another writer Yoshimoto may be compared to in this context is D.H. Lawrence. Dolores LaChapelle (1996) in her study of Lawrence describes him as a 'future primitive'. LaChapelle defines future primitivism as 'acknowledging the body and nervous system, which we have inherited from past ages, and beginning again to live the life which harmonizes this body and mind with the surrounding environment' (152). A case could be made for Yoshimoto to be included within this category. However, whereas Lawrence explores the 'vitality' of men and women in sexual relationships free of middle-class bookish 'niceness', Yoshimoto, on the other hand, explores spiritual themes in the absence of explicit descriptions of sexuality. Her characters often glimpse aspects of Jungian archetypes in each other and consequently form family groupings reminiscent of Henry Moore sculptures, with vague outlines hewn out of stone, but few distinguishing features. Interestingly, Jung's biographer, Deirdre Bair, observes that leading up to his split with Freud, Jung expressed continuing reservations about Freud's substitution of sexuality for what he loosely termed the 'mystical' (Bair, 2003, 117). In contrast to the writing of other contemporary Japanese women writers like Yamada Amy, Yoshimoto's writing is conspicuously lacking in overt descriptions of sexuality. Consciously or unconsciously, Yoshimoto appears to have followed in Jung's footsteps in substituting spirituality for sexuality as the major focus in her writing.

A significant feature in Yoshimoto's writing, then, is a return to the world that Jung describes before 'scientific thinking' broke man's connection with nature. This is also expressed in Yoshimoto's conversation with Kawai when she recalls a duck calling to its chick, Yoshimoto's first memory as a three-year-old (Kawai and Yoshimoto, 2002c, 9). After that, the first thing she can remember is the 'wild children' in the downtown area where she grew up. Yoshimoto says that her childhood in Tokyo was like growing up in the country playing on stilts and jumping from roof to roof. This is a Huckleberry Finnesque romance in which Yoshimoto privileges an education of the streets over formal schooling. Both Yoshimoto and Kawai lament the absence of this kind of 'wildness' or risk taking in the lives of young people today (Kawai and Yoshimoto, 2002c, 10). This lament, rather than being lost in a futile nostalgia for the past, is a driving force in Yoshimoto's relentless search for meaning and fulfilment in the lives of her characters that cannot be provided by either the traditional Japanese family or the employment opportunities provided by corporate Japan. As a literature of 'self-help', Yoshimoto's characters turn inwards, summoning their strength from within, and it is here that they connect with both the natural and the supernatural worlds.

The previous references to both Jung and D.H. Lawrence reinforces another important point that needs to be established early in this thesis. Because of the themes she is exploring in her writing and her status as a transcultural writer, Yoshimoto's writing needs to be contextualised in relation to Western canonical writers as well as the influences she has absorbed from both popular culture in Japan and the West. Moreover, we need to consider the extraordinary influence

Western writing has had in shaping contemporary Japanese literature as a whole since the Meiji Period. In a very real sense, then, Yoshimoto has been shaped by both Japanese and Western influences and this important trans-cultural dimension of her writing will be discussed in Chapter Two.

Rescuing literature from irrelevance

Finally, this thesis examines both Yoshimoto's development as a writer and the critical response, both national and international, to her writing in the context of the wider debate within Japan and overseas about the value of popular culture. The influence of popular culture on Yoshimoto's writing is significant, particularly *manga*, both in its conversational style and in the stylised imagery which, like that of single cel animation, captures a sense of heroism or else a setting to which Yoshimoto wishes to draw the reader's attention as a charged moment frozen in time. In this sense, her writing may be described as single frame heroics.

Yoshimoto's writing often takes the form of a search for meaning in which the protagonist is privileged to either gain a sense of the great beyond, a glimpse of God revealed through nature or a sense of the pattern of life in which humanity is but one of many strands. Often these revelations come through contemplation of nature and certainly not through books. Importantly, Yoshimoto turns the attention of the reader inwards, and revelation is sought from within, not without. Therefore, her characters do not join movements and although her writing explores New Age themes such as healing, Extra Sensory Perception, spirituality

and a reconnection with the natural world her characters do not turn to organised religion. They look for help instead from the many characters that conform to types in her writing such as ‘fantasy’ women and ‘wise’ children or the male characters who act as spiritual guides to her female characters. It is this search for meaning that defines Yoshimoto’s writing as much as the influence of *manga* and gives it a creative tension that has seen it help redefine contemporary Japanese literature. Whilst this thesis argues that Yoshimoto’s writing is best read as an example of paraliterature, her writing is nevertheless securely located at the periphery of Japanese literature and can be seen as having given literature a relevance it has been in danger of losing in Japan. As was the case with the post-war writer Dazai Osamu, Yoshimoto’s writing has re-energised people to read books and they are subsequently more likely, as a result, to care about literature. Reading Yoshimoto is likely to be a first step towards reading the literature of which her critics are so protective. This point is re-inforced by the publication of a new series of books featuring works by a number of authors including Yoshimoto Banana, Murakami Haruki, Murakami Ryu and Yamada Amy in 2007, entitled *Hajimete no Bungaku (First Literature)*. In the brochure, the editors assure readers that these books are ‘easy to read’. These authors are thus being used as some kind of Trojan horse to lead young readers into the citadel of ‘literature’. The readability of these new writers stands in stark contrast to ‘literature’ itself which is presumably considered too difficult, obscure and perhaps unrewarding for most first time readers.

Thus, to put Yoshimoto’s writing into context, both in terms of it as an example of paraliterature and in terms of the role of women in Japanese society, Chapter

One briefly examines the constraints that have been traditionally imposed on women in Japanese society. Since the Meiji Period, 'Ideals of femininity' have been imposed on Japanese women by successive governments. With the advent of mass media, however, women's magazines have provided a counterpoint to these gender constructions. Meanwhile, a number of both male and female writers in the modern period have explored the identity of the Japanese woman from a number of emerging critical viewpoints such as Marxism and feminism.

Chapter Two briefly examines the emergence of a national literature in Meiji Era Japan, the re-emergence of women's writing and the criticism that surrounds Yoshimoto's writing. It considers the impact of *manga* on her writing, as well as comparing Yoshimoto's writing with Western writers such as Charles Dickens and J.D.Salinger. Finally, Yoshimoto's writing is compared to other contemporary Japanese writers such as Murakami Ryu, Murakami Haruki and Shimada Masahiko. This discussion demonstrates how Yoshimoto's writing is an example of global literature as much as it is an example of Japanese literature. It also asserts that a crisis of identity is a key concern for all of these postmodern Japanese writers. Perhaps Yoshimoto's writing can best be seen as a battleground between second and third wave feminism (as well as a battleground between modernism and postmodernism) which reflects the changing nature of Japanese society (and literature).

Chapter Three examines the first phase of Yoshimoto's career which, Yoshimoto announced, ended with the publication of *Amrita* in 1994. How might this first phase be characterised? In books such as *Kitchen* (1988a), *Goodbye Tsugumi*

(1989a) and *N.P.* (1990a), Yoshimoto's young androgynous characters are surrounded by death. Her otherwise 'ordinary' female narrators are transformed by their experiences, however, giving them an insight into life and death to which other characters are not privileged. This, coupled with the absence of family and idealised forms of employment, places Yoshimoto's characters outside the traditional social framework for women, which consists of a brief period of full-time employment followed by marriage and then motherhood. Yoshimoto's writing is also decidedly anti-modern, however, in its privileging of the past and a closer connection between people, nature and a life of the senses. Yoshimoto herself has described her writing as 'fables' which can be seen as a comment on the absence of social realism in her writing; an absence which may also explain why Yoshimoto says she is incapable of writing in the confessional style of writing known as *shishôsetsu* or the 'I' novel (Yoshimoto, 1989c, 18).

Chapter Four examines Yoshimoto's writing since *Amrita*. Yoshimoto's essential style remains unchanged but she broadens its focus to deal with social issues such as Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, sexual abuse and the environment. Yoshimoto's characters increasingly engage with the natural world in which 'voices' speak to them from stones, plants and animals. Consequently, it makes sense to read her writing within an ecocritical framework. Ecocriticism is a form of literary criticism which emerged in the United States in the 1990s analysing the relationship between people and nature. Whilst Yoshimoto might be seen to be taking an anti-modern stance, her engagement with the environment is typically light on dogma and she is careful not to burden her readers with too much reality, a fault she finds in the writings of Tezuka Osamu and Miyazawa

Kenji. Her female narrators remain 'ordinary' but, under the guidance of spiritual mentors and in communion with the natural world, find spiritual rather than sexual healing.

This thesis concludes by arguing that Yoshimoto's characters are post-social beings removed from society, first by an alienating experience and secondly, through the insight gained by this experience. Yoshimoto's characters are, in a sense, a cast of invalids alienated from society by illness, loss of memory, over-work, sexual abuse, the death of family members and loved ones. Their voices are isolated from a social or collective perspective. It is, however, the ability of Yoshimoto's characters to face their dilemmas that has ultimately won her praise from influential critics such as Kawai Hayao. With the awarding of the 2004 Akutagawa Prize to nineteen-year-old Wataya Risa and twenty-year-old Kanehara Hitomi, Yoshimoto's growing influence as a writer can also be seen. The literary success of these writers suggests that the voices of young Japanese women are finally being heard. Moreover, these voices are speaking in a new language that is set apart from the traditional, male, educated voice used in literature by its sense of *karumi* (lightness of tone), conversational style and femaleness. More recent developments in contemporary Japanese literature reflect the impact of new technology such as the mobile phone. Of the ten fiction bestsellers of the first half of 2007, half were begun as *keitai shōsetsu* (mobile literature). Rin, the twenty-year old author of *Moshi mo Kimi ga (If You)*, acknowledges that 'older Japanese don't recognise these as novels' but wants *keitai shōsetsu* recognised as a genre (Onishi, 2008, 23). In the contested space of what constitutes Japanese literature Yoshimoto Banana, Murakami Ryu and

Murakami Haruki were labelled the *shinjinrui* (new breed) and embroiled in similar disputes in the 1980s and 1990s. In Yoshimoto's case, by reconnecting her characters with nature, she is intuitively working towards restoring what Jung described as 'the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied' (Jung, 1964, 95). This may prove to be Yoshimoto's most lasting achievement. For hers is often described as a 'healing' voice set against a background of political corruption and scandal, the collapse of the bubble economy, the rise of the Aum cult, the falling birth rate and social problems such as *enjo kôsai* (schoolgirl prostitution) and *hikikomori* (social withdrawal).

CHAPTER ONE: WOMEN AND GENDER ROLES IN CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE SOCIETY

An Historical Overview

As discussed in the Introduction, there is a creative tension at the heart of Yoshimoto's writing. Her insistence on using the conversational language of her peers rather than the traditional language of *junbungaku* (pure literature) enables her search for spiritual meaning and healing. In the absence of traditional social structures, Yoshimoto's predominantly female protagonists struggle to make sense of their world often unaided except for that provided by equally unworldly 'wise' children and 'fantasy' women characters. The fact that Yoshimoto is writing for her peers using their own language does not lessen the value of the search for spiritual meaning in her writing. Neither does it lessen the importance of the search for meaning that is depicted during a period of significant social upheaval, particularly for young Japanese women. Whilst Yoshimoto has distanced her writing from 'literature' her writing is forcing her critics and her readers to redefine what they mean by 'literature' in contemporary Japanese society. As a woman, Yoshimoto has said that Japanese people do not easily accept her description of herself as a writer. Her success is forcing not just a redefinition of literature but also awareness of the changing gender roles in contemporary Japanese society. Women and gender roles in Japan have long been of interest to scholars and writers and, in this chapter, I will revisit some of the work done in this area in order to explain the significance of Yoshimoto's achievements as a woman in this culture.

A Japanese *butoh* dancer, now living in Australia, has described Japanese society as one in which:

... people are losing identity... There is an absence. They are rich and economically satisfied, but it's not stable spiritually. They try and be more superficial, don't have to be political or confront ecology, it's sickening...

Girls, and boys too, are getting more cute and trying not to confront each other. They just laugh and say, "That's cute". Young girls go into prostitution, but they just laugh and say, 'That's cute'. I am curious about that. Japan has become so westernised. Nobody cooks rice anymore, never use chopsticks. The hairstyles are western, there is very much admiration for the blond hair and blue eyes – people wear colored contact lenses. People here are thinking Japan is Zen and meditation, so spiritually oriented, and it's not (Scott-Norman, 1999, 6).

Despite the passage of time, this anecdote remains relevant given the ongoing nature of the discussion about women's fashion and the debate between modernity and tradition. This anecdote shows the clash of tradition and the modern, and the perceived corruption of a culture. It reflects the experiences of a Japanese woman who has travelled and, in this case, settled outside of Japan. Viewing her own culture from the outside, she is critical of Japanese people for being 'superficial' and says that Japan is not what foreigners think it is. This point of view needs to be balanced, however, with the views of women who are living in Japan. In a more recent article on Japanese hairstyling, written in 2004, Simon Rowe notes in 'Anything but Black', that 'traditional values have long dictated that Japanese women wear their hair naturally black, from high-school, through to a corporate career' (Rowe, 2004, 12). On the other hand, for contemporary Japanese women, one way of expressing themselves is by dyeing their hair. Rowe quotes a thirty-two year old travel consultant, Tamada Ayame, who says 'It's a psychological thing. Lighter colours make me feel happier and

more optimistic in my daily life' (ibid.). Tamada argues that black hair 'doesn't fit the image of the independent, modern Japanese woman at all' (ibid.).

These views show two different approaches to the direction that young Japanese people are taking in their lives. Whilst the 'outrageous' fashion choices of young Japanese women are celebrated in Takemoto Novala's novel *Kamikaze Girls* (2006) and U.S. singer Gwen Stefani's song 'Harajuku Girls' (2004), the criticism of Japanese people quoted in the first article is that they are losing their sense of identity. These same criticisms have been made about Yoshimoto Banana's writing. Yoshimoto's novels have been criticised for their superficiality by critics such as Miyoshi (1991), Treat (1995) and Smith (1997). Whatever criticisms are made about Yoshimoto's writing and whatever criticisms are levelled at young people in Japan today, it cannot be denied that the identity of the modern Japanese people, particularly young Japanese women, has undergone radical change during and since the 1980s. Furthermore, as has been discussed in the Introduction, Yoshimoto has created a new type of heroine in contemporary Japanese writing which reflects this change; a heroine that has emerged out of the apparently contradictory strands of popular culture and a concern for spiritual well-being that is more often associated with serious culture.

It is interesting to contrast these impressions of Japanese identity with those of a Japanese woman living in the United States written sixty-six years earlier. In 1933, Etsu Inagaki Sugimoto published an account not only of her life in the United States but also of her childhood in a *samurai* household in Meiji Period Japan. Sugimoto refers to the 'age-old, patient submission of the Japanese

woman' and seems to suggest that there were too many restrictions placed on women at this time (1933, 140). For example, they did not receive the same education as men and even their sleep was prescribed on the basis that 'Samurai daughters were taught never to lose control of mind or body – even in sleep' (39). Sugimoto expresses a desire in her autobiography to move beyond the confines that being female placed upon her. She became a Catholic and went to live in the United States. The constraints on Japanese women at this time are also the subject of controversial Japanese film-maker Ôshima Nagisa's 1991 documentary *Kyoto, My Mother's Place*, in which Ôshima examines the life of his mother who had been a high school student in Kyoto in the 1920s. For her, marriage was inescapable and total subservience to her husband was expected, especially in a city like Kyoto that had once been the national capital and was steeped in tradition. Sugimoto's experience, however, is indicative of the accelerated change that has been a part of Japanese life for more than a century. Similarly, Yoshimoto's writing reflects the loss of rigidly defined 'ideals of femininity' that in a sense were already being undermined during the Meiji Period. By the Taisho Period, some women, like Sugimoto, were able to aspire to lifestyles that had previously been denied to women. To put Yoshimoto's writing into perspective, the changing social context within which these changes took place needs to be discussed.

Nation building and changing 'ideals of femininity'

In *Recreating Japanese Women 1600 – 1945* (Bernstein, 1991), a number of essays examine the evolution of female roles and feminine identity in Japanese

society over a period of three hundred and fifty years. One of the key concepts discussed in these essays is that of *ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother), a term coined by Nakamura Masanao in 1875, which emphasised the woman's role within the family. At this time, the Meiji government created 'ideals of femininity' (a term used by Bernstein, 1991, 2) to allow the Japanese government and Japanese men to modernise the nation. Whereas in the Tokugawa and Meiji Periods, men worked close to home and took part in family life, it was during the Meiji Period that men began to work away from home in non-familial enterprises. The concept of *ryōsai kenbo* also contained, however, elevated expectations of women. Previously, moral tracts such as *Onna Daigaku* (*Greater Learning for Women*), popular in the Tokugawa Period, emphasised a woman's responsibility to the household and her duty to her husband and seniors, and also her 'innate inferiority'. *Ryōsai Kenbo* presumed a 'greater degree of female competence'. Women who were increasingly receiving an education were expected in their roles as mothers to ensure that their children became 'good subjects of the emperor' (Uno, 1991, 38). In the Meiji Period, however, women were barred from politics, holding property rights, serving as family heads, and almost excluded from universities. Thus, Uno argues that the new 'ideal of femininity' saw a 'greater rigidity in family roles' (41). Women were given a greater responsibility for child rearing, yet Uno (1991) suggests that 'If Japanese women became trapped in the house, Japanese men became locked out of the home' (41).

Sandra Buckley (1997) argues that the 'second wave' of the women's movement in postwar Japan followed a 'first wave' which had its beginnings in the Meiji Period. In *Nationalism and Gender* (2004), Ueno Chizuko points out that the

‘first wave’ had an ‘affinity for Scandanavian maternalism and rejected Anglo-Saxon individualism and egalitarianism’ (27). Buckley notes, however, that the women’s movement was perceived as enough of a threat by the Meiji government that the 1890 Law on Associations and Meetings was enacted which banned women from attending political meetings or being involved in political activities (304).

In 1887 the Ministry of Education suggested in *Meiji Onna Daigaku* (*The Meiji Greater Learning for Women*) that ‘the home is a public place where private feelings should be forgotten’. The family home was clearly seen in the Meiji Period as a precinct of the state. Nolte and Hastings (1991) suggest that the 1890 law produced ‘conflicting images of women’. Under the law, women were viewed simultaneously as ‘weak and vulnerable’, ‘dangerous’ as well as ‘responsible and authoritative’ (156-7). The notion of femininity continued to be the subject of debate. Nolte and Hastings (1991) suggest that bureaucrats who shaped gender policy ‘acted in the interests of industrialising Japan’ (172). Thus there is a strong link between the goals of nation building and the construction of ‘ideals of femininity’ by the state.

The rise of the *Modan Ga-ru* (Modern Girl)

If *ryōsai kenbo* represents an ‘ideal of femininity’ which emphasises a woman’s role within the family, the rise of the *modan ga-ru* (modern girl) represents the opposite. The *modan ga-ru* phenomenon was a development during the Taisho Period in which young Japanese women wore Western dress and Western hair

styles and smoked cigarettes in public. This development coincided with the establishment of the modern nation state and the rise of the middle-class, but whilst it might have been seen to herald the dawn of new freedoms for Japanese women, it was not a political movement. Although it coincided with the emergence of feminism in Japan, Saitô Minako argues, however, that these women were unselfconsciously following their own desires and had little to do with the ideals of feminists and suffragettes (2000, 10 – 11). In 1924, Kitazawa Shuichi described the Modern Girl as being ‘apolitical’, neither being an advocate for women’s rights nor of having any intention of being a slave for men (Kitazawa in Silverberg, 1991, 240-1). Whilst it is difficult to make a comparison between Yoshimoto Banana and the *modan ga-ru* because of the difference in circumstances between the 1920s and early twentieth century Japan, it is interesting to note that Yoshimoto has also distanced herself from feminism and in her books explores new ways of being for her female characters independently of any social movement. Given that Yoshimoto’s writing has encouraged her readers to examine new ways of being for her female characters, one practical solution would be to describe her as a writer with feminist sympathies as opposed to an active feminist.

In Japanese literature, women have long been at the centre of the battle between change and tradition. ‘Ideals of femininity’ are the centre of this tension. Tyler (2008) argues that in modernist texts women were treated as ‘icons of rebellion or flashpoints for social controversy’ (28). One such modernist text is the 1924 novel *Chijin No Ai* (Translated into English as *Naomi* in 1986) by Tanazaki Junichiro, whose main character Naomi is an example of the *modan ga-ru*. Later

Tanizaki took exception to the westernisation of Japanese women and in 1931 wrote an essay titled 'Love and Lust' arguing that:

The elevation of Japanese women, encumbered by many centuries of tradition, to the position of Western women would require many generations of spiritual and physical cultivation. It could not be accomplished in our generation... I will confess that, in my youth, I was one of those who embraced this preposterous dream and felt a terrible loneliness at the realization that my dream was not about to become a reality (Tanizaki, Quoted in Chambers' Introduction to *Naomi*, 1986, p. x).

Whilst this simplifies Tanizaki's attitudes towards women and the 'West' it does illustrate some of the uncertainties that were felt as gender roles changed in response to the demands of an increasingly modernised society.

Women writers emerged who were unhappy with the status quo and new women's publications took up the debate about the 'new woman', focussing on the westernisation of Japanese women. Rodd (1991) argues that, as a result of this discussion, the state lost its 'monopoly over gender construction in Japan' (176). Rodd's treatise on women writers of the Taisho Period highlights the works of Yosano Akiko, best known for her poetry, who also wrote many 'highly opinionated' (183) and 'heartfelt' (187) essays. In one essay she refuted traditional concepts such as *fushô fuzui* or *fushô fuwa* (the wife willingly following the husband's opinion) on the basis that anyone whose eyes have been opened would be shocked by these old fashioned ideals (187).

Yosano believed that people should be allowed to take on as many roles as they are capable and that the relationship of a couple was equally as important as having children. Her views were not necessarily shared, however. Rodd sums up

the views of Yosano and two other writers, Hiratsuka Raichô and Yamakawa Kikue, and argues that these three writers represent ‘three of the paths the women’s movement has taken in the twentieth century’:

Akiko’s startlingly modern demands for equality of opportunity and effort, Raicho’s call for state welfare to support the family for the good of society, and Kikue’s appeal for socialist revolution... (Rodd, 1991, 194).

The Taisho Period itself was a period of great change during which the middle-class in Tokyo grew from nearly six percent of the workforce in 1908 to over 21 percent in 1920. According to surveys of working women, necessity was the biggest factor, but some were motivated by the opportunities that work offered, including independence and self-fulfillment.

According to Silverberg, varying interpretations of gender roles meant that writers like Kitamura Kaneko ‘accepted that what it meant to be feminine and what it meant to be masculine were being called into question’ (1991, 243). Silverberg points out, however, that for all the crossing of gender boundaries, there was never any doubt about the sexuality of the Modern Girl, who was ‘unquestionably female’ (1991, 244). Interestingly, in relation to the environmental themes that emerge in the second phase of Yoshimoto’s career, Ueno (2004) notes that Takamure Itsue, Hiratsuka Raichô’s ‘maternalist successor’, ‘... presented herself as an enemy of the evils of urbanisation and capitalism, and protector of nature and the rural and pastoral’ (30). Whilst Yoshimoto shares similar ideals in relation to nature, her writing does not share the same maternal emphasis on the ‘ideals of femininity’ promoted by both Hiratsuka and Takamure.

During the Pacific War (1940 – 1945), the state promoted the policy of *ryōsai kenbo* (Good Wife, Wise Mother) and encouraged young rural women to work in factories. The State also promoted the policy of *fukoku kyōhei* (Rich Country, Strong Army) which originated in the early Meiji period. These two policies, Miyake argues, proved to be irreconcilable because the government was in effect glorifying motherhood whilst at the same time victimizing female factory workers (1991, 270). In this sense, Miyake argues that feminists ‘succumbed to the state’s instrumental use of women’ (275).

In *Nationalism and Gender* (2004), Ueno argues that during the Pacific War feminists welcomed plans for the ‘nationalisation of women through modern, total war’ (39) because it brought with it a ‘new identity for women’ (38). However, Ueno also points out that the state expected women on the home front to play the roles of ‘reproductive soldiers’ and of ‘warriors in the economic war’ (Ueno, 2004, 44). In Japan, Germany and Italy, the fascist states of the Axis Alliance, women’s roles were used to enforce gender boundaries rather than break them down. The consequences of this policy not only led to ‘the glorification of motherhood and the victimization of female factory workers’ as Miyake points out, but also the victimization of the military ‘comfort women’ who Ueno writes ‘were forced to carry the burden of “whorishness” as opposed to motherhood, the dark side of the sexual standard’ (48).

According to Anne Imamura, the essays collected in *Recreating Japanese Women, 1600 - 1945* ‘shattered a number of myths about Japanese women’ (1996, 1). Imamura argues that they show that motherhood has not always been

the primary role of Japanese women, that Japanese women did work outside the family home and that Japanese women did not begin to work outside the home only after World War Two. Imamura also suggests that, in a comparison of the roles of men and women, despite the prevailing sense that men are allowed far more access to positions of power in Japanese society, the position of women actually allows for more choice (5). In terms of nation building, however, the construction of ‘ideals of femininity’ was a major priority for the State which became less tolerant of such social phenomenon as the *modan ga-ru* when the militarists took control during the 1930s.

The Post-War Experience

Takie Sugiyama Lebra (1984), Iwao Sumiko (1993) and Nancy R. Rosenberger (2001) have all written full-length studies of Japanese women in the post-war era. Lebra’s study, in particular, raises a number of issues that have relevance to Yoshimoto’s portrayal of Japanese women. One of these is the notion of ‘*the perfect mother as a cultural type*’ (34). Lebra notes that the ‘perfect mother’ is described as having had ‘enormous hardship and suffering in one way or another’ (1984, 35). According to interviewees, a worthless mother has an easy life. In order to be a perfect mother, there is a need to ‘suffer’, particularly under a mother-in-law (36). This is the subject of a Japanese proverb which, according to Knight, compares the relationship between a daughter and a mother-in-law to that of a monkey and a dog, ‘*yome to shûtome inu to saru* (like wife and mother-in-law, so dog and monkey)’ (Knight, 2006, 109). The assumption being that the natural enmity between wives and mothers-in-law in Japan is like that between

dogs and their fiercest enemy, the monkey. The ‘suffering’ of a young woman under her mother-in-law is described by Edward Seidensticker in the *Life World Library Book on Japan* (1966) in relation to a photograph of seven members of a farming family seated around the fireplace being served by the farmer’s daughter-in-law. Seidensticker writes, ‘it is cooked and served by the farmer’s daughter-in-law who by ancient custom is a maid of all work’ (69). Yoshimoto’s female characters ‘suffer’, but not in the same way either as daughters-in-law or as mothers. Yoshimoto’s characters initially suffer the loss of family or a loved one, and, through their suffering, discover non-traditional ways of being and fulfillment. In this way, their experiences resonate with the experiences of increasing numbers of young women in Japan who also seek fulfillment outside marriage and motherhood.

The emergence of the ‘parasite single’

In this chapter, I have explored how ‘ideals of femininity’ are at the centre of clashes between tradition and change and the rise of the *modan ga-ru* can be seen as one such flashpoint. Another example of ‘ideals of femininity’ being at the centre of the clash between tradition and change can be seen in the emergence of the term ‘parasite single’, used to describe Japanese women who are reluctant to marry or not to have children. This has become a significant trend in contemporary Japanese society and in 1984, Lebra wrote that:

Japanese women today have begun to question whether motherhood is the surest road to a woman’s self-fulfillment, whether or not they should look for other alternatives (Lebra, 1984, 216).

The term 'parasite singles' was coined by Yamada Masahiro in 1999. Yet, despite the trend away from marriage, it is still a main concern for women. Marriage, writes Lebra, is an essential part of the traditional *ie* (home) system and a woman without marital experience is considered 'deprived of meaning in her life' (1984, 78). Iwao argues that while the figure of the mother is still central to most women's sense of self worth, 'the image of self sacrifice has largely faded' (1993, 128). Iwao argues that because Japanese women born between 1960 and 1969 escaped the 'traditional confines of female destiny', they have grown up with the same 'individualistic and hedonistic values' as the men of their generation (1993, 61). Therefore the institution of marriage is under pressure. Men, it appears, are unaware that women have developed a 'totally new outlook on life'. Rosenberger argues that in the 1980s there was not only a 'slowly growing trend toward distrust of marriage among young women' (2001, 63–64) but there was also pressure on middle-class Japanese women to go out and work rather than stay at home. The work, however, was low level so they could easily be flexible and switch between being 'high-level consumers, low-level workers, and faithful procreators and nurturers' (66).

In all of these accounts of Japanese womanhood by Lebra, Iwao and Rosenberger, marriage and motherhood are no longer a major priority for an increasing number of Japanese women. Or, if they are a priority, they are being delayed until significantly later in life. This view of Japanese women is echoed in the media. Cameron and Wahlin somewhat sensationally write:

Like the power girls of animated video games, young Japanese women swat, kick and roar at their maternal instinct. When it rears up, they chase it down, thrash it and stuff it right back into its cave. Should they keep winning, the heroine stays free. Lose, or take the first dangerous step into marriage, and she teeters at the edge of a time tunnel (Cameron and Wahlin, 2005, 17).

Although Cameron and Wahlin acknowledge that ‘Japan’s young women do not know what they want’, they point out that two-thirds of households have no children. In fact, the country has more registered dogs than children. In 2000, 54 percent of women aged 25 to 29 were single compared to nearly 21 percent in 1970. Fertility rates are low and in 2003 the rate was 1.29 births per woman, which was one of the lowest in the world and below the number needed to sustain the population. The Japanese government is trying to reverse this trend through financial incentives for families with children, job flexibility and increased options for women. But as Rosenberger writes, this runs counter to media representations of women. Rosenberger points out that there are two messages contained in Japanese media representations of women in the post-war period, that of the ‘dutiful switchers’ between work and home and that of women as ‘free, leisured consumers’ (1996, 12). The first is in line with societal expectations whereby women will typically graduate from high school, junior college or university and take a job. The expectation is that they will marry and have children in their mid to late twenties, giving up work and becoming economically dependent on their husbands. Women will then take sole responsibility for their children’s education and later when the children are at school, take on part-time work or engage in hobbies such as the tea ceremony.

Women's magazines and changing 'ideals of femininity'

The clash over 'ideals of femininity' between the forces of tradition and change is significant because it provides the context in which Yoshimoto's career needs to be placed to show how her characters and the language they use is valid, since it challenges the predominantly male voice of traditional Japanese literature. This is a voice privileged by the status of men within Japanese society. The voice which Yoshimoto has successfully established at the centre of contemporary Japanese literature explores new ways of being which Japanese women have pursued in defiance of tradition. The clash over 'ideals of femininity' has not only been fought on the pages of novels and in the clothing and hair styles of women on the street since the emergence of the *modan ga-ru*, but also in the pages of Japanese women's magazines which have also offered 'alternative images to women' (Rosenberger, 1996, 19). Magazines targeting women grew from just four publications to sixty-two during the 1970s and 1980s. Compared with previous magazines that targeted women, these magazines included younger women and divided the market into narrower age groups. The growth in circulation suggests that the views being discussed were becoming more mainstream and less radical. Rosenberger (1996) suggests that the major shift reflected in the growth of this industry has been away from prewar household and community to women being aware of themselves as citizens with needs that warrant attention from the state (20). The magazines promote the idea that women are consumers with more sophisticated concerns than being worried about not being wasteful. Ultimately, these magazines threaten established gender differences by showing women

enjoying themselves. These changes to do with the role and behaviour of women since the 1970s are instances of postmodernisation referred to in the Introduction.

Of course, not all Japanese women's magazines support the radical changes to 'ideals of femininity' taking place in Japanese society. In this way the clash between 'ideals of femininity' can be seen to be ongoing. In November 2003, *Josei Seibun* (*Women's Weekly*), featured an article about young women who do their make-up on public transport. According to the article, five universities surveyed 699 female students on public transport about this issue and approximately one-third said that they do their make-up on the train. The main reason they gave was because of a lack of time. In the article, Professor Sakaguchi Sanae argues that this is because of late night television and part time work at bars that are open until late. Society is becoming increasingly nocturnal, he argues, and the number of people who cannot get out of bed in the morning is increasing. This and the speed of modern life are the reasons that people do not have enough time.

Discussions about applying make-up on public transport, the declining marriage and birth rates and the use of mobile phones in public target female behaviour that does not conform to accepted 'ideals of femininity'. In the case of applying make-up on public transport, a number of experts were asked for their opinions in the *Josei Seibun* article. Sakaguchi Sanae argued that this behaviour represented a 'moral dilemma'. Sugawara Kenosuke, from the literature department of the Seishin Women's University, thought it was 'scandalous' and Asakura Shoko, an ageing specialist, linked the behaviour to prostitution and suggested that adults

need to explain to the young that this type of behaviour is ‘wrong because it is wrong’. In a follow up article in June 2005, *Josei Seibun* reported that a committee was established in Tokyo in April 2004, to give the final answer as to whether behaviours such as applying make-up in trains constitute a violation of public nuisance laws. The committee was set up because of an increase in the number of complaints about such behaviours. In one incident, a 22-year-old woman pushed a 65-year-old woman against the carriage breaking her ribs after she was cautioned about her use of make-up on the platform.

The phenomenon of women doing their make-up on the train has even merited an article in the Melbourne *Age* newspaper by Tokyo correspondent Deborah Cameron, who took a women’s only carriage to ‘watch what goes on when men are not around’:

First came out the mirrors the size of dinner plates from their school bags and then went on dark foundation. They sketched in eyebrows, rubbed frosty white highlighter down the bridge of the nose and more on their eyelids and underneath them, and then swept new eyeliner in a streak that stretched almost to the temple. The last touch, mascara, went on after they had dragged their lashes with a metal curler wielded like a precision surgical instrument (Cameron, 2005c, 24).

Cameron’s article, like the articles in *Josei Seibun*, documents the drama of social change from the perspective of an external observer. It also shows that this fascination with the resistance or incomprehension being shown towards changing ‘ideals of femininity’ in Japanese society is not restricted to the Japanese media.

Despite such changes, there is debate about the impact that falling marriage and fertility rates have actually had on the lives of Japanese women. White observes that despite significant change in women's lives since the 1950s, this has not translated into 'diversity in their options' (2002, 153). The main obstacle to change, according to Millie R. Creighton, is that Japanese women themselves are still being made to believe that the home is their main responsibility (1996, 205). In support of Creighton's observation, feminist academic Ueno Chizuko argues that despite falls in fertility rates, the conditions of postmodernisation have actually led to traditional family structures being reinforced by social phenomena such as *mazakon* (mother complex) (Ueno in Buckley, 1997, 290). Clearly, there is ambiguity about the gains that are being made by Japanese women in this transitional phase in Japanese society.

The Women's Liberation movement

Feminism and the Women's Liberation movement were significant forces in Japanese society during and following the 1960s. While Yoshimoto Banana does not acknowledge feminism as a significant influence on her writing, her depiction of Japanese women can be seen to reflect trends in Japanese society that have been influenced by feminism. The gains made by Japanese feminists are also reflected in the kind of upbringing Yoshimoto received. Her father, a major postwar poet, literary and cultural critic as well as political activist, presided over a household in which Yoshimoto notes there was never any suggestion that her choices would be dictated by gender.

After the heady days of the student uprisings in Japanese universities in the late 1960s, some women activists moved on to form the Women's Liberation movement, which forms part of the second wave of Japanese feminism. Of this period, Vera Mackie writes in *Feminism in Modern Japan* (2003) that Japanese women, like women in the United States and Europe, found they were experiencing similar contradictions in that although they had received an education promising opportunities for 'self-fulfilment' they found themselves entering a labour market based on 'inequalities of class and gender' (156).

In 1993, Kurihara Nanako, a Japanese woman who left Japan in the 1980s to live in New York, made a 'personal journey' back to Japan to explore the legacy of the Women's Liberation Movement in Japan. In her film documentary *Ripples of Change* (1993), Kurihara interviewed a number of former activists in the movement. One of these former activists was Tanaka Mitsu, now living in Tokyo as an acupuncturist. Tanaka was initially involved in the student protest movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s but became disillusioned because she felt that the position of women in the movement was not so different from the position of women in mainstream society. She felt, for example, that student discussions relating to *ningen* (human beings) did not take into account the experiences of Japanese women. Tanaka felt that she could not discuss her own problems as a woman and, having been sexually abused as a child, the movement did nothing for her in her personal struggle. A founder of the group *Tatakau Onna* (Fighting Women), Tanaka is famous for having written a pamphlet in 1970 entitled *Benjo kara no kaiho* (*Liberation from the Toilet*) which became a manifesto for the Japanese Women's Movement. In the pamphlet, Tanaka

explained that women were divided into two categories; those that married and those that were used like *benjo* (toilets) to relieve male sexual tensions. By the mid 1970s, however, Tanaka decided to leave Japan and the Women's Liberation movement. Asked why the Women's Liberation movement did not spread more widely in Japan, Tanaka suggests three reasons. First, Japan is one big family in which people communicate non-verbally. Therefore it is hard to say what you think. Secondly, the faction *Chûpiren*, which involved women demonstrating in pink helmets, was seized by the media and used to discredit the movement. Finally, the Western image of the downtrodden housewife did not actually suit the Japanese context. It is proposed in this film that the women's movement in Japan has taken a different direction from that of the West and that rather than imposing change on society, former activists such as Tanaka Mitsu have chosen instead to change themselves in order that society can change. This is a non-confrontational approach that avoids the violence of the student protest movement that preceded the Women's Liberation movement and is compatible with Yoshimoto's world view which, whilst on one hand can be criticised as being apolitical can also be seen more positively as non-confrontational. While, as we have seen, Yoshimoto doesn't identify her writing with feminism, she has certainly been influenced by it. In the novel *Amrita* (1994a), the character Saseko's name is a reference to the concept created by Tanaka Mitsu about women being used like *benjo* (toilets). In the novel, Saseko is abused by a succession of men and hates both her body and Japan (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1996, 183). Whilst Yoshimoto is dismissive of the impact of feminism on her writing, Mackie argues that feminism in Japan continues to be active to this day. In particular, she points to the way in which Japanese feminist politics

was profoundly influenced by International Women's Year in 1975 and the subsequent International Decade for Women (2003, 168). These events inspired campaigns by Japanese feminists that led to significant policy reforms such as the Equal Employment Opportunity Act in 1985 and the Childcare Leave Law in 1992. Other policy reforms have also been achieved in education and Nationality laws.

The politics of falling birth rates

Whilst the activism of Japanese feminists has resulted in significant reforms since the 1970s, the choices that Japanese women have been making have historically caused concern at government level, especially in relation to their appearance. As a result, bobbed hair was prohibited in 1872 and permanent wave styles in 1939. In 2003, Ôta Seiichi, a former cabinet minister and member of the governing party (the L.D.P.), suggested at a forum held by the national kindergarten association on Japan's declining birth rate, that gang rapists were 'virile' and 'close to normal'. Mr Ôta was reported by the Japanese news agency Kyodo as saying that the 'fall in the birth rate was because of the lack of courage among Japanese men to marry'. Whilst Mr Ôta is taking Japanese men to task for their perceived lack of 'virility', the implication is that Japanese women should be subdued to the will of Japanese men. The prime-minister, Koizumi Junichiro, declined to agree, however, and is quoted as saying that 'Rape is an atrocious act of cowardice and has nothing to do with "virile" qualities' (Koizumi in Green, 2003, 19). In 2007, Japan's health minister, Yanagisawa Hakuo, told Liberal Democratic Party members in western Japan that women of child bearing age

should perform a 'public service' and raise the birth rate which fell to a record low of 1.26 children per woman in 2005. In his speech, Yanagisawa referred to women as 'birth-giving machines'. Democratic Party leader Hatoyama Yukio later described these comments as 'extremely rude towards women' (*The Age*, 2007, 9). In addition, prime-minister Abe Shinzô did not call for the resignation of his health minister and thereby implicated agreement with Yanagisawa, making it clear that many Japanese politicians continue to see the primary role of Japanese women in terms of motherhood.

In the political sphere, despite the democratic reforms initiated by the occupying forces after the Second World War (in particular, the reformation of the education system and giving women the vote), the number of women in parliament in Japan is still minimal. The election of Ôta Fusae as governor of Osaka in 2000 was hailed as a 'positive sign', but journalist Michael Millett points out that:

Japan ranks a lamentable 94th in the world in terms of its female representation in national parliament. That puts it behind Syria, Iran and Iraq, hardly known as epicentres of female emancipation. In the critical Lower House, women have only 25 seats out of 500. Only three of Japan's 666 mayors are women (Millett, 2000, 11).

The reasons for, and potential meaning of such an outcome, are debatable. Vera Mackie argues that one factor of 'protective' legislation is that 'all working women are positioned as mothers or potential mothers, through the language of *bosei hogo*' (motherhood protection) (1995, 104). In a comparison of men and women, Mackie argues that where men are positioned as workers or as citizens with rights, women are positioned, through the discourse of protection, as weak and in need of state protection (103).

On the other hand, Ueno Chizuko cautions that the criteria used by the U.N. focuses on labor-force participation, the election of women to government and ‘other measures of women’s access to male domains’ (Ueno in Buckley, 1997, 278). Ueno argues that differences between the American context and the Japanese context need to be taken into consideration. For example, in America feminists have ‘devoted themselves to the issues of freedom of speech for women’ (278), whereas ‘in any East Asian culture you will find that women have a very tangible power within the household’ (279).

Yoshimoto’s writing can be characterised by its non-traditional representation of women’s lives. Yoshimoto’s characters tend to be displaced rather than securely located within a traditional family setting. As a result they explore alternative realities and identities gaining strength from these rather than their position within the traditional Japanese household as described by Ueno. It is, however, evident in the critical reception given to the writing of Kôda Aya. In *Mirror: The fiction and essays of Kôda Aya*, Ann Sherif argues that the ‘utopian vision of the family’ in Kôda’s writing is an alternative to the concerns raised by contemporary writers contemplating failed patriarchy and matriarchy (1999b, 66). Sherif also argues that some of Kôda’s narratives seek to subvert male-dominated culture and challenge the centrality and universality of masculine values (133). Whereas the Western critics discussed in this chapter focus on the positive aspect of changing ‘ideals of femininity’ in Japanese society, Japanese critics such as Ueno are more cautious. The role of housewife is, despite statistical evidence to the contrary, still central in many people’s thinking in Japan about women and their place in Japanese society.

In an article entitled 'Women and the Family in Recent Japanese Literature', Osawa Machiko notes that 'Since the end of World War Two, few countries have so reified the housewife as the ideal lifestyle for women as Japan' (2001, 1). Osawa argues that reactions to this kind of thinking dominate contemporary Japanese fiction. Contemporary Japanese women's literature is, she argues, struggling to come to terms with a shift in thinking by women who are putting their own needs as individuals before the needs of society. Osawa describes the challenge facing young women in contemporary Japan as being '... to determine what kind of life she will find truly rich and fulfilling'. In the next chapter I will argue that Yoshimoto's characters are engaged in a search for a lifestyle that is 'truly rich and fulfilling', but without necessarily becoming housewives, mothers or office ladies. However, because her focus is on individual needs rather than the needs of society, Yoshimoto distances her writing from broader social movements. Thus when asked about feminism, Yoshimoto argued that 'the attitudes of people within these movements are too extreme' (Yoshimoto, 1995a, 28). Doris Lessing has described some feminists as 'Cruel Sisters' and argues that 'each political movement unleashes the worst in human behaviour and admires it' (1997, 347). Whilst Yoshimoto is more circumspect, she is not alone in being wary of political movements. In attempting to create a new life for themselves as individuals in the face of overwhelming community expectations of them as women, Yoshimoto's characters can be described as engaging in single frame heroics. In terms of her writing, the influence of popular culture on Yoshimoto's writing enables her to step outside existing literary and social conventions and explore new 'ideals of femininity' using the language of her peers. Morton argues that rather than merely reflecting social change in contemporary Japanese society,

Yoshimoto and Murakami Haruki are helping to shape and draw attention to particular social issues and thus 'problematise matters that otherwise would not come to public attention' (Morton, 2003, 257).

Analysing the fiction of Yoshimoto Banana and Hayashi Mariko, Awaya and Phillips argue that both Yoshimoto and Hayashi raise challenges and questions which 'resonate with young women in Japan today'. Awaya and Phillips argue, however, that a careful distinction is made between Yoshimoto's readers and her protagonists (1996, 246). In this way, they suggest, Yoshimoto manages to uphold traditional institutions such as marriage and the family whilst at the same time empowering her readers by identifying with strong female protagonists who 'speak out without fear of ostracism' (254). This is why, Awaya and Phillips argue, Yoshimoto appeals to young Japanese women. Her books promote the safe idea of change *within* the existing social framework. It is change from within that is most empowering because it does not involve confrontation with a dominant role model or identity. As we have seen, this is an idea that strikes a chord with the former feminist activist Tanaka Mitsu. At a time of great social change, it can be argued that Yoshimoto is raising awareness of these issues but without positioning herself in a political sense. Yoshimoto places far more emphasis on healing and self-help than affirmative action in her writing, and in some way can be compared with her father Takaaki who, whilst being labelled a critic of the New Left, has attacked both the left and the right in his critiques of society and culture and advanced instead the concept of *jiritsu* (independence). Whilst Takaaki has been involved at various times with movements such as the *zengakuren*, one faction involved in the broader student movement in the 1960s,

Yoshimoto Banana has explored new ways of being for her characters independently of either traditional social structures or radical political or religious movements. Her characters are post-social beings in the sense that they turn within or to other characters such as the 'wise' children and 'fantasy' women characters in her books who also exist on the margins of society (or reality). Moreover, it is Yoshimoto's exploration of new ways of being in this new environment free of the entanglements of the past that has made it so powerful. Yoshimoto has liberated her characters from the struggles of the past between traditionalists and radical feminists and given her female characters freedom. However, it is not a freedom which comes without a price. Yoshimoto's characters must face tremendous suffering caused by illness or the loss of loved ones. Their search for healing and spirituality keeps the focus in Yoshimoto's writing on the individual. It is this focus on the individual and the struggle of the individual to make sense of an increasingly alienating world that has helped make Yoshimoto a trans-cultural writer. The new ways of being that Yoshimoto is exploring are part of a global culture.

CHAPTER TWO: YOSHIMOTO BANANA AND CONTEMPORARY JAPANESE LITERATURE

As we have seen in Chapter One, a number of significant changes in relation to ‘ideals of femininity’ have been documented in various studies of Japanese women. These form an important context in which Yoshimoto Banana’s work must be considered. *Ryōsai kenbo* (good wife, wise mother), developed in the Meiji Period emphasised a woman’s place in the home. In 1890, women were banned by law from direct participation in the political process. Today, despite the democratic reforms initiated by the occupying forces after the Second World War, in particular reforming the education system and giving women the vote, the representation of women by women in Japanese politics is minimal.

Contemporary writers like Yoshimoto Banana and Yamada Amy have consistently explored alternative options for women by breaking down traditional gender roles and ‘ideals of femininity’ that centred on marriage and child bearing. These changes have not taken place in a vacuum, however. In the postwar period, Japanese women’s magazines offered alternative images to Japanese women, helping to break down the notion of *ryōsai kenbo* during a period of dramatic growth. This was followed by a period of social instability during the late 1960s and early 1970s during which time the Women’s Liberation Movement and second wave feminism emerged from the student protests in Japan.

In this chapter, Yoshimoto’s writing and its engagement with changing notions of ‘ideals of femininity’ will be placed in a broader cultural context by examining

the development of a 'modern' or national Japanese literature. Yoshimoto's voice is one of a number of female voices that have emerged within contemporary Japanese literature. Due to the tension between serious literature and popular culture which critically informs the debate surrounding Yoshimoto's writing, this chapter also examines shared themes in Yoshimoto's writing and the writing of Charles Dickens and J.D.Salinger. Apart from the fact that all of these writers have met with similar critical reservation in the face of huge popular success, Dickens and Salinger, despite differences in time, place, language and culture, thematically share much in common with Yoshimoto. This comparison with Western writers also allows Yoshimoto's writing to be seen in a global context and not as the product of a culture that is alien, exotic and/or 'other'. Ultimately, by discussing Yoshimoto's writing in the context of these writers, this thesis shows that it needs to be read as an example of paraliterature.

Japanese literature, women and modernity

Women's writing in Japan has largely been ignored in both translations of Japanese literature in the West and in the modern Japanese canon itself, which is most often seen as comprising male writers such as Tanazaki Junichirô, Natsume Sôseki, Kawabata Yasunari, Mishima Yukio and Ôe Kenzaburô. Modernity in Japanese literature can therefore be defined as a 'masculine' literature. This is the case in the West also where the usual suspects identified by critics such as Edmund Wilson and Hugh Kenner include W.B.Yeats, T.S.Eliot, James Joyce, D.H.Lawrence and, somewhat marginally, Virginia Woolf. Whilst there has been some revision of this view in Anglo-American critical studies of the 1980s,

Modernism as a movement led to the creation of a canon that has a distinct gender bias. Yet it is clear in the case of Japanese writing that there have been a number of significant female writers since the Meiji Period, including Hayashi Fumiko and Enchi Fumiko. Critics such as Miyoshi Masao have suggested that this neglect may reflect a gender bias in both Western and Japanese scholars, and that more importantly, this gender imbalance needs to be addressed so that a more balanced view of everyday life in Japan is available (1991, 206).

In the postmodern period, specifically during the bubble economy of the late 1980s, much significance can be attached to Yoshimoto's writing, then, as it represents a challenge to the 'masculinity' of the Japanese canon. With the emergence of Yoshimoto Banana, a mass of critical attention has been given to contemporary women's writing that has elevated it to a status not dissimilar to that of contemporary male writers like Murakami Haruki and Murakami Ryu. Yoshimoto's writing is part of a trend in contemporary Japanese writing, then, that has rescued Japanese literature from irrelevance by giving women writers a voice at a time of great social change. As this period of social transition has focussed to such a great extent on 'ideals of femininity' and the choices that women are making in this new environment, Yoshimoto's writing has even greater significance as it reflects this change whilst giving women of her generation a voice.

In terms of literary style, Yoshimoto's postmodernism can be conceived of as an opposition to the intellectual 'masculine' style of modernity. Elaine Showalter noted in *A Literature of their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to*

Lessing (1978) that ‘Many literary historians have begun to reinterpret and revise the study of women writers’ (1978, 10). It may also be argued that Modernism itself was a response in opposition to the rise of communism, hence its links in time and cultural theory to fascism both in Japan and in the West. One of the achievements of postmodernism, however, is that it has given a voice to writers who are not necessarily male, educated and middle class. The cultural legitimacy that postmodernism has bestowed upon popular culture is controversial, however, and this will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

Despite the existence of *The Tale of Genji* (early 11th century) and various diaries of the Heian Period, women’s writing in Japan has been largely overlooked by editors and translators in the West. In the various anthologies of Japanese writing that have been edited by Western critics, there have been few women writers published. One major female writer Morris includes in his 1989 anthology, *Modern Japanese Stories, An Anthology* (originally published in 1962), is Hayashi Fumiko (1904 – 1951). Hayashi is one of only two female writers represented, compared with twenty-three men. The other female writer included is Hirabayashi Taiko (1905 -).

This lack of representation of women writers is curious, given that in a study of Hayashi Fumiko, Joan E. Ericson notes that anthologies in the early part of the twentieth century indicate the great diversity in women’s writing during the Tokugawa Period (1997, 20). Further, Ericson points out that women’s writing not only has a long tradition in Japan but it occupies a prominent position in the Japanese canon noted by commentators both in Japan and in the West. Japanese

women writers, however, became grouped together in a way that Ericson notes ignores the authors' standing in relation to literary, intellectual, social, or political trends (1997, 27). Even when critics such as Donald Keene and Miyoshi Masao included women in their discussions of Japanese literature, they were not given as much space and attention as male writers. Thus Hayashi, despite being a prominent writer, was categorised as a 'woman writer' and her work was considered inconsequential in relation to the canon and rarely received sustained critical consideration (75). Hayashi was denied the sustained critical discussion surrounding Yoshimoto Banana, which suggests that there has been a fundamental shift in the attention being given to contemporary female writers in Japan.

A major factor in the appraisal of women's writing has been the gender roles assigned to men and women, as outlined in the previous chapter. In 1908, a group of male writers noted that whilst women have the right to write as human beings, 'if they are to write, they should write well' (Oguri et al., 2006, 33). This, they suggested, however, was a 'tall order' as it was observed that women inevitably abandoned their womanliness when they started writing (34). Of the women writers of the time, it was suggested that not only did they imitate men but, regrettably, they imitated 'men's baser instincts' (34). For example, they wrote knowingly about such male preserves as the goings-on in teahouses, bordellos or the world of the theatre (40). They should be encouraged instead to write poetry rather than prose, at the very least lyrical writing (34). Oguri et al., argue, however, that given that it is 'very important for women to marry' (35) it is not actually possible for them to become successful writers because in marriage they

take on the responsibility of a household as well as a husband and there is not enough time to devote to writing.

For much of the twentieth century, writing by women has been separated into two groups: writing that was similar to that of men and writing that had a ‘female sensitivity’. The term *joryû bungaku* (women’s writing) was one label used to marginalise women’s writing. Ericson writes that this term was used to effectively segregate women’s writing from the modern canon (2006, 114). In the case of Hayashi Fumiko, Ericson writes that by being categorised as a *joryû sakka* (woman writer) her work ‘would rarely receive sustained critical scrutiny’ (1997, 75). By the 1980s, however, most critics no longer defined ‘women’s literature’ as a distinct literary style. Instead, writing by women has come to be considered as developing from a ‘variety of perspectives’ and in a ‘variety of voices’. Schalow and Walker (1996) observe, however, that because of the Heian legacy, Japanese women have a ‘strong proprietary sense toward the Japanese literary language’ as opposed to European and American women who ‘struggle with an alien, male-dominated language when they write’ (5). Ericson concedes that whilst the notion of an unbroken tradition going back to the Heian Period ‘grossly distorts’ the work of women writers, the significance of gender in shaping the content and quality of what is written and read cannot be ignored (Ericson, 1997, 106).

Despite the pre-eminence of novelists such as Sôseki, Tanizaki, Kawabata and Mishima, novel-writing has often been considered to be a feminine activity. Certainly, Tanazaki’s novel *The Makioka Sisters* was banned by war-time censors

because it was felt to be too feminine. Okuno (2006) argues that where men in the Meiji Period embraced literature, today they have ‘lost their respect for this form of art’ (68). Suggesting that novel writing is the domain of female writers is misleading, however. Setouchi Harumi (2006) observes that even though the 1950s were dubbed ‘The Era of female Genius’ because of the prominence of two women writers, Ariyoshi Sawako and Sono Ayako (61), and even though male writers at the time considered adopting female pen-names in order to be published, Setouchi points out that the number of women writing compared to men was less than one per cent (Setouchi, 2006, 62).

In her 1978 study of British women’s writing from 1800 to the present day, Elaine Showalter notes that by the 1840s women had adopted a number of popular genres, described as ‘domestic realism’. At this time, however, the term ‘feminine novel’ also stood for

... feebleness, ignorance, prudery, refinement, propriety, and sentimentality, while the feminine novelist was portrayed as vain, publicity-seeking, and self-assertive. At the same time that Victorian reviewers assumed that women readers and women writers were dictating the content of fiction, they deplored the pettiness and narrowness implied by feminine values (Showalter, 1978, 20).

There are obvious comparisons that can be made between the qualities that are ascribed to the ‘feminine novel’ in Britain and ‘women’s literature’ in Japan. Both terms typecast the writings of women as unintellectual, and in the case of Victorian England, women writers were also dismissed as being devoid of real worth, seeking acclaim and notoriety (Showalter, 20), criticisms with which Yoshimoto Banana would be familiar. Given the publication of her diaries in both journals and books, as well as on the Official Yoshimoto Banana website, it is

clear that Yoshimoto is both 'publicity seeking' and 'self-assertive'. This, however, is not meant to imply a value judgement. All authors, by virtue of the fact that they publish their writing, are publicity seeking. To then make the leap to describe Yoshimoto Banana, or women writers in general, as 'vain' is a value judgement that is illogical and hard to sustain unless society creates an 'ideal of femininity' in which it is a 'woman's virtue to hide behind the males' (Setouchi, 1993, 180).

In recent years there has been a shift towards a greater representation of women writers in both anthologies and criticism of contemporary Japanese writing. Although, interestingly, Ariga (1996) notes that in a survey of one hundred randomly selected books, commentaries on works by women writers are written almost entirely by male critics. On the other hand, in a survey of books by male writers, not one of the commentaries had been written by a woman (353). In *Monkey Brain Sushi: New Tastes in Japanese Fiction* (Alfred Birnbaum [ed], 1991), an anthology of contemporary Japanese writing translated into English, there is a significant change to the established status quo in favour of male writers with three of the ten writers represented being women. Moreover, in the collection of essays *Ôe and Beyond: Fiction in Contemporary Japan* (Snyder and Gabriel [eds], 1999), six of the twelve writers discussed are female writers, one of whom is Yoshimoto Banana. This is a significant increase in the representation of women writers which reflects the increasing attention being given to women's writing in Japan. Whilst editors Stephen Snyder and Philip Gabriel do not comment specifically on the gender of the writers under discussion, they refer to the 'new routes of expression' that no longer conform to 'accepted literary

practices' (7). The fact that one of those women writers is Yoshimoto Banana is clearly an example of a critical departure. Ann Sherif describes it as 'appealing fiction', noting that:

Yoshimoto's devotion to popular fiction contrasts with the philosophical and scholarly emphases found in the writing of another famous member of her family: her father, writer Yoshimoto Takaaki (Sherif, 1999a, 278).

This is a view that Yoshimoto encourages by suggesting that her father has had little influence on her writing, which makes an interesting corollary to the absence of the father figure (and in fact the biological family) in her early writing. Indeed, this distancing of her writing from her father's literary activities makes Yoshimoto a literary orphan akin to the 'orphans' in her writing. However, one implication of this is that Yoshimoto is embracing the stereotype of the non-intellectual female writer whose writing has, according to Ericson, been described as non-intellectual and sentimental (1997, 103) consisting of little else than 'detailed observations of daily life' (103). Shimada Masahiko, novelist, essayist and director of the Japan Writer's Association, adds weight to this view arguing that Yoshimoto's writing is best understood when placed in the context of Japanese classics from the Heian Period, such as the *The Pillow Book of Sei Shônagon* (early 11th century). Shimada argues that Yoshimoto's writing, like the world of the Heian court women described in the *Pillow Book*, is a world of feeling rather than thought (Ramsay, 2000). Whether Yoshimoto is aware of this type-casting is unclear, but as we have seen, she has deliberately chosen to distance her writing from 'literature'.

The problem with popular culture

The development of a national literature in Meiji Period Japan was driven by a number of ideas and influences imported from the West. According to Roy Starrs (1998), the novel and its relationship with nation building had a profound effect on Japanese writers of the Meiji Period such as Tsubouchi Shôyô, which led novelist Kafû Nagai to observe that ‘purely Japanese literature died out completely around the year 1897’ (Kafû in Janeira, 1970, 169). The development of ‘new characters’ and a ‘new concept of love’ in Japanese literature coincided with the arrival of first wave feminism in Japan. With greater access to education Japanese women began taking up employment in a variety of sectors. Writers like Yosano Akiko and Hiratsuka Raichô debated the ‘New Woman’ in new publications such as *Seitô* (*Bluestocking*) first published in 1911. Hiratsuka is famous for the publication of her manifesto entitled ‘In the Beginning was the Sun in the first edition of *Seitô*. Hiratsuka wrote:

In the beginning woman was the Sun. She was a genuine being.
Now woman is the Moon. She lives through others and glitters through the
mastery of others. She has a pallor like that of the ill.
Now we must restore our hidden sun (Setouchi, 1993, 164).

The end of the Taisho Period and the subsequent rise of the military during the Showa Period, however, saw increasing state control and censorship that targeted the ‘soft, effeminate, and grossly individualistic lives of women’ (Rubin, 1984, 264). It was not until the post-war period that new freedoms were introduced and serious writers were free to write about sex and criticise structures such as

military traditions, emperor worship, and the family system. It was at this time that Japanese women were finally given full political rights.

Women writers have made a substantial contribution to the development of a national Japanese literature. To repeat the important point made by Nobel laureate Kawabata Yasunari, *The Tale of Genji* in particular is the ‘highest pinnacle of Japanese literature’ (1968, 47) and critic, Karatani Kôjin, observed that even though women’s writing in Japan reached its peak in the Heian Period, women have continued to be involved in literary activity (1993,135). Since the Meiji Period, there have been a number of significant female writers in Japan including Yosano Akiko, Hayashi Fumiko and Enchi Fumiko. Awaya and Phillips have argued that Yoshimoto Banana and Hayashi Mariko are currently among the most celebrated Japanese women writers (1996, 246). The influence of popular culture on Yoshimoto’s writing, however, has caused much critical concern.

In Yoshimoto’s writing, for example, there are many references to both Japanese and Western pop singers. The English translation of the short story collection *Lizard* (1994) is dedicated to American singer Kurt Cobain and her novella ‘Moonlight Shadow’ (1993) is named after a Mike Oldfield song. Yoshimoto has also written short essays about Japanese bands such as The Blue Hearts (1989c) and the composer/musician Sakamoto Ryuichi (2000d). Yoshimoto also makes reference in her writing to characters from Charles M.Schulz’s *Peanuts* as well as the Japanese *manga* character *Doraemon*. The significance of this is that it is evidence of the way in which Morton argues there has been a hybridisation over

the last three to four decades not only of national and international influences but also of different genres in Japanese culture (Morton, 2003, 257 – 258). As a result of this hybridisation, Morton notes that the Japanese literary historian Suzuki Sadami observed in 1994 that ‘the division between highbrow or elite literature and popular literature had finally broken down’ (Suzuki, Quoted in Morton, 2003, 194).

Nominating Stephen King as a major influence on her writing is also an acknowledgement by Yoshimoto of the influence of popular culture in her writing. Where Ôe Kenzaburô describes the importance of William Blake’s poetry in his novel *Rouse Up Young Men of the New Age!* (1986, Translated into English 2002, 124). Yoshimoto refers to King’s ‘powerful imagination’ and ‘vital themes’, declaring that he is one reason why she became a writer in a 1989 essay entitled ‘Stephen King and I’, (1989c, 77). In the British television documentary *Stephen King – Shining in the Dark* (King, 1999), King’s writing is described as being ‘grounded in the real world. There are references to brand names, people eat at MacDonalds and shop at Kmart; all the things that we do in the real world’. These are all features that have been noted in Yoshimoto’s writing. Then there are the shared themes that link the two writers. King remembers being warned by his agent after writing *The Shining* (1977) that he would be ‘typed’ because ‘*First* the telekinetic girl, *then* the vampires, *now* the haunted hotel and the telepathic kid. You’re gonna get typed...’ (Stephen King, 2000a, 554). Yoshimoto herself has written about these themes in a number of novels and short stories.

Interestingly, in his novel *Misery* (1987), Stephen King describes popular culture as ‘degenerate’. Yet he warns that ‘Millions might scoff, but only because they failed to realise how pervasive the influence of art – even of such a degenerate art as popular fiction – could become’ (238). King is in no doubt about the importance of popular fiction and in *Misery*, he places himself (through the character Paul Sheldon), in the company of other exponents of popular fiction such as Galsworthy, Dickens and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, all of whom had a profound effect on their society.

Since her debut in 1988, Yoshimoto’s writing has achieved phenomenal sales but has received mixed critical acceptance. The association of her writing with popular culture is central to critical doubts about its literary worth. Ôe (1995), for example, has argued that Yoshimoto’s writing is politically disengaged whilst Miyoshi (1991) has argued that Yoshimoto’s writing is couched in ‘baby talk’. What exactly Miyoshi has in mind is not entirely clear. In *Kitchen*, after Mikage has been confronted by Okuno, Yuichi’s former lover, she sees Yuichi and he holds the car door open for her. Mikage realises that Yuichi

must have opened the car door for that awful girl as well. Inexplicably, my seatbelt seemed too tight. I realized with amazement – oh! This must be jealousy (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 77).

This example of Yoshimoto’s writing, it is fair to say, is naïve and lacks sophistication or psychological depth. Nevertheless, Yoshimoto’s writing represents a departure from traditional Japanese literature. It features young characters living in a consumer society, cut off and set adrift from traditional social structures such as the family. Isolation is a major theme in Yoshimoto’s

writing. In *Kitchen* (1988, English translation 1993), Mikage is alone after her grandmother dies until she is welcomed into Yuichi Tanabe's family, whose mother is dead and his father has become his 'mother'. In *Tsugumi* (1989, English translation 2002), Maria is the daughter of an unmarried woman whose cousin Tsugumi is weakened by illness. Tsugumi is described as 'living in a universe of thought that was all her own, shared with no-one else' (2002, 156). In addition, in *N.P.* (1990a, English translation 1994), Kazami is a young woman whose parents divorced when she was nine but she notes that 'We missed having a father around, but we had a good time anyway' (1994, 9). This positivity in the face of isolation is a major theme in Yoshimoto's writing which, as previously discussed in this thesis, stops it from being identified as a literature of adolescent complaint or existentialist despair.

The fact that Yoshimoto's writing has received a number of awards has no doubt added fuel to the fire surrounding its literary value. To date she has received the Nihon University Department of Art's Prize in 1986 for *Moonlight Shadow* and the 6th *Kaien* magazine New Writer's Prize in 1987 and the 16th Izumi Kyôka Literary Prize in 1988 for *Kitchen*. In 1989, *Tsugumi* won the 2nd Yamamoto Shûgoro Literary Prize and in 1995, *Amrita* won the 5th Murasaki Shikibu Literary Prize. In Italy, Yoshimoto won the Scanno Literary Prize in 1993, the Fendissime Literary Prize in 1996 and the Maschera d'Argento in 1999. In recognition of her achievements, Yoshimoto Banana was one of two Japanese women included in *Asiaweek's* list of 'Asia's Most Powerful Women' in 1995. These were women said to 'go beyond the ordinary to achieve the exceptional'.

Yoshimoto was described as a ‘rebel writer’ and her first novel *Kitchen* was said to have captured the voice of ‘alienated youth’.

Further, the “Japan Access” website prepared for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs by Kodansha International Ltd., in July 1999 states that young Japanese who have been influenced by international culture have found their voice in writers such as Murakami Ryu, Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto Banana. The “Japan Access” website notes that Yoshimoto is immensely popular but also that she ‘portrays the lives of people in desperately isolated situations’. This description points to a key feature of Yoshimoto’s writing that I have been eliciting in the previous discussion - her ability to write about difficult subjects without alienating her readers. For example, in *N.P.*, Kazami discusses her parents’ divorce without bitterness. She says of life with her mother and sister, ‘In times of need, someone was always there to give you a hug’ (*N.P.*, 1990a, English translation 1994, 9).

Part of the marketing strategy used in Japan to promote Japanese popular music by artists such as Puffy, Hamazaki Ayumi or one of the more extreme examples of *shōjo* culture Shinohara Tomoe, is the use of the moniker J-Pop. Oniki Yuji uses this same moniker to identify writing produced for a similar aged audience. Thus the use of the moniker J-Pop fiction effectively identifies a new style of writing for a new readership as distinct from those readers interested in *junbungaku* (pure literature) or else *manga*. On a website devoted to ‘a Brief Overview of J-Pop Fiction’, Oniki writes that people once read Japanese fiction because of its ‘exotic temples, cherry blossoms and frog-jumping-into-pond haiku poetry’. However, this has been displaced by popular culture and consumer

culture. Oniki observes that Yoshimoto is one of four J-Pop writers of fiction who are ‘worth checking out’ and have been translated into English. On the other hand, he notes:

Reading a Yoshimoto story is a lot like watching a Japanese TV commercial. It’s amazing in its crafty simplicity but then you realize you have no idea what it’s about at all. Like the commercials it’s all terribly clean, almost crystalline. Emotions are measured out by the spoonful, to sample and taste (Oniki, 1996b).

There is, then, clearly a departure from traditional Japanese literature in the writing of Yoshimoto Banana and her contemporaries. Moreover, the awarding of literary prizes to a writer who chooses to write dialogue in a conversational non-academic tone no doubt raises the ire of critics like Miyoshi and Ôe. An example of this kind of dialogue can be seen in *Kitchen*, when Mikage and Yuichi decide to go to a café:

“Yuichi?”

“Hmmm?”

Umm...Let’s...let’s have tea.”

“I thought you were in such a hurry to pack and everything. It’s fine with me, though.”

“I have this terrible craving for tea.”

“Let’s do it. Where do you want to go?”

“You know that little barley-tea shop above the beauty parlor?”

Isn’t that a little far? It’s clear across town”

“I just have a feeling that’s the best place.” (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 74-5).

It is not just the absence of a ‘serious’ tone that is striking about this writing but also the absence of sexual tension. Yoshimoto argues that this style of writing enables her to write about serious subjects without burdening the reader with too

much 'realism' (Yoshimoto, 2001a, 16). For her critics it is another reason why Ôe feared in a 1986 lecture that 'Japan's literature may be decaying' (Ôe, 1995, 59-60). The problem with Yoshimoto's writing is how it should be read. Reminiscing about his father, the Australian songwriter and novelist Nick Cave writes that, 'Literature elevated him, tore him from normality, lifted him out of the mediocre and brought him closer to the divine essence of things' (Cave, 1997, 137). Whilst this Leavisite interpretation serves to pit literature as the sacred against the profanity of the everyday world, the *shôjo* culture in which Yoshimoto was immersed as an adolescent was not necessarily either 'mediocre' or 'mundane'. Further, where Cave makes claims for the great literature of the past Yoshimoto makes similar claims for popular culture. In *Amrita*, Saseko and Kozumi introduce Sakumi to heavy metal bands like Iron Maiden, Quiet Riot and AC/DC. Sakumi says:

I knew they had quietly saved the two sitting near me, just as Capote's novel rescued Ryuichiro on nights he couldn't sleep (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 202).

Presumably these same claims could be made about Cave's own music. One of the advantages of this approach is that by not emulating the great literary achievements of the past, Yoshimoto is free to articulate the feelings and thoughts of her peers in their own idiom and vernacular. Furthermore, by referencing popular culture but, more importantly, exploring new ways of being that are largely independent of traditional social and economic structures, Yoshimoto can explore a world that is recognisable as her own. Whilst this has led to a difficulty in perceiving how her writing should be read, she has nevertheless often been held up, together with Murakami Haruki, Murakami Ryu, Shimada Masahiko and

Yamada Amy, as a new voice in contemporary Japanese literature. Helen Mitsios in her foreword to *New Japanese Voices: The Best Contemporary Fiction from Japan* (1991) described them as sharing an ‘energetic originality and an unbridled interest in the world around them’ (Mitsios, 1991, xii). This thesis argues that whilst terms such as postmodernism, escapist literature, a ‘separatist literature of inner space’, L literature or even global literature are useful in classifying Yoshimoto’s writing, overall, it is best to see it as an example of a minor literature that deals with serious themes in a contemporary idiom: This is compelling given the break that contemporary Japanese literature has made with the past and Yoshimoto’s own preference to distance her writing from serious literature.

***Shôjo* culture: the ‘baby-doll face of feminism’ in Japan**

In the short story ‘Milk,’ written by the 2002 Akutagawa Prize winner, novelist Daido Tamaki, the narrator says ‘You don’t burden your best friends with the really heavy stuff’ (19). The narrator also says of the relationship between the girls, ‘The bonds between us may be stretched thinner and thinner, but they’ll never break. They’ll last forever’ (‘Milk’, 2006, 26). This connection between friends is an example of the enclosed world of the *shôjo*. A connection further strengthened by the shared experience of reading the same books and seeing the same films. This is the context within which Yoshimoto’s early writing needs to be read.

The *shôjo* has a long history in Japan and has been throughout a controversial figure. Jennifer Robertson writes that this term, conceived in the early 1900s, categorised girls and women between puberty and marriage who were considered to be potentially disruptive (1998, 157). In the 1980s and 1990s a number of publications were published about the *shôjo* including *Shôjo Ron* (Theories about the *Shôjo*) (Honda et al., 1988), *Gyaru no Kouzou* (The Construction of a Girl) by Yamane Kazuma (1991) and *Shôjo Minzokugaku* (Folklore of Young Girls) by Outsuka Eiji (1997).

There are disagreements as to the definition of *shôjo*. Whilst Yamane argues that the term *shôjo* can be said to include high school girls, it does not cover girls over the ages of seventeen or eighteen (1991, 23). Treat however, argues that the term *shôjo* is difficult to translate into English because in English, gender is binary, but it could be argued that *shôjo* are neither female nor male, detached as they are from the 'productive economy of heterosexual reproduction' (1996, 282-83). Treat argues further that the role of the *shôjo* in the 'service economy' is to consume, therefore they are a peripheral presence (1996, 281). Jennifer Robertson argues, however, that the attempt by 'fearful and pessimistic' not to mention 'mostly male' 'celebrity' critics, such as Outsuka Eiji, to attribute the feminisation of Japanese society to *shôjo* culture, has been countered by 'actual girls and women' who have demonstrated that this 'universal *shôjo*' figure is just another 'patriarchal, even misogynist, invention' (1998, 159).

Aoyama Tomoko argues that there is a tendency to see the *shôjo* as a 'passive, frivolous, and vulnerable being who is easily manipulated by consumer culture'

(2004, 2). Aoyama challenges this perception arguing that critics have ignored the ‘critical and creative power’ of the *shôjo* and especially girls’ intertextuality, which has a ‘long tradition’ (4). By intertextuality, Aoyama refers to the way in which young women experience intertextual amusement through discussing the books and films that they read and see. An example of this kind of intertextuality can be seen in Yoshimoto’s novel *Tsugumi* when Maria, Tsugumi and Yoko become obsessed by the same television program. Like a later generation of women obsessed with films like *Sex and the City* (2008), Maria says that ‘We were so passionate about it that it was as if we had all come down with some kind of fever’ (*Tsugumi*, 1998a, English translation 2002, 66). It is a tradition that encompasses novels such as Hashimoto Osamu’s *Momojiri Musume (Peach-Bottomed Girl)*, 1978) and Kanai Mieko’s *Indian Summer* (1988). Aoyama suggests that in these relationships ‘Sexuality is not completely ignored, but it is regarded as something much less important than textual pleasure’ (2004, 12). Ultimately, and of most significance, given the mainstream acceptance of Yoshimoto’s novels, which is discussed elsewhere in Chapter Three, anyone can be a *shôjo* regardless of actual sex, sexuality, and age in intertextuality, if not in reality (12).

In relation to the contemporary usage of the word, a widely quoted definition of *shôjo* by Japanese critic Ogura Chikako argues that:

... (1) because shojo are not adults, they can perceive things that those in control of the society cannot; (2) because they are not young men, they can see things that those who will someday rule society cannot see; and (3) because they are no longer children, they are fully aware of who controls Japan (Ogura in Sherif, 1999a, 282).

Ogura suggests that young Japanese women are aware, as adult males and young males are not, of power structures from which they are barred because of their gender. As a result, the *shôjo* figure can be seen as a threatening figure. The *shôjo* challenges the status quo of the male dominated society by embracing an alternative, adolescent, pink and fluffy, fantasy world. Hence the clinging to the language and trappings of childhood. Cute culture, with its “baby talk”, is, as Kinsella (2000) points out, a very effective form of subversive political behaviour. Moreover, the fact that cute culture has not been restricted to the female domain, and is seen as ‘feminizing society’, demonstrates how much it is perceived as a threat. The 2004 novel *Kamikaze Girls*, by Takemoto Novala, is about ‘Lolita gangs’ who roam the streets of Tokyo wearing what Cameron describes as a ‘protective cordon of passion-killing petticoats’. Cameron describes the cute culture that inspired Takemoto’s novel as the ‘baby-doll face of feminism in Japan’ (Cameron, 2006b, 5). Kinsella argues that the young women following cute fashion are refusing to take on the traditional role of the subservient Japanese woman. Their behaviour is anything but traditional feminine behaviour (1995, 249). In this way cute culture can be seen to be contributing to the changing identity of women in Japanese society discussed in Chapter One.

The impact of cute culture on Japan has been described by Alex Kerr as a ‘conquest’ that in thirty years has swept all before it (2001, 314). Kerr argues that cute culture is no longer an amusing sidelight and has, in fact, become the ‘cultural mainstream (315). David Flynn and Michael Millett have observed that cute is everywhere in Japan, and the general rule is that ‘if it’s cute, it sells – whether it be to six-year-olds or 36-year-olds’ (Flynn and Millett, 2000, 21).

Kinsella writes that the *kawaii* or cute style was particularly dominant in Japanese popular culture in the 1980s and she describes the *kawaii* style as having ‘evolved from the serious, infantile, pink romanticism of the early 1980s, to a more humorous, kitsch, androgynous style which lingered on into the early 1990s’ (1995, 220). Kinsella argues that by embracing cute culture, young people idolise their childhood and turn away from their futures as adults in society (241). The rejection of adulthood does not mean that young women ‘condemn materialism or the display of wealth’, however (245). Rather they use their earnings on themselves and their friends, delaying marriage indefinitely. Marriage is seen as a ‘threat’ which will most likely lead to life in a small apartment in a distant suburb shared with children and their school books (244), a view that echoes similar observations by Rosenberger (2001) and Iwao (1993) discussed in Chapter One.

In an earlier incarnation, during the 1990s, the young women who embraced cute culture were described by journalist Teresa Watanabe (1997) as ‘teen queens’, who, despite making up only four percent of the population, receive a disproportionate amount of media and marketing attention. Watanabe reports that ‘intense sociological scrutiny’ has ‘assailed’ these girls as being the ‘spoiled products of smaller families and an affluent society’. They are described as shopping mindlessly, slathering on make-up and hitching up their skirts to ‘perilous heights’. Modesty is seen as a thing of the past. Watanabe quotes the Japan Youth Research Institute who have reported that despite the ‘limp economy’, 68 percent of Japanese teenagers get regular allowances from their parents averaging \$220 a month compared to just 28 percent of American teenagers. It is this money, coupled with the fact that the money is being divided

up by smaller families, that has led to the relative affluence of the current younger generation who enjoy a lifestyle unimaginable to their parents (1997, 9).

Watanabe acknowledges deep concerns about young people in Japan and quotes a report from Dentsu, Japan's leading advertising firm, concerning today's high school girls who they find to '... lack an inner core and suffer from the boredom of acquiring whatever they want without having to sweat for it' (Dentsu in Watanabe, 1997, 9). Tamotsu Sengoku, from the Japan Youth Research Institute, blames Japan's 'rigid society' for not encouraging their professional dreams and warns, 'With teens like these, Japan is finished' (Tamotsu in Watanabe, 1997, 9).

This attitude can be seen in the lyrics of the all-girl band Shonen Knife from Osaka. The song, *One Week*, for example, reads:

Monday/I got to watch sumo wrestling/It's an easy day to get a good ticket.
Tuesday/My friends come to my house/And we play that Twister Game
Wednesday/I play computer games all day/My favourite's 'Jewelbox'
Thursday/I drive to a toy shop/And I buy a Barbie doll
Friday/I go to see the Kinks/Dancing, screaming and drinking beer
Saturday/I go ice skating/Playing tennis is very good, too
Sunday/What movie do I wanna watch/How about the new Star Trek flick?
Monday to Sunday/One week has seven days/One week. One week... One – week – Life! (Shonen Knife, 1996).

Karl Taro Greenfeld describes Shonen Knife as a 'novelty act and cult favorite in America', who consciously parody the Japanese idol scene with 'intentionally silly lyrics' (1994, 186-7). This may be so, but perhaps the simplicity of these lyrics represents not just an act of defiance in relation to the Japanese idol scene

but also to the adult, male dominated society which controls the idol scene. The lyrics of *One Week* embrace games and toys which are symbolic of childhood and a rejection of adult values. Yoshimoto's *shôjo* characters also reject adult values by listening to popular music and eating fast food. Yoshimoto appropriates cute culture in the same way for her own ends, which include increasingly the exploration of social issues such as the negative impact of urban living on the lives of her characters.

There is a further connection between Yoshimoto Banana and Shonen Knife who have toured with acts such as Nirvana, to whose lead singer Kurt Cobain, as we have seen, Yoshimoto dedicated *Lizard* (1993, English translation 1995). In addition, in 1988, Shonen Knife's CD *Happy Hour* featured artwork by Yoshitomo Nara, which is also featured in Yoshimoto's novels *Hard Boiled/Hard Luck* (1999a, English translation 2005) and *Hinagiku no jinsei (Daisy's Life)* (2000b). In some of his artwork, Yoshitomo's *shôjo* figures are shown in aggressive poses with knives and sporting bandages. This is a more explicit representation of the oppositional nature of the cute culture which Yoshimoto and Shonen Knife have adopted. It is, therefore, clearly not just the product of mindless consumer culture an important distinction that critics such as Miyoshi (1991) and Ôe (1995) failed to perceive. This is especially the case given Ôe's concern that these younger novelists were failing to engage their readers with the political issues of the day (51). Rather Yoshimoto can be seen to have inventively appropriated cute culture for her own ends, which includes increasingly the exploration of social issues such as the negative impact of urban living on the lives of her characters.

A key feature of Yoshimoto's writing, in this respect, is the ambiguity in its portrayal of good and evil. In her foreword to *Inside and other short fiction: Japanese Women by Japanese Women* (2006), Ruth Ozeki writes:

the new Japanese woman is not only redefining her sexual prowess; she is even acquiring supernatural powers: the demure schoolgirl has morphed into a superheroine, or antiheroine, out to save or destroy the world' (Ozeki, 2006, 8).

Whilst Yoshimoto is noticeably circumspect about the sexuality of her characters, she has explored supernatural themes extensively and her fantasy women characters do have powers that are demonic if not world destroying. These are discussed more fully in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Another key feature of Yoshimoto's writing is its sense of *karumi* (lightness of touch). In *Kitchen*, when Mikage meets Eriko for the first time she says Eriko 'was stunning. She made me want to be with her again. There was a warm light, like her after-image, softly glowing in my heart. That must be what they mean by "charm"' (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 12). As a result of this sense of *karumi*, some critics have judged Yoshimoto's writing as being lightweight and insubstantial. Yet, as discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, Shima (1988) also acknowledges that Yoshimoto's subject matter itself is not lightweight. Yoshimoto is clearly interested in exploring issues such as attitudes towards marriage, children, relationships, sex, death and spirituality. Moreover, Yoshimoto's popularity shows that her writing style is successful in communicating with a generation who share the same concerns whilst having grown up reading the same *manga* and watching the same *anime* that explore some of these themes.

One of the critical difficulties associated with Yoshimoto's style of writing is the seriousness of her subject matter, which seems to jar with the entertaining nature of the popular cultural influences she has embraced. But this juxtaposition is not without merit, however. An interesting analogy may be made here again with Nick Cave, who describes the Kylie Minogue song *Better the Devil You Know* as a pop song with a 'disposable plastic beat' that hides a 'love lyric of truly devastating proportions'. Cave argues that 'the disguising of the terror of love in a piece of mindless, innocuous pop is an intriguing concept' (2001, 29). This is similar to the way in which Yoshimoto addresses serious issues in a writing that is otherwise characterised by its lightness of tone or else its conversational style.

In Yoshimoto's short story 'Asleep', Terako loses her sense of motivation and finds herself in a world in which 'Nothing existed but the free-falling world of sleep' (*Asleep*, 1989b, English translation 2000, 107-8). Terako is able, however, to tell when her boyfriend calls on the telephone and she says of this increasingly tenuous link to the outside world, 'nothing but that single line connected me to the outside world' (107 – 8). Yoshimoto describes Terako's sense of isolation but invests her with special powers making her less dependent on others and thus able to effect change from within. At the end of the story, Terako is happy that 'when I'd finally waken up it had been here and now' (166). The advantage of this approach is that Yoshimoto's audience is not scared away by 'serious' themes, which may have been the case if they were handled by 'serious' writers. Yoshimoto is important, then, as a transitional writer because she experiments with popular culture by using it as a framing device within which she explores 'serious' issues. Moreover, it can be seen as an example of how, according to

Suzuki Sadami, the distinction between popular culture and serious culture in Japan has ‘broken down’ (Suzuki, Quoted in Morton, 2003, 194).

The most recent incarnation of the *shôjo*, as portrayed in the *anime* films of Miyazaki Hayao and the novels of Yoshimoto Banana, has proven to be timely in terms of the portrayal of female characters in global popular culture. Second wave feminism and its rejection of women being used as sex objects has been challenged by third wave feminism in which raunch culture is considered acceptable because the women it portrays are action figures rather than passive objects of desire. Whilst Miyazaki’s films may not immediately be considered as examples of raunch culture, the panty shots that proliferate in his films (like so many *anime*) can be seen as a Japanese contribution to third wave feminism and its revision of second wave ideas about sexual exploitation. The overseas success of Yoshimoto’s novels with the single frame heroics of her *shôjo* heroines is matched by the success of Miyazaki’s film *Spirited Away*, which won the Golden Bear Award at the Berlin Film Festival in 2002 (the first animated film to do so) and the Oscar for best animation in 2003.

A Global Literature and a Shared Sense of Romanticism

If Yoshimoto’s writing reflects the changing status of women within Japanese society and challenges the essential masculinity of the Japanese canon by embracing the influences of *shôjo* culture, it can also be seen as part of an emerging global literature that is not situated within a specific cultural context. In a comparison of Edo literature with ‘modern’ literature, Edward Seidensticker

argues that the literature of Edo (the name given to Tokyo during the Tokugawa Period, had a ‘strong sense of locale’ which Tokyo does not have (1983, 250-1). Seidensticker argues that where Edo had its own literature Tokyo, which is a cosmopolitan city by comparison, does not. Seidensticker notes that in modern literature ‘specific places’ were replaced by ‘that great abstraction of suburbia’ (250-1). This has ultimately led to the development of a global literature of which Yoshimoto Banana is a part.

The absence of a sense of place features prominently in Yoshimoto Banana’s writing. In *Kitchen*, Yoshimoto writes about the grief and alienation of the individual with minimal social or geographical context. Mikage lives in a big city that could almost be any big city. As such, her writing can be described as being part of a ‘global literature’. By global literature I mean writing that is not specific to a particular place. By being set in urban centres that share icons such as McDonalds this literature, then, lacks specificity. Another shared aspect of this new non-specific sense of locale set in urban centres is a sense of nostalgia that privileges an increasingly bucolic past. Yoshimoto’s father Takaaki has drawn attention to the universal, contemporary and international nature of Banana’s writing (Yoshimoto, 1997b, 133-134). Yoshimoto’s writing, despite its alleged representation of the banality of modern life, is increasingly familiar to readers around the world with her books having been translated into many languages.

Given, as it has been argued by some critics (such as novelist Kafû Nagai, quoted in Janeira, 1970, 169), that modern Japanese literature owes more to the Western tradition than to traditional Japanese writing, it is not surprising that Yoshimoto’s

writing shares many elements in common with Western literature. Apart from Stephen King, who Yoshimoto acknowledges as a major influence, aspects of Yoshimoto's writing may be compared, in particular, with Dickens and J.D.Salinger, who variously write from the child's point of view, are preoccupied with death and express nostalgia for a world of lost innocence associated with childhood. Apart from sharing an anti-academic stance that rejects the values of a 'high' adult culture preferring instead to explore various spiritual phenomena such as healing powers and contact with alternative worlds, Yoshimoto lists Dickens as one of the writers she read whilst working as a waitress (Yoshimoto, 1995a, 42).

Peter Ackroyd, author of a biography of Dickens, writes that the essential themes in *Oliver Twist* (1837-38) are home, death and childhood, 'all of them so curiously blended in the wish to revert to some primal place, some Eden of remembrance, some innocent state' (Ackroyd, 1990, 93). Coveney notes that *Oliver Twist* is the first novel in the English language to take a child as its central character (Coveney, 1967, 216) and that the child first appeared as a major theme with the generation of Blake and Wordsworth. Prior to the Romantics, the child was either 'absent' or else the 'occasion of a passing reference' in Augustan verse and the eighteenth century novel.

Yoshimoto's world-view is reminiscent of Dickens' writing in several ways. One is the reversal of traditional roles in which adults are shown to be dependent upon children. Ackroyd writes that 'We recall in Dickens' fiction how universal it is that the child looks after the adult' (1990) 12). In Yoshimoto's writing there are

many such examples of role reversal. In the novel *N.P.* (1990a, English translation 1994), Kazami says of her family:

Strictly speaking my family consisted of a mother and two daughters, but our ages and roles changed many times a day. I might be the one who comforted mother when she was in tears, and she would encourage me when I was moaning and groaning about my problems – or it might be my sister who took that motherly role (*N.P.*, 1990a, English translation 1994, 9).

Yoshimoto explores the fluidity of roles most completely in the novel *Amrita* (1994a, English translation 1997). In *Amrita*, the protagonist Sakumi is putting back together the pieces of her life after an accident. Her mother is the central figure in a blended family that includes two women. Of her step-father, whom her mother divorced, Sakumi recalls the days ‘when I lived with that stranger I called ‘father’, even bothering to do his laundry’ (*Amrita*, 1997, 275). Sakumi contacts him in the novel only so that her bother Yoshio can see him. By doing so she takes on a maternal role. In case this seems too motherly, however, Sakumi imagines putting on high heels and sunglasses when Yoshio is old enough for high school making all the ‘younger girls tremble’ (*Amrita*, 1997, 15-6). Clearly the roles that Yoshimoto’s characters adopt are fluid and adaptable.

The fate of the family is critical to both Dickens and Yoshimoto. In Dickens, the family became an ‘emblem of the transition through which the entire country was going’, a transition in which the family was threatened by the demands of the industrial revolution (Ackroyd, 1990, 70). Yoshimoto’s writing is characterised in the early part of her career by the absence of family (see Chapter Three for details). In *Kitchen* (1988a), Mikage is the last surviving member of her family. In *Tsugumi* (1989a), Maria’s parents have to wait until her father gets a divorce

so they can get married. In *N.P.* (1990a), Kazami's father left home to live with another woman when she was nine years old. In *Amrita* (1994a), Sakumi's father is dead and her mother has divorced her step-father. In both writers, there is a tendency to focus on what Ackroyd describes in Dickens' writing as the 'loving sexless union of siblings' (Ackroyd, 1990, 28).

Another important aspect these writers have in common is the attention they give to dreams in their writing. Alfred Alvarez defined art as being 'the place where dreams and imagination cross' (1995, 176). Alvarez writes:

From the moment when the Romantics turned away from polite society and re-established the private self at the centre of the world, dreams ceased to be disturbing curiosities on the periphery of literature and became a major preoccupation (Alvarez, 1995, 181).

According to Ackroyd, Dickens was 'fascinated' by his dreams. Dickens believed that the 'strongest dreams' were at the root of all fiction' (1990, 359). Yoshimoto has often written about dreams and her writing has dreamlike qualities. At times her characters communicate with each other in their dreams. The importance attached by these writers to dreams is part of their rejection of 'scientific fact'. Dreams also provide an alternative viewpoint to social realism. Whilst Dickens is renowned for his closely described characters and locations in London, there are elements of fantasy in his writing, such as in the 'Christmas' stories, the wilder fantasies of some of his characters such as Miss Havesham or else in the celebrated description of the 'melancholy mad elephants' in *Hard Times* whose 'wearisome heads went up and down at the same rate, in hot weather and cold, wet weather and dry, fair weather and foul' (*Hard Times*, 1961, 116). Yoshimoto,

however, is more decidedly fanciful in her descriptions of ‘real life’, particularly those of work. In the short story ‘Lizard’ (1993, English translation 1995), Lizard studies acupuncture in China for six months. When she comes back to Japan she is very successful. People come from all over, some ‘seriously ill’ and others a ‘lost hope’. But no matter how busy she is, Lizard’s healing powers ‘never failed’. The narrator, who is curious, visits her hospital and notes:

When patients who had been unable to walk came out of her office on their own two feet, leaning on Lizard’s arm, their waiting families would wait with joy. But Lizard just smiles and went on to the next case (*Lizard*, 1993, English translation 1995, 33).

Finally, both Dickens and Yoshimoto cultivate a close relationship with their readers. Perhaps this is related to an expanded notion of ‘family’ that can include their audience. Both writers use afterwords to address their readers directly. Ackroyd writes of Dickens, ‘Certainly he became fond of the direct connection with his audience of readers’ (Ackroyd, 1990, 214). In what could conceivably be a description of Yoshimoto’s relationship with her readers, Ackroyd writes, ‘He seems to have needed that link with his audience... approaching something like a relationship with an extended substitute family’ (Ackroyd, 1990, 215).

Treat suggests that the postscripts to Yoshimoto’s novels take ‘the form of a direct address by Banana to an assumed audience of fellow *shôjo*’ and that these are ‘phrased like mawkish love letters’ (Treat, 1996, 299). It would seem that both writers have the need for an intimate relationship with their readers and yet perhaps this is not unusual given that their writing is intimate, the stuff of dreams rather than academic texts. As for the charge that Yoshimoto’s postscripts are

‘mawkish’ would appear to be part of the persona that she has adopted. It is no more incongruous than her penname Banana. Yoshimoto clearly demonstrates on many levels that she is not interested in subscribing to high culture. She has kept her writing firmly anchored in the conventions of the popular culture in which she immersed herself both in childhood and adolescence.

The breakdown of the family is also central to the writing of J.D. Salinger. In the opening sentence of *Catcher in the Rye* (1951), Salinger dismisses the need for fiction to establish a genealogical line for its characters in the manner of *David Copperfield*:

If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you’ll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don’t feel like going into it, if you want to know the truth (*Catcher in the Rye*, 1951, 5).

Yoshimoto and Salinger have much in common. In particular, they have both written bestsellers reflective of the youth culture of the day, Salinger’s *Catcher in the Rye* (1951) and Yoshimoto’s *Kitchen* (1988a). Of *Catcher in the Rye*, Salinger’s biographer, Ian Hamilton, writes that following the teenage revolution in the mid 1950s, the book became an ‘indispensable manual from which cool styles of disaffection could be borrowed’ (Hamilton, 1988, 155). Little seems to have changed as journalist Mark Mordue asserts that *Catcher in the Rye* ‘remains the seminal text for teenage angst in the half-century or so since Holden Caulfield first appeared’ and that white rap singer Eminem is ‘just the latest screwed-up model on the block to prove it’ (Mordue, 2003, 4).

Yoshimoto's disaffected *shôjo* characters seem to fit neatly into the mould created by Salinger's teenagers. Her characters challenge the status quo of the male dominated Japanese society by embracing an alternative, adolescent, pink and fluffy, fantasy world. As a result, they fail to meet and deliberately flout society's expectations of them as young women. On the other hand, however, Yoshimoto is far more upbeat about their prospects as she depicts their search for spiritual meaning in the face of alienation and rejection.

Given their emphasis on disaffected youth, the adoption by both writers of an anti-academic stance in their writing is perhaps not surprising. By anti-academic stance I am referring to the attempt by both writers to create an intimate relationship with their readers rather than seeking critical approval. They both eschew the language of 'serious' literature and write instead in the language of their readers. Thus Yoshimoto and Salinger speak to readers in a language that belongs to and defines them. Yoshimoto's father Takaaki recognises the intimate relationship that Banana has created with her readers and he compares it to that established by post-war cult novelist Dazai Osamu with his readers. Of Dazai, Takaaki says that his fans felt that 'only they could understand him' and that he wrote for his readers, not for his literary editors, critics or literary friends (Yoshimoto, 1997b, 182–183).

In Salinger's case, children are also endowed with healing powers. In Salinger's stories, the war survivors are 'wounded in the nerves' and two are 'permitted healing intimations'. In both cases, the therapy arrives in the shape of a 'radiantly innocent young girl' (Hamilton, 1988, 93). Similar female figures appear in

Yoshimoto's writing such as Urara in *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a, English translation 2003), Sui in *N.P.* (1990a, English translation 1994) and Saseko in *Amrita* (1994a, English translation 1997). But rather than being 'radiantly innocent young girls', Yoshimoto's characters are older and invested with qualities which include the demonic as well as the angelic. Stephen King (2000b) recalls reading a *Life* magazine article about telekinesis and writes, 'There was some evidence to suggest that young people might have such powers... especially girls in early adolescence, right around the time of their first - ' (53). Mordue suggests that 'Salinger basically didn't like people very much – unless you were the Buddha or someone below the age of 12 (children tend to be sacred in his novels)' and quotes Norman Mailer who called Salinger 'the greatest mind ever to stay in prep school' (Mordue, 2003, 4). All three writers write about young characters empowered with special powers.

In place of academic learning, both writers adopt religious instruction as an alternative form of education. Both Salinger and Yoshimoto show an interest in transcendental religion. In *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a), Urara is a conduit between parallel worlds. Salinger's interest in oriental religion was based on the teachings of Vivekananda and fueled by a hatred of the adult world he associated with 'phonies'. Both writers explore the importance of the teacher-pupil role. Hamilton says of Salinger:

... much turns on a teacher-pupil dialogue. Phoebe teaches Holden, Seymour teaches Buddy, and Buddy teaches Seymour's teaching to Franny and Zooey. There are sacred texts and relics; Allie's baseball mitt, Seymour's diary, Buddy's letter to Zooey after Seymour's death (Hamilton, 1988, 157).

Yoshimoto's characters such as Hiiragi and Satsuki in *Moonlight Shadow*, Otohiko and Kazami in *N.P.*, and Yoshio and Sakumi in *Amrita* also take on 'teacher-pupil' roles which would be ironic given Yoshimoto's attempts to distance herself from her academic father except for the fact that they are all children and therefore untainted by adulthood.

Yoshimoto's concerns about academia have a precedence, despite her lack of interest in political movements, in the disturbances on university campuses around the world in the late 1960s, which Ôe Kenzaburô writes, 'raged everywhere like a medieval plague' (1995, 82). In Tawada Yôko's 2000 story 'In Front of Trang Tien Bridge', the narrator Kazuko recalls 'hordes of students with narrow hips, trembling fingers, vacant eyes, and androgynous flat shoes' hounding her with Chinese characters featuring the 'enigmatic' word '*Vietnam*' (*Facing the Bridge*, 2007, 52). Ôe agrees with Octavio Paz that these 'identical subcultural trends' had 'global horizontal ties' (Ôe, 1995, 82-3). Interestingly, the influential postwar American translator Edward Seidensticker, says of Ôe Kenzaburô that he found both his politics and his fiction 'distasteful' (2002, 90) and seems to have taken umbrage at Ôe who, like so many of the postwar *interi* (intelligentsia), including Yoshimoto's father Takaaki, opposed the signing of the revised Security between Japan and the United States in 1960. Morton observes, however, that Yoshimoto has criticised both the left and the right in his writing, resulting in what he describes as a 'perverse complexity', a term which interestingly could be used to describe his daughter Banana's writing given her refusal to identify with movements as varied as feminism, the New Age and environmentalism (not to mention any trace of academic influence on her

writing) in pursuit of her own form of *jiritsu* (independence) which nevertheless seeks to engage intelligently and creatively with the social problems that confront her generation (Morton, 2003, 105).

In Stephen Spender's study of this period, *The Year of the Young Rebels* (1969), he explains the poet Allen Ginsberg's vision for the university:

... Academe meant a grove of trees where there should be taught not just knowledge but wisdom... Wisdom meant non-verbal non-conceptual sensory training in expansion of consciousness, teaching students to attain a state of awareness without the use of brainwashing (Spender, 1969, 138).

Spender describes Ginsberg as a latter-day prophet and writes that he represents not only new techniques of consciousness and communication but also an ancient wisdom. Spender defines this as meaning a 'truth which everybody recognises and which only has to be spoken – or which need not be spoken, only has to be in the present flesh – for it to be accepted' (140). Salinger's book anticipates this period of upheaval whilst Yoshimoto considers its consequences.

Yoshimoto (2001a) has also expressed admiration for the writing of Isaac Bashevis Singer. Singer's rejection of scientific fact and materialism would be appealing to Yoshimoto, as would Singer's reply, when asked by the editor of the American Jewish newspaper *The Forward*, to stop writing about ghosts and demons, asserting '... ghosts and demons are an intrinsic part of our existence' (Singer in Zamir, 1994, 34). Singer argues that 'only with their help can we understand what life is made of' (112). Singer also expressed a distrust of academics. He is quoted as saying 'I'd rather have one reader in Harlem... than a

hundred scholars at Columbia University' (146). This distrust is expressed further when he observed that 'Children read books, not reviews. They don't give a hoot about critics' (177).

This rejection of critics and academia is related to the wider rejection of an 'adult' point of view in children's literature. In *The Magician's Nephew* by C.S.Lewis (1980) two children speculate that someone may live 'in secret' in a nearby house that has been empty for a long time. Digory suggests that they may 'discover a gang of criminals and get a reward'. Polly says, however, that according to her dad it 'must be the drains' to which Digory replies 'Pooh! Grown-ups are always thinking of uninteresting explanations' (15). Digory rejects 'uninteresting explanations' which he associates with adults, preferring to use their imaginations instead. As well as rejecting grown-up thinking, history itself is dismissed when Polly argues that history is 'Battles and dates and all that rot' (138). In Narnia, the children have many experiences and Lewis suggests that children are more open to these experiences and can therefore learn more from them. In this children's story of Christianity, Lewis seems to argue that the same suspension of disbelief is needed as that which Shakespeare describes in the prologue of *The Life of Henry the Fifth*. Ultimately, in Shakespeare, this leads to the world-view Hamlet expresses when he says 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in our philosophy' (*Hamlet*, Act 1, Scene 5).

The importance of childhood in literature, then, is associated with the ability to think with an unfettered mind. Childhood provided the inspiration for the

Romantics in the late eighteenth century, as it has for many writers since. A further example of the inspiration of childhood on literature can be found in the writing of the 1982 Nobel Prize winner for literature, Gabriel Garcia Marquez. In a review of Marquez's autobiography, *Living to Tell the Tale* (2003), Michelle de Kretser argues that magic realism is 'more accurately understood as a child's way of seeing the world' and 'magic realism is the invention of childhood, which treats legend, history, experience and mythology with democratic even-handedness' (de Kretser, 2004, Review 11). Childhood, then, is described as having had a significant impact on Marquez's writing. Given Marquez's pre-eminence as a Nobel laureate, the values of a high 'adult' culture cannot be seen as completely separate from the values of 'popular' culture. Interestingly, Marquez notes that as a child he was an avid reader of cartoons such as *Dick Tracy* and *Buck Rogers* and he learned to draw them from memory and continue the week's episodes on his own (Marquez, 2003, 141).

Yoshimoto's writing, then, shares much in common with a number of Western writers and should be seen as part of an emerging global literature. Global literature allows for influences to travel in both directions and the success of *Kitchen* in translation shows that Japanese writers such as Yoshimoto are having an impact overseas; a point that Treat (1995) acknowledges when he describes *Kitchen* as being possibly 'Japan's first "intellectual" global commodity' (279). The impact of Yoshimoto's writing on global culture can be seen not only in the translation of her books into many languages but also in the making of *Kitchen* into a film by the Hong Kong director Yim Ho, in 1995, in which the story was relocated to Hong Kong. In the next chapter the first phase of Yoshimoto's

writing is considered in detail, especially in relation to her ability to translate the various influences on her writing into a paraliterature that communicates with a readership not accustomed to seeing the relevance of writing in their daily lives.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ENCLOSED WORLD OF THE *SHÔJO*: *KITCHEN* (1988) TO *AMRITA* (1994)

Yoshimoto Banana, as has been discussed in Chapter One, is writing at a time of great change in women's lives in Japan. And this change is not just affecting the young. Of the middle-aged Japanese woman in the 1990s, Rosenberger writes:

Women were no longer the symbol of feudal Japan, bound into kimono, husband's home, or subordination within a frankly hierarchical group; they were symbols of changing Japan (Rosenberger, 2001, 151).

In the first phase of her career, from 1988 to 1994, Yoshimoto's writing is mostly focussed on her *shôjo* characters and the enclosed world which is their domain. What has given Yoshimoto's writing added significance is that the adolescent subculture associated with the *shôjo* has been adopted by older women who have turned their backs on marriage and child bearing. As a result, the new ways of being that Yoshimoto has explored in her writing have added significance given that they reflect the choices being made by increasing numbers of young Japanese women. Yoshimoto's characters inhabit a world outside the framework of the traditional family which clearly reflects that of an increasing number of Japanese women whose lifestyle choices are leading to changing 'ideals of femininity'.

The literary significance that has subsequently been attached to Yoshimoto's writing has met with some resistance from Yoshimoto herself. In an interview with Gotô Shigeo published in 2001, Yoshimoto says, 'If you really think about it my writing is not literature. I don't really know what it is except as a kind of story. I'm happy if I write the kind of stories that people want to read' (54). In a

2005 interview Yoshimoto encouraged young, aspiring writers to just ‘write and write... Without any fancy theories or logic’ (Riley, 2005). Whilst Yoshimoto’s writing is sometimes judged as some kind of postmodern malaise, her writing can perhaps best be seen as an example of a paraliterature, existing on the margins of traditional understandings of literature. This thesis argues that in this way Yoshimoto has been able to explore ‘serious’ themes in the language of her peers and draw upon popular culture rather than ‘literature’ which traditionally sets itself apart from popular culture. Yoshimoto has thus created a body of writing that subverts the gender bias of the essentially male canon of *junbungaku* (pure) Japanese literature and remained true to her own dreams of becoming a writer conceived within the enclosed world of the *shôjo*.

In Chapter Two, various viewpoints have been examined in relation to Yoshimoto’s writing both within Japan and overseas. Importantly, Yoshimoto, like her ‘new breed’ contemporaries Murakami Haruki, Murakami Ryu, Shimada Masahiko and Yamada Amy, is a writer of global literature. The significance is that where nationalism and the novel were linked closely together during the Meiji Period, today, globalisation is breaking down national borders. In this new environment, the individual is free to explore new ways of being independently of state sponsored goals such as the ‘ideals of femininity’ promoted in Japan by both by the Meiji Period and wartime governments. The absence of family, the loss of loved ones, the blurring of gender differences and the absence of a specific sense of place in Yoshimoto’s writing reflect this new environment. Both Yoshimoto Banana and Murakami Haruki can be seen as writers of a global literature that is more about the individual than the nation.

In this chapter, I will discuss the novels of Yoshimoto's first phase and, in particular, the influence of popular culture on novels and short story collections such as *Kitchen* (1988), *Moonlight Shadow* (1988), *Tsugumi* (1989), *Asleep* (1989), *N.P.* (1990), *Lizard* (1993) and *Amrita* (1994). I will analyse the enclosed world of the *shôjo* in which the 'critical and creative power' (2004, 2) of the *shôjo* referred to by Aoyama Tomoko can be clearly observed. I will also analyse Yoshimoto's attitude to the 'family' and the role of 'fantasy' women and 'wise' children characters that help her narrators find spiritual meaning in the face of death. Enlightenment is restricted to those characters that experience extreme suffering. Rather than being overwhelmed by suffering, however, Yoshimoto's characters display resilience and courage. The power of positive thinking and healing is a key element in her writing and in this Yoshimoto has much in common with the young Japanese female artist Mori Mariko, who argues that 'people should have fun making art' (Mori in Molon, 1998, 8). Yoshimoto has said that she strives to make her writing fun (2001a) but while it is often associated with popular culture it needs to be pointed out that not all popular culture contains a positive message. When Yoshimoto started reading Tezuka Osamu's *manga* at the age of ten, she felt that it was 'too dark'. Yoshimoto argues that people have had enough by the time they go home at night without such 'dark' and 'bitter' thoughts (Yoshimoto, 2001a, 016). Thus, whilst Yoshimoto deals with 'serious' issues in her writing, she embraces a sense of *karumi* (lightness of tone) as opposed to the dystopic fantasies of much Japanese popular culture. It is, therefore, this creative tension between the seriousness of her subject matter and the lightness of tone in her writing that forces the reader to re-examine how 'literature' is to be read.

‘A separatist literature of inner space’

By writing on the margins of the essentially male *junbungaku* tradition of writers like Sôseki, Tanizaki, Kawabata and more recently Ôe Kenzaburô, Yoshimoto can be seen to be rejecting ‘male society and masculine culture’ in order to create what Elaine Showalter (1978) has described as a ‘separatist literature of inner space’. Mikage’s need to be alone in a kitchen could be a modern Japanese example of this trend long established in women’s writing in Britain. Showalter notes that:

Psychologically rather than socially focussed, this literature sought refuge from the harsh realities and vicious practices of the male world. Its favourite symbol, the enclosed and secret room, had been a potent image in women’s novels since *Jane Eyre* ... (Showalter, 1978, 33).

The kitchen can be seen then as an ‘enclosed’ space or else a ‘secret room’ within which Mikage, the protagonist, tries to find a new self. Whilst the kitchen (as part of the household) is generally speaking a communal space and place of work in which Japanese women have a ‘very tangible power’ (Ueno in Buckley, 1997, 279), it also becomes a place of refuge for Mikage in the novel after her grandmother’s death. Later, the kitchen becomes a more traditional space in which she cooks for others and even joins the staff of a master chef. Therefore, *Kitchen* is not only the title of the novel, but also refers to the secret place in which Mikage’s new sense of self is developed. Mikage herself says:

Dream kitchens... I will have countless ones... Alone, with a crowd of people, with one person – in all the many places I will live. I know that there will be so many more (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 43).

The kitchen, then, is a flexible and dream-like place in the novel. As well as being a traditional space (often a work space) it is also the space in which Mikage takes refuge and finds solace. In that sense, it could be argued that 'dream kitchens' are an example of an 'inner space' in a 'separatist literature'. Whilst Yoshimoto's writing can be seen to embody what Showalter describes as feminist sensibilities, Yoshimoto herself, as has been discussed previously, distances her writing from feminism. This avoidance of ideology suggests that whilst Yoshimoto's writing can be classified as an example of a 'separatist literature of inner space' that her characters withdraw into, Yoshimoto's writing is not an example of a 'separatist literature' in the radical feminist sense. In fact, the focus of Yoshimoto's writing is on the private world of the individual and not the implications their actions have in any public or social sense. Yoshimoto has said in conversation with her father Takaaki that she envisages her characters existing in a 'pleasant place like the womb'. This along with the private nature of her writing is underlined in her statement that when she writes, she often needs to find that 'pleasant place' (Yoshimoto, 1997b, 142-143). Yoshimoto may have a room of her own, but it is private and she is certainly not bound by any rules or regulations in relation to the room and its use.

Yoshimoto's use of popular culture and the distancing of her writing from serious literature can be seen as a further example of the private nature of her writing and her aversion to rules and regulations. The influence of *shôjo manga* on Yoshimoto's writing style is also crucial to it, then, being seen as an example of a 'separatist literature of inner space'. Yoshimoto draws freely on influences from her own adolescence regardless of the views of her critics and academics. These

influences include the use of stylised visual imagery, a conversational tone of dialogue, references to popular culture icons and in her characterisations of gender and the ambiguity that surrounds the relationships of characters such as Mikage and Yuichi in *Kitchen* (1988a). As a result, Yoshimoto's indebtedness to popular culture has made *Kitchen* a controversial novel. Whether Yoshimoto is some kind of a superficial cultural pond skater or a more substantial creature of the deep seems to preoccupy many of her critics.

The impact of popular culture on literature is a distinguishing feature of postmodernism. In terms of a definition of postmodernism, Terry Eagleton makes a distinction between the terms postmodernism and postmodernity. Murakami Fuminobu explains that for Eagleton where postmodernity 'refers to a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity' postmodernism is a 'depthless, de-centred, ungrounded, self-reflexive, playful, derivative, eclectic, pluralistic art which blurs the boundaries between "high" and "popular" culture' (Murakami, 2005, 8). In relation to the Japanese context, Miyoshi argues that the term postmodernism fits Japanese society in terms of the 'dispersal and demise of modern subjectivity' and the 'erasure of historicity' (Miyoshi 1991, 15). Yoshimoto's writing with its frequent anti-modern messages fits this definition neatly. Interestingly, Miyoshi argues that while Japanese citizens are 'desubjectified and decentralized, simply live – produce and consume, buy and sell' there is one crucial aspect of postmodernism missing, feminism (Miyoshi, 1991, 16). Yoshimoto's writing, because of her refusal to identify with movements such as feminism, also fits this definition neatly. I will argue, however, that in her writing Yoshimoto explores new ways of

being in terms of the individual rather than on behalf of a collective identity. And this reflects the changing attitudes that are defining contemporary Japanese society, especially through its changing 'ideals of femininity'.

The literary environment in which Yoshimoto made her debut was polarised by landmark postmodern texts such as *Sayonara Gyangutachi* by Takahashi Genichiro, first published in 1982 (the English translation *Sayonara, Gangsters* was published in 2004). If Salinger's novel *Catcher in the Rye* represented a self-conscious break from the narrative tradition established in nineteenth century realism, *Sayonara, Gangsters* renders the break even more complete. Whilst the novel has a beginning, middle and an end, the characters choose their own names and rub shoulders with a series of characters from a variety of genres. Thus there is a vampire, the poet Virgil who appears as a refrigerator, a talking cat who wants to read Thomas Mann and an alien from Jupiter carrying a business card. This kind of postmodern writing represents a break from the past and liberates both the writer and reader from tradition. By blurring the distinction between high culture and popular culture, for instance incorporating a section of a *manga* by Ôshima Yumiko as well as a quotation from Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, the novel develops a creative tension in which the reader is forced to consider the act of writing anew. Or, to ask with Valentine Cunningham, what is a text? (Cunningham, 1994, 5).

Whilst postmodern fiction was embraced enthusiastically by Japanese readers in the 1980s, it was not universally well received. Postmodern fiction is parodied by the Australian comic novelist Barry Oakley in his novel *Don't Leave Me* (2002).

When the protagonist Harry Eastaugh, a literary reviewer, tells the chief of staff that he does not feel himself, the chief of staff replies 'Sounds quite post-modern. Brett will like that' (66). The chief of staff fails to realise that Harry is not being ironic and is not coping with the fact that his wife has left him. When Harry interviews Brett, a Genzo (Generation Zero) author, Brett argues that 'The Genzo formats its world in top-ten lists and game-show banter. They were moulded by Three-Mile Island, Watergate, Kiss, Brady Bunch re-runs, divorced parents and Flintstone-grade computers' (67-8). Further, Brett has little interest in being interviewed. He argues 'Think what you like about my book. Who's right? Who's wrong? Who cares?' (68).

Like the literary critic Fredric Jameson in his essay, 'Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism' (1984), Oakley is critical of postmodernism because of the blurring of high and low culture and a perceived decline in cultural standards. However, as in the case of Yoshimoto's writing, postmodernism has allowed for more fluid notions of self-identity. This enables writers like Yoshimoto to explore new ways of being, especially in terms of the changing 'ideals of femininity' in a society in transition. As we have seen in Chapter Two, the grand narrative was especially influential in the development of a national literature in Meiji Period Japan. In the bubble economy of the 1980s, the postmodern movement was just as influential but in the opposite direction. Rather than the construction of a grand unifying narrative, the postmodern movement was a decentering force which gave a voice to a range of marginalised voices including the gay community, women and ethnic communities. In this new environment, whilst Yoshimoto's writing can be read within the contested space

that is contemporary Japanese literature, it can also be read as an example of a paraliterature that exists on the margins of literature in a way that Kawabata, Tanizaki and Ôe cannot. Therefore this is what ultimately distinguishes the writing of Yoshimoto Banana from the canonical works of Japanese literature.

Given the influence of popular culture on her writing, one of the key elements that makes Yoshimoto's writing an example of a 'separatist literature of inner space' is her use of *shôjo* characters. In Yoshimoto's writing, *shôjo* characters can be seen to have made the transition from *manga* to the novel. In *Kitchen*, the main character Mikage is young and female. Her grandmother, her last surviving relative, dies at the beginning of the novel and Mikage is set free from the 'adult' world in which gender roles are fixed and within which expectations placed upon females are different from those placed upon males. Despite living in an environment in which adult figures are absent, Mikage does not, however, live in a state of idealised freedom. Indeed, Yoshimoto takes great care to show the pain and isolation which Mikage has to deal with in order to grow and explore new ways of being. In this sense, Mikage comes to realise that 'Women are strong!' (56) and remarks:

I had come to understand that despair does not necessarily result in annihilation, that one can go on in spite of it, I had become hardened. Was that what it means to be an adult, to live with ugly ambiguities? I didn't like it, but it made it easier to go on (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 56).

In *Kitchen* Yoshimoto draws attention to Mikage's fearlessness in the face of existentialist despair. There is great irony, however, in the fact that Mikage finds her strength in a kitchen. The kitchen, a symbol of female oppression in another

age as the domain of the housewife chained to the kitchen sink, is thus reclaimed by Yoshimoto as a place for creativity and self-expression, rather than enforced domesticity.

Yoshimoto is, of course, not alone in challenging gender stereotypes. A particularly startling example of this type of gender challenging behaviour can be seen in the film *My Secret Place*, directed by Yaguchi Shinobu in 1996. The protagonist, a young female bank employee is shown dressed in her pink office uniform lugging heavy geological equipment through a dense forest. At the end of the film, her obsession with money is overcome and she throws away a suitcase full of cash. As in the writing of Yoshimoto Banana, both materialism and gender roles are questioned. In particular, the image of the young woman in her bank uniform, hauling heavy equipment through the jungle, challenges the perception that young women are merely wallflowers in big institutions with no real power.

It needs to be emphasised that Yoshimoto's *shôjo* characters also do not have an easy time making the transition from corporate wallflowers to leading more fulfilling lives. Thus after the death of her grandmother, Mikage takes small painful steps towards independence. Mikage therefore distinguishes between herself having taken those steps and the women who come to the cooking classes who can never know 'real joy' (59). Mikage's situation is, however, misunderstood. Yuichi's ex-girlfriend Okuno, confronts her and says:

You don't accept the responsibilities of a relationship. You just like to have fun and you keep him tied to you. Parading your slender arms and legs, your long hair, in front of him, never letting him forget your womanhood - thanks to you, Yuichi is half a man. That would really suit you, wouldn't it, to leave things undecided forever? But love is not a joke; it also means sharing someone else's pain (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 72).

Okuno 'begs' Mikage not to see Yuichi anymore.

In some ways, these characters conform to an observation made by Miyoshi (1974), that 'the characters in the Japanese novel are almost always types, and not living individuals'. Okuno plays the role of the devil's advocate and allows Mikage to state her position more clearly. Mikage is described as being like a parasite, emasculating Yuichi and holding him back from developing as a whole person. She is accused of using her sexuality ('your slender arms and legs') to ensnare Yuichi. The result being that he is only 'half a man'. Okuno reminds Mikage that 'love is not a joke' and suggests that she is somehow not 'sharing someone else's pain'. The sub-text, however, begs the question, how well does Okuno know Yuichi? Is it Okuno's role as 'responsible' female to rescue Yuichi? If so, where does Yuichi's responsibility lie in the matter?

After a visit to a teashop, their first together, Mikage thinks to herself:

Whether she or I were winning or losing, who could say? Who could know which of us was in the better position? The score couldn't be determined. Besides, there was no standard of measurement, and, particularly on this cold night, I couldn't even hazard a guess (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 78-9).

Mikage places herself side by side with Okuno inviting comparison, but there is no 'standard of measurement'. Presumably they are such different young women

that such a comparison is impossible. This conflict between the two female characters is a major leitmotif in Yoshimoto's writing. There is a similar scene in the short story 'Night and Night's Travellers' (1989b) where both Mari and Sarah love Yoshihiro. Shibami, the narrator asks:

Was Mari the winner, or Sarah? For a moment I considered this question very seriously. But it was hard to say who had come out ahead. Thanks to Yoshihiro they'd each arrived at places they'd never anticipated (*Asleep*, 1989b, English translation 2000, 63).

Again, there is no certain 'standard of measurement' and, indeed, Shibami is prepared to argue that both Mari and Sarah are winners. This is an example of Yoshimoto's postmodern ambivalence that inspires critics such as Murakami Fuminobu (2005) and outrages others such as Treat (1995) and Smith (1997). Another example of this ambiguity can be seen again in *Amrita* when Sakumi says of the kitchen

It's wrong for mothers, daughters, and wives to be imprisoned there forever. The kitchen is not only a place where we create wonderful borscht, but it's also a breeding ground for malice and kitchen drinkers (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 34).

Where Mikage says 'Dream kitchens... I will have countless ones' (43), Sakumi takes a more cautionary approach. In this way Yoshimoto avoids being seen to take a polemical stand in her writing. While Treat characterises Yoshimoto's writing as 'non-oppositional' (278) and Smith describes Mikage as 'drifting, listless' (262), Murakami Fuminobu writes that the rivalry between Yoshimoto's female characters leads to a 'common connection'

rather than ‘violence’ (89). Murakami attaches great significance to this and asks longingly:

Like Banana’s characters, can we not engage in sexual activity without discharging and appeasing our erotic desire and the desire to do violence?’ (Murakami, 2005, 91).

The idea that Oedipal conflict is essential in the development of the individual is challenged by this notion. While Murakami argues that Yoshimoto has made conflict in relationships redundant on a personal level, ultimately he suggests that postmodernism is ‘one of the ways towards a world without violence’ (11). Yoshimoto’s writing carries a weight and significance for Murakami that eludes other less impressed critics such as Ôe, Smith, and Treat.

Another element in Yoshimoto’s writing that makes it stand apart as an example of a ‘separatist literature of inner space’ is her use of fantasy. Yoshimoto writes in a non-realist mode of writing in which, as has been discussed in Chapter Two, there is little attempt at kitchen sink realism or concerns about socio-economic reality. Yoshimoto prefers to explore a world of dream jobs and the supernatural that could not exist in reality. As Yoshimoto spurns the expectations of academics and critics so her characters refuse to conform to the external expectations or demands that have traditionally been made on them as women. When asked in a 1995 interview what was most alien to her, Yoshimoto replied ‘*Daikigyo no O.L.*’ (‘*An office lady in a big corporation*’) (Yoshimoto, 1995a, 77). Thus in her writing her characters have dream jobs that flout the expectations with which young Japanese women have traditionally been faced. In *Kitchen*,

Mikage has a dream job with a teacher who was ‘rather famous’ even though she herself was a ‘novice with only one summer of study under my belt’ (58). And in *Amrita* (1994a), Sakumi says, ‘I hated offices. I’d go crazy if I had to work in another one’ (225). Instead, she works in a shop called ‘Berries’ where previously she had been a customer:

Every night as the doors opened for the evening all the elements would come together nicely – the way the water squirted from the faucet over the sink in the kitchen, the arrangement of odd glasses and plates, and the atmosphere coming from the music in the background (*Amrita* 1994a, English translation 1997, 234).

There are precedents for this type of fantasy in Japanese popular culture. In the 1985 film *Otoko wa Tsurai yo: Torajirô Ren'ai Juku* (Tora-san’s School of Love) Tora-san imagines the perfect job for a young woman. He lists a kind boss, trips to Kanazawa in summer, skiing in winter, no overtime and so on. His family listens in silence. In the eyes of his family, Tora-san’s dream is an impossibility and yet, this is a dream that Yoshimoto embraces. The difference is that in Yoshimoto’s writing there is no family sitting in silent judgement. Yoshimoto has dispensed with the ‘family’, consigning them to the same fate as the office.

While work is romanticised in Yoshimoto’s writing, sex is not. One of the reasons for the absence of sex is the triangles that form when Yoshimoto’s female characters find themselves in a contest for the same man. This does not lead to declarations of undying love. In fact, Mikage says in *Kitchen* (1988a) that she is not in love with Yuichi and she declares that she can understand Yuichi better than Okuno because, ‘If you’re not in love with him you can understand him’ (29). Later in *Amrita* (1994a), Sakumi observes

When I look at a man and a woman I'd much rather see them lined up together looking out into the world than seeing them staring romantically into each other's eyes' (*Amrita* 1994a, English Translation 1997, 202).

The influence of popular culture is significant in the development of this aspect of Yoshimoto's writing as an example of a 'separatist literature of inner space'.

Newitz (1994) notes that:

... relationships between young men and women in romantic comedy anime are based upon sexual innuendo and deferral – that is, they are about fantasized expectations, rather than sexual consummation and its aftermath (Newitz, 1994, 11).

More often than not, however, sex takes second place to food. Food is a central theme in Yoshimoto's writing. Aoyama writes that 'The literary celebration of food and cooking culminated in the two best-selling books of the late 1980s' referring to *Kitchen* (1988a) and Tawara Machi's *Salad Anniversary* (1987) (Aoyama, 2008, 180).' The pleasure and enjoyment offered by the making and sharing of meals is central to her characters' enjoyment of life. Murakami Fuminobu notes that a key development in Yoshimoto's writing is the subsuming of the desire for sex by the desire for food. Murakami observes 'Banana's postmodern characters eat together where modernists would sleep together' (2005, 66). The significance of this is that:

... by deconstructing the sexual and food desires, and the bedroom and the kitchen, the structure of Banana's *Kitchen* subverts the modernist binary oppositions of the self-stranger, and heterogeneity and homogeneity ideologies (Murakami, 2005, 66).

By breaking down these binary oppositions, Murakami argues that Yoshimoto's intention is to 'establish human relations as widely as possible' (68-9). The

implications of this development will be explored further in Chapter Four where, especially in the light of recent ecocritical theory, the relationships between Yoshimoto's human and non-human characters, such as plants and animals, are explored. Interestingly, Otomo Rio notes that third-wave feminists such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Butler and others have agreed that the collapse of the sex-gender distinction, in which sex was seen as 'biological determination' and gender as 'cultural categories imposed on that sexed body', is necessary (2004, 1). In her later writing, Yoshimoto blurs boundaries on a species level as she blurred gender boundaries in the first phase of her career.

Not only is there an absence of sex in Yoshimoto's writing which distinguishes it from harder edged contemporaries like Murakami Ryu and Yamada Amy, there is also an absence of drugs. When Mikage talks about her new life with the Tanabes she says:

I was not afraid of burns or scars; I didn't suffer from sleepless nights. Every day I thrilled with pleasure at the challenges tomorrow would bring. Memorizing the recipe, I would make carrot cakes that included a bit of my soul. At the supermarket I would stare at a bright red tomato, loving it for dear life. Having known such joy, there was no going back (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 59).

It is interesting to compare Mikage's experience with the tomatoes at the supermarket with a description from Murakami Ryu's Akutagawa Prize winning novel *Almost Transparent Blue* (1977). Under the influence of mescaline, Lilly and Ryu go for a drive and stop near a field of tomatoes:

The tomatoes were wet and wonderfully red in the darkness. They flashed on and off like the little light bulbs on fir trees or around windows at Christmas time. The numberless trembling red fruits, trailing sparks, were just like fish with luminous teeth swimming in the dark sea (*Almost Transparent Blue*, 1977, 89).

When they get out of the car, Lilly and Ryu go into the field. Lying down on the ground, Lilly says that she can hear Ryu breathing and he observes:

The tomatoes looking up from this place were breathing quietly, too. Their breath mixed with ours and moved like mist among the stalks. In the puddly black earth were broken grass stalks, they pricked our skin, and thousands of tiny resting insects. Their breath reached here from deep in the earth (*Almost Transparent Blue*, 1977, 91).

Lilly and Ryu make observations about their world that are not out of place in Yoshimoto Banana's writing, except for the fact that they are on a drug binge. Yoshimoto's characters also experience a heightened appreciation of their world but without drugs and this is an example of the absence of the hard edges of reality in her writing.

Whilst Anne Sherif has observed that Yoshimoto's writing is uncharacteristic of late-twentieth-century fiction, because she rarely describes sex and violence directly (1999a, 294), this is not so surprising given the influence of *shôjo manga* on Yoshimoto's writing. The predilection of *shôjo manga* for androgyny and homosexuality is one reason for the lack of sexual activity in Yoshimoto's writing. Aoyama lists the favourite themes of *shôjo* culture as 'bishônen (beautiful boys), androgyny, transgender, transsexuality, and male homosexuality' (2004, 1). To underline this aspect of Yoshimoto's writing Treat argues that Yoshimoto's characters are written 'without key heterosexual differences' (1996, 294) and that Yoshimoto has a tendency to make her male

characters ‘... rather effeminate, prone to tears, and emotionally attuned to their *shôjo* friends’. The significance of this varies from critic to critic. The notion of a ‘male shedding tears’, Treat suggests, is a character flaw. This seems to be little more than a value judgement, however. The fact that these characters are androgynous, do not produce children, buy ‘designer goods’, and that the young men are ‘effeminate’, ‘prone to tears’ and indulge in ‘cosmetics’, would seem to be a private matter of personal choice. Otomo Rio, from a feminist perspective, argues that through the creation of homosexual love stories by women writers for female consumption ‘some girls have gained a way of facing their own sexuality away from a male gaze’ (Otomo, 2006, 4). For those critics who assumed that Mikage is sexless, Alwyn Spies warns that they are ‘missing some very important issues’. Spies points out that Mikage is ‘not exactly a virgin’. For example, she has an ex-boyfriend whom she has obviously slept with, knowing how ‘wildly he tossed in his sleep’ (2000, 90). Spies concludes instead that Mikage is ‘not sexually passive, but prudent’ (91).

The rise of *manga*

As has been noted in Chapter Two, Yoshimoto has been influenced in particular by *shôjo manga*, which are at the heart of girls’ popular culture in Japan. Yoshimoto cites the influence of *manga* writers such as Ôshima Yumiko and Iwadata Mariko on her writing and this can be seen in the descriptions of an enclosed *shôjo* world in novels like *Tsugumi*, as well as the use of visual imagery and the conversational dialogue used by the characters. Yoshimoto is not alone in this. Natsume Fusanosuke, *manga* critic and grandson of novelist Natsume

Sôseki, observed that many contemporary novelists in Japan either wanted to be *manga* artists or else like them (1997, 16). In his novel *69* (1987, English translation 1993), for example, Murakami Ryu describes the impact that *manga* had on him as a high school student. There is, then, a strong link between *manga* and contemporary Japanese literature. In order to examine the influence of *manga* on Yoshimoto's writing, we first need to define what we mean by *manga*.

In a brief history of the development of *manga* in postwar Japan, Natsume writes that it is not strange today to be seen reading *manga* on a train but in the U.S. or Europe this would be shocking (1997, 13). Natsume says, however, that this has not always been the case. Attitudes in Japan began to change in the late 1960s when university students began to read *manga* and in the last twenty years, adults have followed suit. Natsume argues that this does not represent, however, the sudden infantilisation of the Japanese people (14). Conditions that were unique to Japan led to this development. In the postwar period, *manga* were cheaper to produce than other books. *Manga* were also much cheaper to produce than film and television. *Manga* artists just used paper and pens and did not need expensive locations or special effects (17). One other factor that spurred on the development of *manga* in Japan was the genius of Tezuka Osamu. Tezuka was sixteen years old when Japan lost the war and started off as a writer of children's *manga* at a small publishing company. Here he had the freedom to not only write 'safe' stories for children, but also long *manga* that dealt with life and death, such as *Kurubeki Sekai (The Next World)* (19). At the time, Natsume argues, these themes were too awful to contemplate in a novel and too difficult to stage for a movie or a play.

Manga, then, is unique to postwar Japanese popular culture. And given its birthplace it is no surprise that critics such as Gunter Nitschke write that *manga* ‘exhibit a creative energy similar to that of Japan’s big urban centers’ (1994, 232). Sugimoto Yoshio notes that *manga* is one of four ‘obvious phenomena’ that constitute Japanese popular culture. These include *manga*, *pachinko*, *karaoke* and the commercialisation of love and sex. To highlight the cultural significance of *manga*, Sugimoto points out that one-third of all publications in Japan are *manga*, of which *Shukan Shonen Jump* (Weekly Boys’ Jump Magazine) sells over four million copies per week (1997, 225). As a testament to *manga*’s popularity, in 2004, Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro advised younger members of the L.D.P. government not to ‘send email on your cell phones or read comic books while in session’ (*The Age*, 2004a, 21).

One of the features of *manga* that make it synonymous with contemporary urban life is the speed at which it can be read. Jack Hunter describes *manga* as ‘Japanese comic books’ whose roots go back centuries but argues that the genius of Tezuka Osamu was to introduce a ‘cinematic technique which effectively decimated word-count and relied on codified visuals, enabling a comic to be “read” at incredible speeds’ (1998, 97-8). As a result, in a society in which time has become a premium Susan J. Napier argues that ‘virtually everybody in Japan has had some exposure to *manga*, not only in childhood, but in many stages of their adolescent and adult life’ (1998, 92). Napier goes on to assert that apart from its ubiquity *anime* is also an ‘intellectually challenging art form’ (4) that is worth serious consideration by academics because it is a ‘richly fascinating contemporary Japanese art form’ (Napier, 2001, 8).

Of significant interest to this discussion about Yoshimoto Banana is an editorial in the *Japan Echo* journal that suggests that *manga* and *anime* target both adult viewers as well as children. 'In fact, I think it is fair to say that in Japan the dividing line between adult and juvenile culture is gradually disappearing' (Japan Echo, 2003). *Manga* is representative, then, of postmodern culture and the blurring of the distinction between serious culture and popular culture. To underline the significance of *manga* to Japanese culture, the animator Miyazaki Hayao has argued that '*manga* have become the basis of Japanese culture' (Miyazaki in Saitani, 2000).

Single frame heroics: *Shôjo manga* and 'L Literature' (new women's literature)

Yoshimoto's writing is best read with an understanding of *manga* and its place in Japanese society. In any discussion of *manga*, it needs to be pointed out that there are many different types of *manga*, each targetting different audiences. The *shôjo manga* written by Ôshima Yumiko and Iwadata Mariko first emerged in the 1970s. A particularly influential *shôjo manga* was 'The Rose of Versailles' by Ikeda Riyoko, which Robertson (1998) suggests was inspired by Tezuka Osamu's 'popular post-war comic' *Princess Knight*. *Shôjo manga* have subsequently moved on, however, from 'simple adolescent love themes' to 'life and death, love and hate, family matters, and the need for self-esteem' (Yonezawa, 1999, 21).

Shôjo manga (girl's comics) are instantly recognisable because the female form of the characters is made to look like Western fashion models with 'long legs and

big eyes' (Nitschke, 1994, p. 238). Kinsella argues that the 'unrealistic' drawing styles of girl's *manga* were criticised as being 'petty individualism' and a 'reactionary retreat from more important political issues' (2000, 37). This criticism resonates with Ôe's view (1995) that contemporary Japanese writers fail to engage with politics, but Yoshimoto's heroines are also seen as idealised figures by Mitsui and Washida (1989) and Furuhashi (1990), who argue that her characters are, in fact, mythic figures. Furuhashi argues that Yoshimoto explores an idealised, mythic love that harks back to creation and that she is not just describing brother-sister love in her early novels, she is writing about better times in the past, 'a time of myths' (1990, 66). An example of this can be seen in the Jungian archetypes that appear in her writing. These will be examined later in this chapter.

There is a strong connection between *shôjo manga* and 'L Literature', which is the focus of an article by Saitô Minako (2002) entitled 'A New Brand of Women's Literature'. The 'L' standing for ladies, love and liberation, etc (2002, 1), Saitô identifies the Cobalt library (junior fiction in the 1980s based on *shôjo manga*) as a major influence on Yoshimoto's writing. In fact, Saitô argues that the Cobalt novels are one of three factors contributing to 'L Literature', the 'new women's literature of today' in Japan (2002, 1). The first was the translation into Japanese of a number of novels such as *Anne of Green Gables* (Montgomery, 1908; translated into Japanese 1952) which led to the development of home-grown literature such as the Cobalt novels. The second was the women's liberation movement in the 1970s. Finally, the third was the emergence of *manga* in the 1980s such as 'ladies comics' which target adult women who have

graduated from *shôjo manga*. Saitô sees writers such as Hayashi Mariko, Yamada Amy and Yoshimoto Banana as part of this developing trend which has become ‘mainstream literature’ read by both men and women (2002, 2). Saitô speculates that this has been brought about by the breakdown of traditional gender roles or even the breakdown of Japan’s corporate society.

Analysing the success of Yoshimoto Banana and Murakami Haruki, Mitsui Takayuki argues that there are five main reasons: (1) they are easy to read; (2) they describe normal events in the lives of young women; (3) they are visual like *shojo manga*; (4) the style is conversational and therefore ‘real’; (5) the characters are nothing out of the ordinary. They write from the point of view of the self (Mitsui in Mitsui and Washida, 1989, 107-8). This list could easily be used to describe *manga*. Mitsui also notes the influence of Cobalt novels on Yoshimoto’s writing. Like the Cobalt novels, Yoshimoto’s writing dramatises the everyday lives of girls (77) but where the Cobalt novels created sensations like *waku waku* and *doki doki* (excitement), Yoshimoto creates a sense of artifice and emptiness. Ultimately, Mitsui argues that Yoshimoto’s writing is not a comedown from the heights of *junsuibungaku* (pure literature) (78). Yoshimoto takes solitude and loneliness from *manga* and the Cobalt novels but her message to young people is that despite the difficulties of today, we should live for tomorrow. These are, Mitsui argues, ‘messages from the void to the young’ (82).

In relation to Yoshimoto’s writing, Saitô notes that only two previous articles have discussed the influence of the Cobalt library series on Yoshimoto Banana’s writing, one by Mitsui Takayuki and the other by Shimura Yuko (2006, 173).

Saitô argues that there have been three critical approaches taken. These include conventional analyses of Yoshimoto as an author (analyses of her newness), criticism of her marketability (analyses of her reception) and commodity criticism (analyses of her books as commercial products). Saitô's own view is that Yoshimoto's writing is not so much like cutting-edge comics as older, pre-war novels which 'stereotypically glorified the unhappiness of girl heroines' (175). Finally, in relation to her critics, Saitô argues they have largely failed to detect the 'history of girl culture that has been running as an undercurrent throughout modern history' (183).

Tsugumi, in *Tsugumi* (1989), is a quintessential *shôjo manga* character in that she reflects the 'petty individualism' that Kinsella (2000) argues critics have associated with the *shôjo manga* genre. Tsugumi is characterised as being obnoxious to all of the people around her. These include her sister, Yoko, her cousin, Maria, and her mother and father. Maria, the narrator, writes that:

If I had to make a list of the Top Three Victims of Tsugumi's Outrageously Nasty Disposition, the order would undoubtedly be: Aunt Masako, then Yoko, then me. Uncle Tadashi kept his distance (*Goodbye Tsugumi*, 1989a, English translation 2002, 4).

In her selfishness Tsugumi recalls the Yukino character in Yoshimoto's earlier novel *Kanashii Yōkan (A Sad Premonition)* (1988d). This type of character is not entirely new in Japanese writing, however. In the 1939 short story 'The Schoolgirl' (In *Run Melos and Other Stories*) by Dazai Osamu, the narrator wakes up and says 'I'm at my ugliest in the morning' (44). She speculates later

about a female Christ and thinks, 'How repulsive' (51). Later, after being 'nauseated' by a pregnant woman wearing makeup on the train she says:

Women are so disgusting. Being one myself, I know all too well what filthy things women are, and I hate it so much it makes me grind my teeth. The unbearable smell you get from handling goldfish – it's as if that smell covers your entire body, and no matter how much you wash and scrub, it won't come off. And when I think that I've got to go through every day of my life emitting that smell, that female smell, there's something else that pops into my mind and makes me think I'd just rather die now, as I am, still a young girl (*Run Melos and other stories*, 1988, 70).

This misogynistic depiction of women brings to mind that of Kunikida Doppo discussed in Chapter Two. Like Dazai's narrator, Tsugumi is obnoxious but Yoshimoto is careful to place this in context. She is associated with the fantasy women characters in Yoshimoto's writing like Urara in *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a). Tsugumi is described as being an 'unpleasant woman' (1) and 'like the devil' (3). Her room is described as being like a scene from *The Exorcist* (5). As a result of illness, she has been treated kindly since birth and people are afraid for her health. Tsugumi is described as 'growing into her badness' in this environment (4). Finally, in terms of the novel's construction, Tsugumi's character represents rebellion as opposed to her cousin Maria who represents conformity.

Furuhashi Nobuyoshi argues that this split between narrator and main character is necessary because Tsugumi is such a 'selfish' character (1990, 103). Furuhashi argues that by having Maria narrate Tsugumi's story, Yoshimoto demonstrates that even a 'selfish' character such as Tsugumi may be understood (106). And this is a very different emphasis from that of Doppo or Dazai. However, Tsugumi

is not just ‘understood’ by Maria, she also inspires Maria, who comes to see the suffering that Tsugumi masks through anti-social behaviour. They enjoy a symbiotic relationship in which each needs the other. Tsugumi needs someone to tell her story and Maria learns to be strong from Tsugumi. This is the enclosed world of the *shôjo*. It is a world of intense feeling in which Maria says of the days spent on the island with Tsugumi ‘... *those days were blessed*’ (161). The enclosed *shôjo* world cannot last forever, however.

Earlier in *Tsugumi* (1989) when the girls’ favourite series came to an end on TV, Maria says:

That night, having wriggled down into my futon all alone, I found myself in the grips of a wrenching sadness. I was only a child, but I knew the feeling that came when you parted with something, and I felt that pain (*Goodbye Tsugumi*, 1989a, English translation 2002, 67).

Tsugumi describes a group of ‘four women enjoying each other’s company’ (27). As such, it is also a forerunner to the ‘women’s paradise’ in *Amrita* (1994). But Yoshimoto does not just describe the vulnerability of this world and suggests that there is more to the world of the *shôjo*, as Aoyama (2004) argues, than passivity and frivolity. Rather than witnessing the decline of Tsugumi’s health, the reader is shown Tsugumi learning to take responsibility for others. Thus, when the dog, Gongoro, is kidnapped, Maria says, ‘It was the first time in her life Tsugumi had gotten angry on someone’s behalf. Something about her seemed sacred to me then’ (*Tsugumi*, 1989, English translation 2002, 137). When Gongoro disappears again, Tsugumi digs a deep hole at the back of a neighbouring house. Yoko, Tsugumi’s sister, discovers the hole and rescues one of Gongoro’s youthful

kidnappers trapped inside. When she tells Maria this story, Yoko describes it as a ‘genuine adventure’ (151). Maria reminisces and says, ‘She hadn’t changed a bit since she was a girl. All along she had been living in a universe of thought that was all her own, shared with no one else’ (156). There is a sense of purity about Tsugumi’s single-mindedness. This event becomes part of their *shôjo* folklore, all the more precious because of Tsugumi’s illness. However, Tsugumi is to be admired, not pitied. Of more significance in relation to Yoshimoto’s later fiction is Tsugumi’s failure to place the significance of a human life on a higher level than that of an animal. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Four.

Treat describes Tsugumi as the ‘perfect *shôjo* who will never grow up’ (1996, 295). For Tsugumi, there is ‘never anything but “today”’ (295). He argues that in *Tsugumi*, ‘Yoshimoto Banana generates a youth (*seishun*) that could be anywhere, at any time, as an act of homage to a present that does not necessarily have to be “now” or “here” (296). He is critical of Yoshimoto on the basis that her ‘contemporary nostalgia lacks any determined past to validate it’ (296) and points to how Yoshimoto portrays herself as the perfect *shôjo* in the postscript identifying herself with Tsugumi rather than the successful author she has become as an adult (297). Treat asks ‘why childhood and adolescence should be so idealised as a lost object at the expense of a future adulthood?’ (1996, 297) and suggests that characters like Maria are narcissistic and reluctant to let go of their adolescent selves. This could be true, but Maria is also vulnerable because of her parents’ relationship. Even though Maria is hurt by Tsugumi’s anti-social behaviour, she can see through it and forms a strong friendship with Tsugumi.

Not all critics have shared Treat's unease about nostalgia. C.S.Lewis wrote 'Now the modern critical world uses 'adult' as a word of approval. It is hostile to what it calls 'nostalgia' and contemptuous of what it calls 'Peter Pantheism' (1969, 210). Nicols Fox argues that 'there is nothing foolish about yearning for the past' (2002, 227). More recently, Sue Turnbull has suggested that nostalgia gives us a perspective on the past and offers us 'security during the instability of the present' (Turnbull in Carbone, 2003, 6). This would suggest that nostalgia offers a sense of stability and serves a more important function than escapism in that it offers reassurance in the face of increasing economic uncertainty. Yoshimoto turns to the past for a sense of stability and reassurance in her writing, which might explain her popularity with younger readers who are most exposed to the social upheaval that Japan is undergoing. In his discussion of Yoshimoto's writing in relation to postmodern theory, Murakami Fuminobu argues that in short stories like 'Newly Wed' (1993), 'Chiisana Yami' and 'Mado non Soto' (2000a) or else the novel *Kanashii Yokan* (1988d), nostalgia refers to a pre-Oedipal time without binary distinctions between masculinity and femininity, authority and obedience, or between superiority and inferiority. It springs, he argues, from a 'desire to renounce sexuality' (2005, 79-83). And the substitution of spirituality for sexuality is a major focus in Yoshimoto's writing, especially in terms of the direction she has taken in her more recent writing. Nostalgia can therefore be said to be significant as it facilitates a shift from Oedipal tension to a state more susceptible to spiritual awareness.

The influence of *manga* on Yoshimoto's writing style

One of the most striking features of Yoshimoto's style which is borrowed from *manga* is its use of visual imagery. On the opening page of *Kitchen*, we see the kitchen through Mikage's eyes, which suddenly telescopes to the night sky within a single frame: 'When I raise my eyes from the oil-spattered gas burner and the rusty kitchen knife, outside the window stars are glittering, lonely' (*Kitchen*, 1988, English translation 1993, 3-4). This sudden sweep enables Yoshimoto to take in both the 'White tile catching the light (ting! ting!),' as well as the 'loneliness of the "glittering stars"'. This use of visual imagery, notes Birnbaum, is due to the influence of an 'omnipresent media' which today's Japanese writers have grown up with. Because of this, 'their imagination is less emotive than scenic' (1991, 2). Birnbaum argues that their writing reflects a world-as-seen rather than a world-as-felt (2). Reading these contemporary Japanese authors is comparable to experiencing the world as a *manga*, 'clever, compact, disposable' (2).

An example of the world-as-seen rather than world-as-felt approach occurs when Yuichi pays Mikage a visit shortly after the death of her grandmother. Mikage describes him as being 'cool' and says that she felt she could 'trust him'. In order to describe Mikage's emotional state, Yoshimoto writes:

In the black gloom before my eyes (as it always is in cases of bewitchment), I saw a straight road leading from me to him. He seemed to glow with white light. That was the effect he had on me (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 7)

Thorn (2007) discusses the use of ‘lighting’ in *manga* which occasionally includes flashes of light where there is no light source. He observes that these effects express the emotions of characters, giving the reader an ‘electronic-microscopic-view of characters’ synaptical activity.’ Part of the world-as-seen rather than the world-as-felt approach, then, is the use of light to signify emotion. Visual information or cues rather than dialogue are, therefore, relied upon to a greater extent. Visual information or cues then provide an alternative to words. It is important to remember, however, that there is an equally strong tradition in Japanese literature to distrust words. Apart from observing that Japanese culture could be said to be visual in orientation rather than verbal, Miyoshi observes that in Japanese society, reticence rather than eloquence is rewarded (1974, xv).

In *Deja-vu, a Photography Quarterly* (1991), a dialogue was published between Araki Nobuyoshi, Yoshimoto Banana and Iizawa Kohtaro. Araki is a controversial Japanese photographer who has since the early 1970s photographed the world of downtown Tokyo featuring women in positions of bondage and couples in Love Hotels. He has also exhibited and published many photographs of cats and his wife Yoko who passed away in 1990. Apart from being a photography critic, Iizawa was also the chief editor of *Deja Vu* between 1990 and 1994. Discussing the importance of the ‘last scene’ in *Kitchen*, Araki is quoted as saying:

The scene in *Kitchen* with the *katsudon* is your best. It’s like a photograph. Not just the sentence construction and the style but the sense of pace in the scene. The shining image of the girl bringing the *katsudon* stays with you. That is possibly the best of your last scenes (*Déjà-vu*, 1991, 72).

Araki's description of the scene is highly visual. Araki is most likely familiar with the techniques and conventions of *manga* and his appraisal of Yoshimoto's skills seem to be framed by a sensibility based on *manga* techniques. This is the case, especially given Thorn's (2007) comments that the use of 'lighting' in *manga* expresses the emotional responses of characters. In this case, Araki is using this same visual language to express his own emotional response.

Apart from these visual elements, the dialogue between Yoshimoto's characters also has a *manga* sensibility; it is matter of fact and emotionally two-dimensional. Nobody seems to get excited about anything. In *N.P.*, when Otohiko finds Kazami drugged in Sui's apartment, Kazami questions Otohiko about their birth control practices and Otohiko replies:

"I think that she didn't know what she was doing, and then, without really thinking about it, tried forgetting to take it," Otohiko said, his hands in tight fists on his lap.

Otherwise, it was an unusually quiet night. The air seemed desolate like a grave. This was the sad wreckage of a broken dream (*N.P.*, 1990a, English translation 1994, 159).

Kazami's ability to switch off in the middle of a crisis is demonstrated yet again when Sui disappears. Kazami herself is surprised at the 'shallowness of my attachment'. Later Kazami describes the whole summer as a 'dream' and decides to 'move on, and not dwell on it. It only upset me to think of it anyway (164). Because of this matter-of-fact emotional flatness, emotions are compartmentalised as if into single frames, as in *manga*.

Another aspect of Yoshimoto's writing style that is influenced by *manga* is the use of onomatopoeic language. Examples of this onomatopoeic language include the use of *suru suru* to describe the action of peeling fruit and vegetables (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 9) and *kusu kusu* to describe the sound of Eriko's laughter (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 19). Otomo Rio writes that the use of onomatopoeia tends to imply 'limited verbal abilities, demonstrating immaturity, and hence, leading the act to be perceived as "cute"' (Otomo, 2006, 13). Rather than indicating loss of social status, however, Otomo argues that for adolescent Japanese girls the reverse is the case. Their

... speech full of onomatopoeia implies that the speaker is not concerned about having precise communication with others. She may in fact be demonstrating that she belongs to a privileged class for whom being misunderstood does not jeopardise their wellbeing; they are of the class outside the system of material production (Otomo, 2006, 14).

Sounds also punctuate the text. When Saki calls Kazami to tell her that she is going overseas, Kazami can hear the sounds of the airport in the background. Later, when Shoji's bone clicks in the little box at the beach she says 'The sound echoed in my ears for a moment, just as the rhythm of the surf stays with you' (175). Dave Kehr, in a comparison of Western and Japanese animation, writes that while Western animators try to create a 'convincing illusion of life' Japanese animators attempt to evoke a particular mood through the use of colour or capture a single expressive gesture (Kehr, 2002, 23). Yoshimoto's writing incorporates all of these techniques in her writing. It is this sense of a shared textual pleasure with her readers (rather than sexual pleasure) that is the hallmark of the enclosed *shōjo* world: This 'separatist literature of inner space' was unique in Japanese writing and defines the first phase of Yoshimoto's career.

Reconstituted families

One of the most noticeable aspects of Yoshimoto's writing in the first phase of her career, is the absence of adults, parents and authority figures inside the enclosed world of the *shôjo*. Yoshimoto's writing has focussed firmly on the individual; hence the claims that it is a 'selfish' and 'arrogant' literature. Yoshimoto's writing, however, reflects social changes that have been taking place over a long period of time. The *shôjo* is a historical figure that Robertson (1998) traces back to well before the postwar years. Osawa Machiko writes that one of the key features of Japanese literature in the postwar period is that it reflects the dramatic changes that took place in the family, particularly in relation to the concept of motherhood. Essentially the needs of the individual came second during the reconstruction period. Women, in particular, were affected as their roles in the family were 'narrowly defined'. After the period of reconstruction, however, this situation has been reappraised and contemporary literature reflects the shift in focus back to the individual and away from the group (Osawa, 2001, 21). It is in this context that Yoshimoto's search for new ways of being has taken place.

The great irony is that whilst Yoshimoto's writing fits the above description, the 'family' remains its main focus, which opens up the possibility that you can choose your family. In *Kitchen*, after all her family members have passed away, Mikage joins the Tanabe 'family'. Yoshimoto's idea of 'family', however, is not based on the traditional Japanese family linked by blood ties. As such, Yoshimoto's idea of family perpetuates the myth of the family whilst

documenting its transformation into what for some readers would be unrecognisable configurations. The archetypal roles contained in Yoshimoto's idea of 'family' provides, however, stability during a period of transition. Examples include the Tanabe household in *Kitchen* or else the women's paradise established in *Amrita*, which offer a 'home' to characters who would otherwise be excluded from domestic happiness.

As has been discussed in Chapter One, the absence of the 'father' is not a recent development in Japan. During the Meiji Period, the government of the day saw fit to strengthen the official role of the father, but a rapidly industrialising society saw a push in the opposite direction. In post-war Japan, with the creation of the *sarari-man* (salary-man), the role of the father declined even further.

The absence of the mother is a more recent development that distinguishes Yoshimoto's writing from a feminist perspective associated with writers like Tsushima Yûko, the daughter of Dazai Osamu, whose novel *Chôji* (Child of Fortune) (1978, English translation 1986), explores the circumstances of a single-mother in her mid-thirties. Unlike Tsushima, who explores the socio-economic dilemma of being a single mother in contemporary Japan, Yoshimoto chooses to confront more individual dilemmas such as abuse, the death of loved ones or else breakdown. Thus, not only is the traditional family dispensed with, but so too are money problems and financial insecurities. Instead, Yoshimoto's characters either have their own money or find employment in dream jobs, usually in restaurants.

It has already been observed how relations between Japanese men and women have changed greatly because of women's search for fulfilment as individuals, rather than in meeting society's expectations of them as housewives and mothers. The figure of the father, however, has, as a result, been the subject of much discussion in Japan and elsewhere. At a round table discussion at La Trobe University in 1985, attended by Australian and Japanese participants, the blame in the Japanese context was placed on the demands of the workplace. Fathers were said to have no friends and are isolated from family members because they are 'totally immersed in economic activities'. Retirement has become a social problem for these men because at this point in their lives they lose their entire social world becoming effectively *sodai gomi* (large waste) (Ueno, 1985, 5).

What makes Yoshimoto's writing 'new' is that she explores a definition of 'family' in this context in which not only the father figure is absent but also other 'family' members. Hence, Mitsui (In Mitsui and Washida, 1989) argues that Mikage's 'family' is not a 'real family' (86). In an essay titled 'Family', Yoshimoto (1989c) argues that wherever people go they form groups based on the family (39). Even without blood ties, this still leads, however, to incestuous overtones. Towards the end of *Kitchen*, Mikage recalls:

When was it that Yuichi said to me, "Why is it that everything I eat when I'm with you is delicious?"

I laughed. "Could it be that you're satisfying hunger and lust at the same time?"

"No way, no way, no way!" he said, laughing. "It must be because we're family" (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 100-1).

In this way, Yoshimoto links family and lust and confronts taboos and fears associated with incest. In raising the subject of incest, Yoshimoto is again introducing a creative tension into her writing even though there is no explicit description of sexual activity in her writing. As such, it can also be seen as a device to keep boys like as Yuichi at bay and out of reach of the heroine, Mikage. Whatever else it is, *Kitchen* is not a straightforward love story.

In *N.P.* (1990a), family life was disrupted after Kazami's father left home to live with another woman when she was nine years old. As a result, her 'family' reconfigures itself, everybody taking it in turns to play the 'motherly role'. In the short story 'Night and Night's Travellers' (In *Asleep*, 1989b, English translation 2000), Yoshimoto explores the dilemma of parenting when Mari is discouraged by her parents from seeing Yoshihiro because he is her cousin as well as being a 'womaniser'. This turns to tragedy when Yoshihiro dies in a car accident on the way to a secret date with Mari. Mari is described as being a 'caged bird: she couldn't step out of the front door of her house without first reporting to her parents' (16). Whilst Mari's parents' actions come under scrutiny because of Yoshihiro's death, Yoshimoto acknowledges the right of Mari's parents to show this kind of parental guidance. Shibami, the narrator, says:

... if I think things over, I can see that if I were a parent with an only daughter, and if I'd paid good money so that she could learn to play the piano and take English Conversation classes and all that, I definitely wouldn't want to let her go off with a guy who looked as much like a womanizer as my brother (*Asleep*, 1989b, English translation 2000, 47).

Elsewhere Yoshimoto exposes the 'unreality' of happy families. In her short story collection *Asleep* (1989b, English translation 2000), in the story 'Night and

Night's Travellers' (1993), when Shibami observes Sarah, her husband and their two children in a hotel lobby, she sees the 'anguish' in Sarah's eyes. Yet, Shibami is sure that to other people they look like a 'happy American family' (52). In her short story collection *Lizard* (1993, English translation 1995), in the story 'Newlywed' the narrator has been married for just a month. However, whilst in a drunken state on the train one night he discovers that his home is so 'happy' that it 'makes me want to puke' (7). He says of his wife Atsuko, 'Sometimes I feel like I'm living with the quintessential housewife. I mean, all she talks about is our home' (10). Yoshimoto is perhaps suggesting that the perfect American sitcom families on TV (prior to the advent of *The Simpsons* in 1988 and *Kureyon Shinchon* in Japan 1990) were unreal, which is ironic given her predisposition towards fantasy. Yoshimoto is nevertheless conscious of the way in which roles are scripted or constructed and, as Murakami Fuminobu correctly argues, her writing could be said to be about characters in search of a new script. The breakthrough in her writing is to have reconceptualised the family for contemporary Japanese writing so that in place of familial intimacy, relations are those 'between self and self-consciousness and self and strangers' (2005, 65).

Due to the untimely demise of their blood relatives, Yoshimoto's characters increasingly experience a sense of alienation, observing the happiness of others. In *Amrita* (1994a, English translation 1997) a vision of an ideal family appears to Sakumi in a dream. Sakumi hears the 'cry of cicadas' whilst she is 'curled in a fetal position on top of the tatami mats' and her father places a quilt over her shoulders as she watches her mother 'standing in an apron behind the large wok'

(188). This vision of completeness in the past is contrasted with the uncertainty of the present. Yoshimoto returns to this theme often in the second phase of her career where her characters often find themselves looking in at scenes of domestic happiness from the outside. In *Amrita*, when Sakumi's mother's second marriage ends in divorce and Junko, her mother's lover, joins the family, Sakumi says 'Families never stop getting larger' (266). Significantly, Sakumi defines family as having:

... somebody in charge of the household, someone who can maintain order among its members, someone who is clearly mature and established as a person, someone, in other words, like my mother, then eventually all who live under the same roof, despite blood ties or lineage, will at one point become family (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 5-6).

As always, however, there are a variety of viewpoints expressed in Yoshimoto's writing. Ryuichiro, Mayu's ex-boyfriend, says of Sakumi's 'family':

...you're like a family out of a Hollywood movie. ... In a house like that you'd have as many chances to think about 'happiness' as the people you live with. Think about it – at your age you still have a brother who is in kindergarten. That's more than weird (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 15).

The 'women's paradise', described previously, is an example of 'escapist literature' as explained by Uchiyama Akiko (2004) in her paper 'What Japanese Girls' Read'. Uchiyama notes that the world inhabited by Anne in *Anne of Green Gables* is a 'safe matriarchal world, safe from the male dominance of the real patriarchal world – a world without threat from men' (7). The 'women's paradise' in *Amrita* offers the same sense of safety to Junko but in the end she leaves because she is 'troubled' by the idea that she could be having 'more fun' with her own daughter. Junko sacrifices a 'happiness' that would have 'gone on

forever'. In this way, perhaps, Yoshimoto recognises that it is not easy for women to break the bond between mother and child. Significantly, the demise of the 'women's paradise' is also part of a pattern in Yoshimoto's writing in which she rejects same-sex relationships. But whilst Yoshimoto's writing may be seen as an example of 'escapist literature' to which there are obviously correlations with the 'separatist literature of inner space' identified by Showalter, Yoshimoto does not seek to entirely escape from real human and social issues – and by dealing with these issues, she engages with some of the humanist themes associated with literature but using the idiom and vernacular of popular culture.

Ultimately, the 'families' that appear in Yoshimoto's writing, can be seen as a response to a changing social situation. Whilst Japanese women and men who remain single have been dubbed 'parasite singles', their presence in Japanese society points to an ongoing search for fulfillment beyond the traditional family structure. In Yoshimoto's writing there is a greater focus on the individual than on the group, but at the same time she clings to a reconstituted version of the 'family'. In this way, her writing is what Awaya and Phillips (1996), describe as 'challenging' without being 'threatening' (247) and thus Yoshimoto exploits a creative tension that allows her to embrace both change and continuity, radicalism and conservatism without seemingly alienating her readers and also between literature whose humanist themes she engages with but in the idiom and vernacular of popular culture.

Jungian archetypes

This thesis has argued that part of the creative tension that underpins Yoshimoto's writing is the search for new ways of being, exemplified in a new type of heroine that is evidence of the changing 'ideals of femininity' in contemporary Japan. Significantly, in the Japanese context, *shôjo* culture allows Yoshimoto to challenge and subvert traditional values without confrontation. This introduces an element of ambiguity into Yoshimoto's writing about new ways of being. Yoshimoto certainly does not advocate a political dimension to her exploration of new ways of being and she looks to the past rather than the future. This reaching out to the past in the midst of social change can be seen most dramatically in the Jungian archetypes that emerge in Yoshimoto's stories.

Jung's influence on artists has been long acknowledged. Doris Lessing, the 2007 recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature, writes in her memoir *Walking in the Shade* that she liked Jung 'as all artists do' (Lessing, 1997, 35). As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, Yoshimoto's narrators often receive assistance from 'fantasy women' characters and 'wise children' characters. In particular, they have atavistic visions in which Jungian archetypes speak to them of roles that men and women have played since ancient times. The past, as has been discussed in Chapter Two, represents certainty during a time of change and uncertainty. As a writer in a period of transition, it is not surprising that while Yoshimoto is exploring new lifestyles for young women and new 'ideals of femininity', she also looks to the past beyond modernity for a sense of continuity. As Furuhashi has observed, Yoshimoto is writing about a better time in the past,

‘a time of myths’ (1990, 66). It is this juxtaposition of change and continuity in her writing that adds to its creative tension. In *Kitchen*, Mikage dreams that she and Yuichi are climbing a ladder. Together, they peer into a ‘cauldron of hell’. Recounting her dream, Mikage wonders:

But I wonder, as I look at his uneasy profile blazingly illuminated by the hellish fire, although we have always acted like brother and sister, aren’t we really man and woman in the primordial sense, and don’t we think of each other that way? (*Kitchen*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 66).

This mythic conception of themselves allows Mikage to see herself and Yuichi free of the social confines to which both Okuno and Sotaro want her to adhere. It is interesting to compare Yoshimoto’s description of Mikage’s dream with an account of a similar dream by Carl Jung. Jung describes the dreamer as a woman with a ‘highly cultivated style of life’. Her dream, however, takes her to a ‘prehistoric period’ in which ‘she sees a huge crater of an extinct volcano, which has been the channel for a violent eruption of fire from the deepest layers of the earth’. Jung argues that this refers to a ‘traumatic experience... a personal experience early in her life when she had felt the destructive, yet creative, force of her passions... she needed to break away from her family’s excessively conventional social pattern’ (1964, 153). Mikage, it could be argued, is also experiencing the need to break away from an ‘excessively conventional pattern’. During such a crisis, the Jungian psycho-analyst M.-L.von Franz (1964) writes that ‘all well-meant, sensible advice is completely useless’. Thus the arguments that Sotaro and Okuno use to persuade Mikage to drop her independence fail. Von Franz argues:

There is only one thing that seems to work; and that is to turn directly toward the approaching darkness without prejudice and totally naively, and to try to find out what its secret aim is and what it wants from you (M. –L von Franz, 1964, 167).

Yoshimoto's characters share the same need for certainty in an uncertain world. In the short story collection *Asleep* (1989b, English translation 2000), in the story 'Love Songs' Fumi describes Haru as the 'embodiment of the diaphanous image, of Woman herself, come shakily to life, stumbling around' (85). The glimpses Yoshimoto's characters catch of each other as archetypal men and women transcend the moment and give them a sense of identity that is more deeply grounded than the roles created by society. In the short story collection *Lizard* (1993, English translation 1995), in the story 'Helix' the narrator's girlfriend reassures him that she will not forget about their relationship, 'All thousand years of it' she says as if to fix it for eternity.

In *Tsugumi* (1989), Maria notices her father one day and is surprised by the look on his face which is indistinguishable from the faces of the other people on the street and she realises '*Life is a performance*' (39). The importance of the Jungian archetypes that appear in Yoshimoto's writing is that they provide a way of seeing beyond the 'performance' required in daily life. George Steiner describes the arcadia behind and the utopia ahead as a 'shadowy pulsebeat at the heart of our mythologies and politics' (1989, 153). The freedom it represents lies just out of reach which is both vexing as well as consoling. The Jungian archetypes that appear in Yoshimoto's writing are, however, revelations of a past that serve to 'console' her characters.

The English children's writer, Arthur Ransome, also wrote about this sense of the past, or what he calls 'paleolithic life'. Ransome also had a keen awareness of a person's ability to find himself in nature. Defending his great love of fishing from the charge of cruelty, he wrote that:

The fisherman engages in an activity that allows him to shed the centuries as a dog shakes off water and to recapture not his own youth merely but the youth of the world... There is no hostility in this contest. The trout chasing minnows or picking flies from the surface of the stream is contesting with Nature in the same way as the fisherman chasing trout...The truth, I think, is, that we resume 'paleolithic life' not because of any preference for any past age but to seek a relationship with nature which is valuable in any age (Ransome in Brogan, 1984, 306).

In this quote, Ransome engages with the past in a way that would appeal to Yoshimoto and critically, in the process of losing himself, 'finds himself'. Engaging with the natural world he recovers not only his youth but also 'the youth of the world'. In her writing, Yoshimoto, a writer who has grown up in Tokyo, turns her back on corporate Japan and, in the process, her characters look to find themselves increasingly in nature.

Later, in the second phase of her career, Yoshimoto explores this atavistic sense of the past in 'Tadokoro-san' in the short-story collection *Karada wa Zenbu Shitteiru* (*The Body Knows All*) (2000c). The narrator describes Tadokoro-san as an enigmatic, mythical figure that has 'existed since pre-modern times'. She imagines that there was a Tadokoro-san in each village as far back as when cave men carried off women by their hair and when women had lots of children. Tadokoro-san can be compared with the character Mellors in *Lady Chatterley's Lover* by D.H.Lawrence. Nicols Fox argues that Mellors represents the forces of

nature and ‘does not bend to the pressures that keep society organized and its people compliant’ (2002, 273). Tadokoro-san serves a similar function in Yoshimoto’s story. He too represents the ‘forces of nature’ and is a ‘living violation of rigid convention’.

The sense of timelessness that Tadokoro-san represents is central to contemporary Japanese popular culture. Sharon Kinsella argues that the ‘rule for Japanese popular culture has been any space or anytime, but here and now in Japan’ (1995, 252). Kinsella argues further that a key aspect of *shôjo* culture is the link made between cute culture, neo-romanticism and an urban nostalgia for ‘wholesome country life’ (241). Yoshimoto’s writing can be described, then, as anti-modern in its rejection of the present. Despite the fact that most urban dwellers in Japan today have no real experience of the *furusato*, the Jungian archetypes that appear in Yoshimoto’s stories reach out to establish a sense of continuity during a time of social upheaval and change. And as Jungian psychoanalyst and poet Clarissa Pinkola Estes notes, archetypal knowing is ‘timeless’ (1997, 473). The new, it appears, likes to clothe itself in the old.

‘Fantasy women’ and wise children

In *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a), Yoshimoto introduced a new element into her writing with the appearance of the ‘fantasy woman’ character. Urara is the first in a long line of ‘fantasy women’ in Yoshimoto’s writing. These include Mrs Inagawa in the short story ‘Asleep’ (1989b), Sui in *N.P.* (1990a), the stranger in the short story ‘Newlywed’ (1993) and Saseko in *Amrita* (1994a). As well as

fantasy women characters, Yoshimoto also introduces wise children characters into her writing with the appearance of Hiiragi in *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a).

Fantasy women characters also appear in the work of Japanese multi-media artist, Mori Mariko. Dominic Molon writes that these characters come from comic books and video games. However, rather than suggest a way out of the drudgery of daily life, they offer the prospect of the interruption of real life by a 'figure from beyond' (1998, 9). Yoshimoto's fantasy women share a similar function. They too interrupt 'real life' and offer a connection with 'beyond' rather than provide a 'way out of the drudgery of daily life'.

Urara, like Eriko in *Kitchen*, is a changeling. Whereas Eriko changes sex, Urara changes her form and is able to communicate with other worlds. Urara is the first of a number of characters in Yoshimoto's fiction who are part of a tradition of fantasy women in Japanese literature. Napier divides fantasy women into two categories, 'avenging woman' and 'oasis woman'. 'Avenging woman' comes from a long tradition, which associates women with ghosts and metamorphosis (1996a, 21). The 'Oasis woman' became important in Meiji and Taisho literature, offering 'comfort and revitalization to the weary male' (23). Ironically Napier notes that what was traditionally considered to be the 'Other', such as the grotesque, alien and the female, was subsequently linked to the notion of Japan itself, which has become 'Other' (335).

In her study of young females in Japanese popular culture, Napier (1998) writes that in the 1980s the association of women or girls with the occult was 'an

interesting trend in comics'. In the 1990s, Napier writes that the association made between the occult and women has continued. It has grown to include those with superhuman powers, plus a sub-category of 'cyborg women' (93).

Annalee Newitz compares Japanese *anime* characters with special powers to characters from American 1960s sitcoms, such as *Bewitched* and *I Dream of Jeannie*. Newitz refers to the 'magical girl genre' and writes that it 'features women who are simultaneously powerful and traditionally feminine' (1994, 9). This is an observation that is almost identical to Awaya and Phillip's description of Yoshimoto's writing as a 'blend of the familiar and the unusual' (Awaya and Phillips, 1996, 247). One can imagine Jeannie or Samantha racing down the Izu peninsula to bring Yuichi a hot meal. Newitz suggests that the 'magical girl genre' has disappeared in the United States since the advent of feminism, yet the emergence of *Buffy: the Vampire Slayer* and *Charmed* in the late 1990s, and the release of the movie version of *Bewitched* (2005) starring Nicole Kidman, contradicts this view. Reporting on a Buffy symposium held at the University of Melbourne in 2002, Sophie Cunningham wrote that Buffy's power is her ambivalence. She is able to straddle the ordinary world and the supernatural, while not totally identifying with either. Cunningham suggests that ambivalence is a key feature of identity today (Cunningham, 2002, 18). Interestingly, Mikage observes in *Kitchen*, listening to Eriko and Yuichi speak to each other that 'The incredible ease and nonchalance of the conversation made my brain reel. It was like watching *Bewitched*' (31). As observed throughout this discussion so far, ambivalence adds to the creative tension which is a key feature of Yoshimoto's construction of female identity and of her writing in general.

In *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a, English translation 1993), Satsuki first meets Urara by a river where she goes jogging every morning. The river divides the parts of the city where Satsuki and Hitoshi live. Satsuki and Hitoshi used to often meet at the river. After Hitoshi's death, Satsuki comes to the river to grieve. She says 'My self-torture stopped when I was there. Without this respite, I would never have been able to get through the days' (114). Water is also important, however, as it not only divides cities but also worlds. When Satsuki meets Urara, she is so surprised when Urara talks to her that her thermos falls into the river. Urara promises to buy her a new one. There is something about Urara that is not quite real. Satsuki observes that:

She didn't seem very crazy, nor did she look like a drunk on her way home at dawn. Her eyes were too knowing and serene; the expression on her face hinted that she had tasted deeply of the sorrows and joys of the world. The air around her seemed somewhat charged (*Moonlight Shadow*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 115).

At this meeting, Satsuki finds it difficult to guess Urara's age. When Satsuki leaves, she turns back. Satsuki is surprised and when she describes the encounter to Hiiragi, she says that the expression on Urara's face was 'demon-like' (123-4). Later in the story, at their final meeting in fact, Urara wears a pink sweater and looks to Satsuki as if they are the same age. Her outward form is deceiving. As well as being able to change her form, Urara has other strange qualities. For example, when she needs a phone number, she says to herself 'I must get this phone number', and it comes naturally to her (126). Urara tells Satsuki to come to the river. When she arrives, Urara tells Satsuki that:

What happens next is, the dimension we're in – time, space, all that stuff – is going to move, shift a little. You and I, although we'll be standing side by side, probably won't be able to see each other, and we won't be seeing the same things... across the river. Whatever you do, you mustn't say anything, and you mustn't cross the bridge (*Moonlight Shadow*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 144).

This kind of meeting, which can only take place 'near a large river', is part of what Yoshimoto refers to as 'The Weaver Festival Phenomenon', based on the *tanabata* festival held once a year in Japan. The *tanabata* festival itself celebrates the meeting of two lovers Orihime (Vega) and Hikoboshi (Altair) which can only take place once a year. In Yoshimoto's version of this festival, Urara tells Satsuki that the 'vision' of the deceased is produced when the 'residual thoughts of a person who has died meets the sadness of someone left behind'. It can only happen every one hundred years or so. Afterwards, whilst munching on a doughnut, Urara tells Satsuki that:

Parting and death are both terribly painful. But to keep nursing the memory of a love so great you can't believe you'll ever love again is a useless drain on a woman's energies (*Moonlight Shadow*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 147-8).

This is an example of the direct speech that the reader also encounters in *Kitchen*. The positivity of the message is an example of the 'brightness' and 'optimism' that Sherif (1999a) argues characterises Yoshimoto's writing. The fact that Urara is shown chewing on a doughnut places her in the 'real' world and food is often the catalyst that brings characters together in Yoshimoto's writing (rather than sex). After their meal, Urara and Satsuki part ways with Urara promising that she will not forget Satsuki's phone number.

Like Urara in *Moonlight Shadow*, Sui in *N.P.* is a fantasy woman whose unearthly powers set her apart from Kazami. In her descriptions of Sui, Yoshimoto highlights both her strangeness and an alluring quality that makes Kazami want to ‘fall for her’ (58). Kazami’s first impression of Sui is not so composed, however. Yoshimoto’s description of her could have come from a horror story: ‘I was gripped with fear when I saw those eyes - the eyes of a newborn on the face of an adult’ (55). Again, these descriptions, like those of Urara, swing from horror to sweetness. Sui is able to turn on the charm, part of which is its childlike quality:

Sui grinned widely at me with her big mouth. I thought, dammit, I might have just fallen in love with her. She moved me, as though we had been talking like this forever (*N.P.*, 1990a, English translation 1994, 69).

Kazami’s second meeting with Sui occurs when Sui follows her to a convenience store. Outside the store, Sui attacks Kazami from behind. Kazami gets to her feet and Sui bursts into tears. Kazami describes Sui as being childlike:

I stood there in the smell of wet cars, feeling mortified and outraged, for all the world like a mother whose child was having a temper tantrum in public. First she knocks me down and then she pulls a stunt like this (*N.P.*, 1990a, English translation 1994, 80).

However, Sui also reminds Kazami of religious pictures she has seen from India: ‘she reminded me of close-up pictures I had seen of children in India, smiling with all their hearts’ (114). The spiritual association that Yoshimoto makes here with India is explored in more detail in *Hachiko no Saigo no Koibito* (*Hachiko’s Last Lover*) (1994b). A number of Yoshimoto’s other stories and novels also deal with religious themes such as ‘Blood and Water’ (In *Tokage*, 1993, English

translation 1995), *Amrita* (1994a, English translation 1997) and *Honeymoon* (1997a). From *Moonlight Shadow* onwards, spirituality is a key to recovery from trauma in Yoshimoto's writing. Sherif (1999a) has described this as 'a growing obsession with searches for spiritual meaning' (295).

Sui, like Urara, is a conduit between the world of the living and the dead. When she and Kazami go to the park, they decide to call on a spirit to visit them. 'Who would you like?' asks Sui. 'Shoji' replies Kazami. Sui's voice changes and appears on the page in italics. Kazami says:

I wanted to tell her to knock off the joking, but my voice froze. Even though I knew that she was teasing me, my whole body, from where her head rested down, felt intensely cold. I broke out into a sweat. It was her voice, all right, but, coming through my back, it had the sound of a different realm (*N.P.*, 1990a, English translation 1994, 112).

The voice continues and gives a reply to the note that Kazami left on Shoji's table the last morning that she saw him. Kazami says, 'My body was paralyzed with such fear that tears welled up in my eyes. My body hardened, stiff like a rock'. When Kazami queries Sui, Sui replies, 'I was just talking nonsense. Are you crying? I'm sorry' (113). The suggestion here is that Sui herself is not aware of the extent of her powers.

In *Amrita* (1994a, English translation 1997), Yoshimoto creates another 'fantasy woman' character Saseko, whose mother died when she was three. Because her father was a *yakuza*, (a member of the Japanese Mafia), Saseko was put into an orphanage. Kozumi, Saseko's husband, tells Sakumi that his wife communicates with ghosts and 'performs memorial services for the dead' (154). When they first

met, Saseko told Sakumi, 'You're half dead'. She says that rather than being rude this is a 'wonderful thing'. She tells Sakumi that being 'half-dead' means that she has been reborn and that she has the 'resources to tap all the powers she has inside' (158).

When Sakumi is feeling sick, Saseko brings around some sandwiches from the shop and makes coffee. Sakumi knew that it was Saseko ('I knew it all along'). Saseko tells Sakumi that she does not have a cold, it is just the ghosts swarming around her, 'getting to know her'. They sing a song together, 'an old folk song from Japan' (*Amrita*, 1997, 179). One night on the beach, Saseko comes out of the water looking like a 'mermaid'. Standing under the light of the moon she begins to sing. Saseko was 'frightening. She was no longer human' (*Amrita*, 1997, 236).

Estes writes that in mythology, singing is considered to come from a mysterious source, which brings wisdom to all who hear it including; animals, humans, trees and plants (1997, 170). The importance that Yoshimoto attaches to the song that Saseko sings can be understood on the basis that it 'enwisens the whole of creation'. Saseko, like Urara and Sui, is a spiritual figure who is both angelic and demonic, she has unearthly powers enabling her to channel between two worlds. Like Urara and Sui, Saseko is an example of the 'medial woman', a term coined by the Jungian analyst Toni Wolffe. Estes (1997) writes that the medial woman stands between the world of reality and the unconscious and mediates between them. She brings new ideas to life, exchanges old ideas for new ideas and translates between the 'world of the rational and the world of the imaginal' (312).

From this perspective, the most important function that Yoshimoto's fantasy women characters serve is as an intermediary between 'two or more values and ideas' (312). Thus Yoshimoto's characters are able to resolve otherwise unresolvable difficulties and move on with their lives.

Related to the fantasy women characters are the wise children or children with extraordinary powers. In his essay 'Japanese Super-Heroes and Monsters', Tom Gill (1998) notes that, according to Japanese folklore, those children whose minds are not corrupted by adult knowledge are particularly *genki* (possessed with great energy) and capable of 'performing incredible feats of strength' (49).

Characters in popular culture who fit this description include Tezuka Osamu's *Tetsuwan Atomu* (Astro Boy) (1952, English translation 2002), and Miyazaki Hayao's *Mirai Shōnen Konan* (Future Boy Konan) (1978). Whereas Astro Boy is a boy-robot and Konan a boy, both are young, fearless and *genki*, possessing enormous strength and vitality. Gill notes that the most well known traditional versions are 'Momotaro the Peach Boy' and 'Kintaro the Golden Boy' (49). It is interesting to note the similarities between this concept of the *genki* child and Yoshimoto's comment to Kawai Hayao in the 2000 N.H.K. documentary, that she remembers 'wild children' playing on stilts and jumping from roof to roof. Both Yoshimoto and Kawai lament the absence of this kind of 'wildness' or risk-taking in the lives of young people today. Shimazaki Tôson (1912, English translation 1991) made similar observations about children at play in Komoro:

I'm sure you would say they were savages. But I'll tell you that these savages are of the sort that bring interest and stimulation to the senses of the weary traveller (*Chikuma River Sketch*, 1991, 14).

Hiiragi in *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a, English translation 1993) is an example of a wise child in Yoshimoto's writing who has strange powers. Satsuki notes, 'He lived exactly as if his awareness of things had been formed in some other dimension, after which he was plopped down on this planet to fend for himself' (117). Later, after Hiiragi describes a dream in which the spirit of his girlfriend Yumiko appears, Satsuki concludes, 'There was more to Hiiragi than met the eye. Perhaps he had the power to draw an event to himself that should only have occurred at the river' (150). Interestingly, Hiiragi starts to wear Yumiko's school uniform as he mourns her death. This causes his friends and family to have concerns for his well being. It also introduces a new perspective from which to view cross dressing. Hiiragi is clearly not seeking to draw attention to himself. He is not an exhibitionist, therefore, criticism of his behaviour as being narcissistic would be wide of the mark. This instance of one character taking on the identity of another to cope with grief is also not restricted to the 'enclosed *shôjo* world' in the first phase of Yoshimoto's career. In *Southpoint* (2008) Tamahiko who has been identified as a table tennis enthusiast re-appears in Tokyo as Yukihiro, a musician from Hawaii. Not only has he taken on his dead brother's name as a stage name, he also pretends to Tetora that Tamahiko, her first love whom she has not seen in many years, is dead. This identification with the dead should not necessarily be dismissed as evidence of juvenile behaviour and if anything underlines the level of distress with which these characters are confronted.

Other wise children in Yoshimoto's fiction include Kyoichi in *Tsugumi* (1989a). Maria says there was a light in his eyes that 'made it seem as if he knew something huge, something extremely important' (63). Like Hiiragi in *Moonlight Shadow*, Kyoichi is wise beyond his years and Tsugumi comes to love him deeply. The feeling is mutual. Tsugumi tells Kyoichi 'I'm in love with you babe' (96). When they walk around the town together Maria says:

... they seemed to give off a halo of delicate, uncertain light... The faraway sparkle in their eyes seemed like it must make everyone who glimpsed it think back on something precious, call up the pleasant ache of a reviving memory, like a dream dreamt long ago' (*Goodbye Tsugumi*, 1989a, English translation 2002, 97).

This description of the couple recalls Mikage's atavistic vision of herself and Yuichi in *Kitchen*, as being like 'man and woman in the primordial sense'. As such, they transcend the uncertainty of the present.

As well as Yoshihiro in 'Asleep' (1989b, English translation 2000), there is also Yoshio in *Amrita* (1994a, English translation 1997). In *Amrita*, Sakumi learns through her step-brother Yoshio, another wise child character, that her sister Mayu had two abortions when she became pregnant to Ryuichiro. Yoshio tells Sakumi that Ryuichiro has been 'fooling you all this time'. Sakumi is 'shocked'. She is also disappointed that Mayu had never told her. Yoshio wants to be a writer. When he tells his mother, Yukiko tells Sakumi that:

"First Mayu died, and then you split your head open. Now this... When will it end? I'm beginning to think that there'll never be a time without problems. I mean, you should see Yoshio when he writes. I feel like I'm watching somebody possessed when he's scribbling on his manuscript paper" (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 33).

Wise child characters, like fantasy woman characters, take the place of parents as they assist Yoshimoto's narrators through difficult periods in their lives. Why are parents characterised as being unable to fulfill this function in Yoshimoto's writing? Reason and rational explanation, the preserve of adults, are no longer sufficient to assist with the sorts of problems Yoshimoto's *shôjo* characters are facing. In fact, the absence of parents (and reason) is one of the problems with which they are grappling, resulting in a growing obsession with the supernatural and empowerment of *shôjo* and *shônen* characters in Japanese popular culture. It is these characters who wrestle with the dilemmas of the postmodern age, an age in which, according to Estes (1997), 'to be ourselves causes us to be exiled by many others, and yet to comply with what others want causes us to be exiled from ourselves' (88).

Death and the 'flow of time'

As has been observed, trauma and healing are major themes in Yoshimoto's writing, with an emphasis on healing rather than trauma. Furuhashi has observed, however, that all of Yoshimoto's early writing is about death (1990, 149). As it is situated inside the enclosed world of the *shôjo* its impact is maximised by the intensity of the relationships of the characters and, given their age, it can be assumed that the characters are far more open to suggestions of Extra Sensory Powers and other New Age preoccupations such as U.F.O.s.

Yoshimoto's preoccupation with death has been lampooned on a website titled *Cooking with Banana*, (Kaiser, 1997). In this article, Jeffrey Kaiser writes a 'recipe' for *Kitchen*, the first instruction of which reads:

1. In a large aluminium bowl (or in the first of two novellas) add one recently orphaned Japanese female, preferably named Mikage Sakurai. Ensure your orphan is free from impurities such as angst and cynicism. Be sure to check the expiry date – your orphan must not be aged for more than 20 years since innocence and hope help this cake to rise. Add loss. Sprinkle with death. Mix for about 20 pages (Kaiser, 1997).

Whilst Kaiser's recipe sarcastically lists the essential ingredients to 'make' *Kitchen*, he neglects to mention the positive themes in Yoshimoto's writing. These include the search for meaning and the affirmation and hope that Yoshimoto's characters find. Yoshimoto's characters are engaged in a search for meaning at a time when the Japanese economy has experienced the highs of the 1980s and the lows of the 1990s. A strong economy and prosperity has not produced peace of mind. This is evidenced in the rise of cults like *Aum Shinrikyō* in Japan in the 1990s, which will be discussed in Chapter Four. It is also evidenced in the suicide rate, which is one of the highest in the developed world and is the 'first or second leading cause of death for men and women aged between 15 and 49' (Cameron 2005a, 6). The reasons why are varied. According to the twenty-five year old webmaster of a site called The Suicide Club, the Japanese, both young and old, commit suicide because Japanese culture idealises it. This view is endorsed by Dr Yoshimoto Takahashi, a psychiatrist examining cases of failed suicide in a forest near Mt Fuji, who says this choice of location 'indicates the beautification of suicide and the dramatic direction of their death' (Cameron, 2005a, 6). The impact of the internet on suicide is also of concern.

Professor Usui Mafumi describes depressed young people and the internet as a 'very dangerous mix' (Cameron, 2006a, 11). Death might be prominent in Yoshimoto's writing and her characters might belong to the enclosed world of the *shojo*, but they are not devotees of websites such as The Suicide Club. In a discussion of her writing with her father, Yoshimoto Banana emphasises that she is interested in the healing process of her characters rather than death (Yoshimoto Takaaki and Yoshimoto Banana, 1997b, 167). Interestingly, the character Shizukuishi is concerned for her grandmother's welfare when she learns that her grandmother is going to go and live with a man she met on the internet in Malta in *Ôkoku Sono I.* (2002). In this way, Yoshimoto explores the use of the internet in a positive way and draws the reader's attention to the possibilities offered by this technology rather than the dangers.

As well as noting that all of Yoshimoto's early writing is about death, Furuhashi (1990) also points out that many of Yoshimoto's characters die suddenly in car accidents. These deaths take place 'off-stage' and are not the subject of a morbid curiosity. It should be pointed out, however, that car accidents have been given 'aesthetic value' in popular culture (in this sense, car accidents are similar to suicide in Japanese society.) This is clear from a key scene in the film *Aria* (1987) directed by Ken Russell, the movie *Crash* (1996) by David Cronenberg and in the use of the sound of squealing tyres in concert by musician/composer Sakamoto Ryuichi (*Media Bahn Live*, 1986).

In *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a, English translation 1993), Hitoshi and Yumiko are killed simultaneously in a car accident, yet there is no description of the accident

itself, neither is there any special meaning attached to it. Death is sudden and it gives the survivors no time to come to terms with the loss of loved ones. There are no motives as in a murder case and therefore no clues to be found in a subsequent police investigation. There is just the death itself and rather than being distracted by the search for clues, Yoshimoto confronts the fact of death itself. Her characters are alone, unable to be helped by clever sleuths like Miss Marple or Hercule Poirot or by the technology utilised by a new generation of television detectives from *C.S.I. (Crime Scene Investigation)*. In this sense, Yoshimoto embraces mystery rather than the facts themselves.

Death breaks up the friendship of the four young characters in *Moonlight Shadow* (and thus the enclosed world of their adolescence is enshrined as a precious memory), with the danger, perhaps, that this may seem to be more precious than life itself. Satsuki says:

A lover should die after a long lifetime. I lost Hitoshi at the age of twenty, and I suffered so much that I felt as if my own life had stopped. The night he died, my soul went away to some other place and I couldn't bring it back. It was impossible to see the world as I had before (*Moonlight Shadow*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 111).

Satsuki continues in this vein and concludes angrily:

The gods are assholes! I loved Hitoshi - I loved Hitoshi more than life itself (*Moonlight Shadow*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 111).

Yoshimoto, however, is not proposing a reject-the-world conclusion, suggesting that such sadness in life at such a young age is unbearable. Rather, she introduces characters like Urara the 'fantasy woman' and Hiiragi the 'wise child' to enable

‘ordinary’ characters like Satsuki to connect with the dead in order to face death and find the will to live. Like another icon of global culture Bob Dylan, Yoshimoto explores the notion that ‘Death is not the End’. More to the point, however, unlike the inclusive nature of Dylan’s born again Christianity, is the exclusive nature of this vision which is shared only by the members of Yoshimoto’s enclosed *shôjo* world. Those characters like Sotaro and Okuno, who have not experienced the death of someone close, are not privileged with the understanding that Mikage or Satsuki reach. To them, characters like Mikage appear cold and unfeeling. Thus, whilst Yoshimoto’s writing is ‘positive’ in the sense that her characters are not defeated by the deaths of loved ones, her writing does, however, focus on a small privileged inner group.

At the end of the novel, Satsuki says good-bye to Hitoshi and apologises for still being alive:

I’ll never be able to be here again. As the minutes slide by, I move on. The flow of time is something I cannot stop. I haven’t a choice. I go... One caravan has stopped another starts up... I earnestly pray that a trace of my girl-child self will always be with you’ (*Moonlight Shadow*, 1988a, English translation 1993, 150).

Satsuki is able to let go of her grief through an understanding of the ‘flow of time’. In a sense, *Moonlight Shadow* is a novel which embraces mystery in order to accept tragedy. It has obvious religious overtones, although, these are vaguely defined and Yoshimoto is careful to distance them from New Age religions (especially after the Sarin gas attacks by the Aum cult on the Tokyo subway system in 1995) just as she distanced her writing earlier from feminism. The idea of the ‘flow of time’ expressed in *Moonlight Shadow* is an idea to which

Yoshimoto returns in virtually all of her subsequent writing. It is also the theme that she says is most central to her writing (Yoshimoto, 2002c, 278).

The ‘flow of time’ is a major theme of nineteenth century European (French, German and Italian) literature. Writers in these countries wrote about melancholy and romantic despair and, in the case of Dante, mysticism. In the case of French poet Alphonse de Lamartine, he compares time to the flow of water in his poem ‘Le Lac’ and laments for the past when his lover, Madame Charles was alive. In the poem, Lamartine asks nature to keep her memory alive forever. Despite her protests to the contrary, with a literary critic/poet for a father and having been a student herself of the Arts faculty at Nihon Daigaku (Nihon University), it is hard to imagine that Yoshimoto’s interests in these themes are entirely the result of her reading of *shôjo manga* and Stephen King novels.

Whilst Yoshimoto’s characters perceive themselves as being part of the ‘flow of time’, another important aspect of Yoshimoto’s treatment of death is the idea that it is some kind of conduit between worlds. Thus in *Moonlight Shadow* Satsuki and Hitoshi are reunited despite being separated by death. In this way, those characters who approach or have knowledge of death, achieve a state of grace. This is the case with Mayu in *Amrita* (1994a, English translation 1997), Olive (the dog) in *Honeymoon* (1997a), and Mao in *Hachiko no Saigo no Koibito* (1994b). Where Mayu is compared with Marilyn Monroe in *Amrita*, ‘Mum’ reminds Mao of the Brazilian racing car driver Ayrton Senna in *Hachiko no Saigo no Koibito*. ‘Mum’, like Senna, is living with an awareness of her own

death. She has become one of the spiritual elite, with one foot in this world and one foot in the next:

‘Mum’s’ face was like Senna’s before his last race. It was a face that showed a sense of unescapable yet impending doom but a face that was also at peace. Like the faces of young children lining up to be inoculated’ (*Hachiko no Saigo no Koibito*, 1994b, 6).

In relation to the suddenness of the deaths in Yoshimoto’s writing, Furuhashi suggests that unlike death through illness, there is no need to describe and analyse people’s reactions to extended suffering (1990, 88). Thus car accidents are a means of removing characters without having to deal with complicated social problems such as drug overdoses, abortion, A.I.D.S. or *karôshi* (death from overwork). In her later writing, Yoshimoto does acknowledge these social problems, but from the outside. Her characters still seem self-absorbed. Sherif (1999a) argues that even Yoshimoto’s subsequent search for spiritual meaning is not the result of any anxiety brought about by the nuclear age nor is it driven by a burning awareness of social issues (295).

It needs to be acknowledged, however, that Yoshimoto examines the issue of abortion in some detail in *Amrita* (1994a). Whilst this issue has not polarised Japanese society in the same way that it has polarised American or Australian society, there is generally, in the writing of the ‘New Breed’, a deep sense of unease. In Yoshimoto’s *Moonlight Shadow* (1988a), Satsuki describes her grief at the death of her lover as being like her ‘own life had stopped’. She felt that she was ‘fated to undergo one of those things it’s better not to have to experience even in one lifetime (abortion, prostitution, major illness)’ (1988a, English translation 1993, 111). In *Kanashii Yokan (A Sad Premonition)*, the narrator’s

older sister Yukino prays for forgiveness to the foetus that she aborted (*Kanashii Yokan*, 1988d, 187). Whilst in *Amrita*, Mayu tells Yoshio, 'I'm only tormented by one thing in my life, and that was giving up my two children' (1994a, English translation 1997, 272). Sakumi is critical of her sister and says, 'there was a place in Mayu so dark that it was frightening' (270).

This same sense of unease can also be seen in Murakami Haruki's *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicles* (1997). Kumiko tells Toru at the aquarium that 'The real world is a much darker and deeper place than this, and most of it is occupied by jellyfish and things' (227). When Kumiko leaves Toru, his world is turned upside down. Part of the reason they have drifted apart is that Kumiko is unable to tell Toru about her abortion. May Kasahara tells Toru, 'that's what you're being punished for - by all kinds of things; by the world you tried to get rid of, or by the self you tried to get rid of' (264). The novel reverberates with this theme. When Yamamoto is skinned alive in Mongolia, the man with the guitar case peels his skin off with a knife and he becomes a 'bright-red lump of flesh' (339). This recalls the horror of Kumiko's abortion which she cannot communicate to Toru.

The issue of abortion is one that also troubles Yoshimoto's characters. Yoshimoto might not embrace a broad social perspective in her writing but she does try to find a sense of hope in the face of death and isolation. Ann Sherif describes her writing as 'bright' and 'optimistic' (1999a, 287) which Kawai Hayao endorses when he says of Yoshimoto that she is able to 'express well and accurately the deep pain that young Japanese people are carrying around with them today' (Yoshimoto, 2002c, 287). In *Amrita* (1994a), proximity to death allows

Yoshimoto to articulate, through Sakumi, a personal philosophy about the nature of existence:

I believe in cycles. People associated with religion would probably label them karma, but I choose not to call them anything but what they are - simple and ordinary. Nothing more (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 208).

This view of the world is, of course, not new. What is new is the reinstatement of these views within the context of contemporary Japanese literature. Armando Martins Janeira notes that in Japanese writing, death is ‘not a stop but an interruption in a life which is extended in an infinite number of reincarnations’. Janeira argues that in Japanese literature ‘the notion of time is a delusion. Man dissolves in time’ (1970, 65-7). This is consistent with Sakumi’s beliefs. However, looking out the window, Sakumi imagines a world ‘without ticking clocks’ in which there would be ‘no other human beings, just the mountains and the oceans to talk to’ (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 154). These remarks are significant in that they describe a growing relationship between Yoshimoto’s characters and the environment in the absence of human relationships, which will be discussed in Chapter Four. Later Sakumi says:

Cycles never change. One day our bodies turn to bones which eventually turn back to dust. Then we melt in the air, and become vapors covering the earth in an atmospheric dome (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 213).

Sakumi elaborates further that ‘All are connected - Japan, along with China. Italy would be there too. Everything and everyone together in the air’ (213). This remark is of significance because there is no suggestion here of the uniqueness of the Japanese people. In this way, Yoshimoto’s understanding of identity

transcends nationality, and the *Nihonjinron* theories expressed in *N.P.*. These include notions of the uniqueness of the Japanese race and the Japanese language and the dangers posed by exposure to the West and the English language which, in *N.P.*, leads not only to aberrant sexual behaviour but also to the deaths of a number of Japanese translators including Sakumi's boyfriend.

CHAPTER FOUR: BEYOND THE ENCLOSED WORLD OF THE *SHÔJO*; *MARIKA NO NAGAI YORU* (1994) TO *SOUTH POINT* (2008)

In terms of content, as has been discussed in Chapter Three, the first phase of Yoshimoto's career explores the disappearance of the traditional family, the changing roles of women and the alienation of the individual, all of which are key features of contemporary Japanese society. In terms of style, Yoshimoto has been successful in engaging with 'serious' issues using a non-realist mode of writing derived in part from the language and techniques of her favourite *manga* writers such as Ôshima Yumiko, Iwadate Mariko and Fujio F. Fujiko. As such, she has been engaged in creating a paraliterature which has to some extent helped liberate contemporary Japanese literature from a 'literary language' that Murakami Haruki has said 'tends to be the kind that communicates to a small group of like-minded people' (Murakami in Rubin, 2005, 202). Whilst Doris Lessing (1997) has argued that the capacity for imaginative storytelling such as myth, legend, parable and fable has 'atrophied under the pressure from the realistic novel' (1997, 307), Yoshimoto's writing is proof that non-realist storytelling has lost none of its power in Japan (and overseas in translation).

In the second phase of her career, (1994 -), Yoshimoto continues to write in a non-realist mode exploring the inner lives and dreams of her characters. Her characters still communicate through their dreams and E.S.P. and experience spiritual awakenings facilitated by characters endowed with special powers. However, she has shifted her interest beyond the confines of the enclosed *shôjo* world to explore a wider range of social issues such as the dangers of religious

cults, *karôshi* (death by overwork), domestic and sexual violence and the environment. In a 1995 interview, Yoshimoto foreshadowed this development when she said that in five years time she imagined that she would be writing about religious groups, child abuse, multiple personalities and love stories (1995a, 38). Although not identified in this list, the reconnection with nature and spiritual awakening of her characters is a particularly significant theme. Thus, whilst Yoshimoto's female protagonists continue to retreat to small, enclosed and private spaces after traumatic experiences such as the school roof in 'Hidokei' (In *Furin to Nanbei*, 2000a) and again in *Iruka (Dolphin)* (2006a), a cupboard in 'Puratanasu' (in *Furin to Nanbei*, 2000a) or a cardboard box in 'Chiisana Yami' (in *Furin to Nanbei*, 2000a), they increasingly engage with the natural world in a search for 'meaning'. Thus, Yoshimoto's characters remain isolated to a large extent from the wider human society, but rather than living in an enclosed world such as that depicted in her earlier writing, they have a greater range of experiences which gives their search for new ways of being a wider relevance. Moreover, their need to reconnect with nature is a theme that is of growing significance both in Japan and overseas. It reflects not only the huge growth of New Age religions, the increasing popularity of organic foods and the rise of the Slow Food movement, but above all a concern for the environment magnified by the global awareness of the onset of *chikyu ondanka* (global warming) and the search for viable and sustainable solutions.

In this chapter, I will explore, then, how Yoshimoto continues to focus on the inner life of the individual whilst at the same time showing a growing awareness of the special relationship that exists between her characters and the environment.

The significance of Yoshimoto's interest in the environment in terms of her literary style and its development is that it lends her writing to being read from an ecocritical point of view. Ecocriticism is a recent development in literary criticism which Cheryll Glotfelty defines as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (1996, xviii). Glotfelty adds that ecocriticism has one foot in literature and the other on land. As a theoretical discourse, she argues that it 'negotiates between the human and the non-human' (xix). This chapter also analyses Yoshimoto's more recent writing from an ecocritical viewpoint and explores how together with other New Age themes such as healing and spirituality, the Jungian reconnection with nature positions Yoshimoto's writing alongside the mainstream of Japanese literature in terms of its shared themes.

From nuclear annihilation to a sense of ecocrisis

After the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima in 1945, Ôe Kenzaburô (1995) argues that writers such as Ôoka Shôhei, Takeda Taijun and Mishima Yukio took on the job of making sense of Japan's defeat in the war as well as the new realities of the nuclear age and in doing so 'provided a comprehensive image of their times' (Ôe, 1995, 66). For many readers, the fears of nuclear annihilation during this period were realised most explicitly, perhaps, in the nihilism of Dazai Osamu's novels. Six years after the dropping of the bomb, Tezuka Osamu's *manga Tetsuwan Atomu* (Atom Boy) first appeared. Interestingly, under pressure from his publishers, Tezuka modified his original vision to 'stress a peaceful future, where Japanese science and technology were advanced and used for

peaceful purposes' (Tezuka, Quoted in Shiraishi, 2000, 295). In this way, the atomic age also gave birth to what Shiraishi describes as technological optimism. Nevertheless, the reality of living with the fear of nuclear annihilation was central to the task taken on by the writers identified by Ôe which elevated their writing with a sense of great importance.

In terms of his own writing about Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Ôe argues that his experience as the parent of a mentally handicapped child was fundamental to his realisation that healing is possible even after such a calamity and that:

...the victims and survivors of the atomic bombs have the same sort of power to heal all of us who live in this nuclear age (Ôe, 1995, 34).

Given his criticisms of Yoshimoto's writing, it is interesting to note that healing is a major preoccupation in both Ôe and Yoshimoto's writing. This can be seen in Ôe's *Moeagaru no Midori no Ki* (*The Flaming Tree*) trilogy (1993 – 1995) and Yoshimoto's novel *Amrita* (1994a). Despite Ôe's general criticism that Japanese literature was 'decaying' in the 1990s, Yoshimoto's interest in healing combined with her interest in reconnecting with nature and an ongoing search for spiritual meaning gives it an extended relevance beyond the enclosed world of the *shôjo*.

In *Spirit Matters: the Transcendant in Modern Japanese Literature* (2006), Philip Gabriel identifies Ôe as being part of a 'general post-Cold War shift from concern for a nuclear holocaust to a more generalised threat of environmental pollution and destruction' (143). This is a shift that can be seen in Kurosawa films such as *Ikimono no kiroku* (*Record of a Living Being*) (1955), which

focuses on fears of the H-bomb and atomic extinction and *Dreams* (1990), in which various segments deal with exploding nuclear power plants, an earth populated by ogres that has been turned into a tip for deadly chemicals and a vision of Eden in which a one-hundred-and-three year old man tells the narrator that people, especially scholars, have forgotten that they are part of nature. Gabriel is wary, however, and qualifies the association he makes between Ôe's writing and a concern for the environment when he states that Ôe's novel *Somersault* (2003) is not an 'environmental novel'. Rather it explores the relationship of God and man (143). While Gabriel does not identify Yoshimoto as being part of this trend, he observes that the New Age influenced narratives of Yoshimoto Banana, whom he describes as a 'pop novelist', are evidence of the interest the Japanese reading public has in spirituality (4). Whilst Gabriel is dismissive of Yoshimoto as a 'pop novelist', she reflects the same shift in concern from the politics of nuclear annihilation to that of global warming and environmental degradation. Both Gabriel and Ôe's criticism of Yoshimoto's writing ignores her awareness of and response to the sense of a spiritual vacuum in contemporary urban Japan.

The need to reconnect with nature in Yoshimoto's writing can be traced to influences from both the West such as Carlos Castañeda as well as traditional Japanese spirituality. There is a long tradition in Japanese literature, for example, that takes in the writings of wandering *yamabushi* (holy men) such as Ippen (1239 – 1289) and poets such as Basho (1644 – 1694). J. Baird Callicott writes that upon the introduction of Buddhism to Japan it was 'inevitably modified by the Shinto intellectual climate' in Japan (1997, 96). According to Callicott, pre-

Buddhist, Shinto Japan pictured a natural world ‘teeming with *kami*, or gods, associated not only with the sky and upper atmosphere but with mountains, streams, lakes, and caverns’ (ibid.). Callicott argues that when Indian Buddhism was introduced to Japan, it was slowly transformed over the centuries so that even plants and animals were classified as sentient beings capable of reaching enlightenment (ibid.). Japanese Buddhism has influenced not only Japanese writers but also writers from the Beat generation in the 1950s such as Jack Kerouac and Gary Snyder who dreamed of a ‘great rucksack revolution’ (*The Dharma Bums*, 2008, 73). Gunter Grass notes in his memoir *Peeling the Onion* (2007) that after their defeat, German prisoners of war organised various classes for themselves including Bible circles as well as a popular introduction to Buddhism (Grass, 2007, 176). The origin of Yoshimoto’s New Age interests is to be found in the meandering route these cross-cultural influences have taken.

The growing popularity of what are now identified as New Age themes in the works of these writers can be interpreted as a rejection of the nation-building goals of the industrialised nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In the face of international concern about global warming, overpopulation and diminishing energy and food supplies, Yoshimoto’s writing in the second phase of her career demonstrates that the shift from concerns about the nuclear age to concern for the environment is complete. The politics of the Cold War and the leaning towards the left which dominated the thinking of the previous generation is absent in her writing. The politics that inspired Ôe Kenzaburô and her father Takaaki have largely disappeared. Yoshimoto does, however, take a polemical stand against greed and environmental issues like overdevelopment, which can be seen to share

the concern felt by D.H. Lawrence who railed against ‘the destruction of the organic purpose, the organic unity, and the subordination of every organic unit to the great mechanical purpose’ (*Women in Love*, 1969, 260).

The destruction of the environment

The destruction of the environment is central to the sense of ecocrisis in much popular culture in contemporary Japan. One of the most graphic images of this environmental destruction appears in the 1994 animated Studio Ghibli film *Heisei Tanuki Gassen Pomoko* (English title: *Pom Poko*) by Takahata Isao. In this film, bulldozers are shown crisscrossing leaves like tiny insects as they chew their way through the forest building new towns. Summoning all their magical shape-changing powers the *tanuki* try to stop the advance of the new town and protect the forest but ultimately fail. This is the same theme that Miyazaki Hayao takes up in his 1997 film *Mononoke Hime* in which the wild boar of the forest form a large army to protect the ancient forest against the arrival of human beings. Popular culture in this way is at the forefront of raising awareness of these environmental issues in Japan. This is the cultural context within which Yoshimoto’s more recent writing needs to be read.

The value attached to nature is not a new phenomenon. Long before the rebuilding of Japan after World War Two, Miyazawa Kenji (1896 – 1933), wrote the short story ‘Kenju’s Wood’, in which he explored both the importance of nature (as well as the solitude of the individual). Kenju, the protagonist, often strolled through the woods and

When he saw the green thickets in the rain, his eyes would twinkle with pleasure, and when he caught sight of a hawk soaring up and up into the blue sky he would jump for pure joy and clap his hands to tell everyone about it (*Wildcat and the Acorns*, 1985, 129).

Because of this behaviour he was laughed at by the other children (129). He dies an early death from typhus but not before planting seven hundred cedar trees. Later, when the railway reaches the village, a station is built a mile from Kenju's house and 'Almost before people realised it, the village had become a fully-fledged town' (136-7). Years later, a visitor to the primary school is shocked to see the trees still standing. He remembers laughing at Kenju as a child and asks 'Ah me, who's to say who is wise and who is foolish? (138). Miyazawa writes:

Who can tell how many thousands of people learned what true happiness was thanks to the cedar trees of Kenju Wood, with their splendid dark green, their fresh scent, their cool shade in summer, and the turf with the color of moonlight that lay beneath (*Wildcat and the Acorns*, 1985, 139).

This story is interesting because first, it describes the threat to nature posed by urban growth. Secondly, Miyazawa draws attention to the healing powers of nature. Thus, whilst the bullying and early death of Kenju are examples of what Yoshimoto describes as the overwhelming 'realism' of Miyazawa's writing (*Banana Yoshimoto at Work*, 2001a, 16), the story resonates with Yoshimoto's own concerns for the environment. Where the postwar generation had to come to terms with Japan's defeat and the beginning of the atomic age, Yoshimoto's generation is coming to terms with a growing sense of ecocrisis. Given the reverence that the Japanese have traditionally shown nature, then, the question needs to be asked why have the Japanese allowed their environment, as documented by Totman (1998) and Kerr (2001), to become so degraded?

The power of nature is often evoked in Japanese popular culture. As has been discussed in Chapter Three, Reader (1991), Kinsella (1995) and Ueno (2004) have all argued that nostalgia for the past is a modern construct in which the *furusato* (rural hometown) is seen as a powerful antidote to the pressures of urban living. Thus in Miyazaki Hayao's animated film *Tonari no Totoro* (*My Neighbour Totoro*) (1988), Mei and her sister Satsuki plant some seeds. During the night, they dance with the mythical creature Totoro and the seeds begin to sprout with such violent force that an enormous tree grows before their eyes. The power of nature is elsewhere more subtle. When her father is stuck for ideas, Mei places some flowers on his desk and asks him to play the role of *ohanaya-san* (a flower-seller). Her father absent-mindedly picks up the flowers and, whilst toying with them, is struck by a new idea and is able to make progress with his work.

In the 2004 French television documentary *Ghibli: The Miyazaki Temple*, the Japanese island of Yakushima is visited in order to show viewers the inspiration for the settings of two Miyazaki Hayao *anime*, *Nausicaa* (1984) and *Mononoke Hime* (1997). Parts of the forest on the island are still intact because of the belief on the island in the sacredness of the trees. This animistic vision is a vital part of the environmental message contained in Miyazaki's films. In the same documentary, Japanese 'mutant pop artist' Murakami Takashi argues that in Miyazaki's *Tonari no Totoro*, the Japanese were first made aware of Japanese exoticism:

We were shocked to find something exotic in authentically Japanese things. Things around us have something precious that we didn't realise (Murakami in *Ghibli: The Miyazaki Temple*, 2004).

Susan J. Napier (1996) argues that the idea of a pastoral utopia lost most of its appeal in literature by the end of the 1980s and that younger writers such as Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto Banana turned to face the complexities of city life instead (169). These complexities consist of the stress and alienation caused by city life. Characters in both Yoshimoto's and Murakami's writing are often forced to withdraw to confined spaces such as cardboard boxes or on school rooftops (in Yoshimoto's writing) or down well shafts (in Murakami's writing) in order to heal themselves. Inevitably, however, the power of nature is shown against this background. In *Kafka on the Shore* (2003, English translation 2005), Murakami's protagonist, Kafka, spends time in an isolated hut on a mountain. Here he echoes Shizukuishi, in Yoshimoto's *Ôkoku Sono I.* (2002b), when he suggests that the plants on the mountain are different from those in the city:

They have a physical power, their breath grazing any humans who might chance by, their gaze zeroing in on the intruder as though they've spotted their prey. As though they have some dark, prehistoric, magic powers. Just as deep-sea creatures rule the ocean depths, in the forest trees reign supreme. If it wanted to, the forest could reject me – or swallow me up whole. A healthy amount of fear and respect might be a good idea (*Kafka on the Shore*, 2003, English translation 2005, 144).

It is significant that this observation is made by an 'intruder'. Yet it is to the mountain that Kafka retreats in order to heal himself. The search for a pastoral utopia may not motivate the various protagonists in Murakami and Yoshimoto's writing but they clearly benefit from sojourns spent in close communion with nature. Fukuoka Masanobu warns that 'When alienation from nature becomes extreme, the number of sick people increases' (1978, 144). The need to withdraw from city life is a recurring feature particularly of Yoshimoto's writing and spiritual relief, if not healing, is found in a reconnection with nature.

The ‘fear and respect’ alluded to by Kafka in the previous quote from *Kafka on the Shore* is also of interest because of the threatening aspect of nature to which it refers. Nature is not necessarily a benign force or presence and this is especially the case in Japan which is prone to earthquakes, *tsunami*, typhoon and various other natural phenomena. As an Australian, there is no greater contrast of attitudes than in a visit to a Japanese beach. Where Australian beaches are associated with the pleasures of sun, surf and sand, Japanese beaches are more like defensive zones barricaded with concrete tetrapods to protect coastal dwellers from the elements. Kerr argues that they are unnecessary and worse, cause ‘greater erosion than would be the case if the beaches had been left alone’ (Kerr, 2001, 18). The point that needs to be made is that whilst nature is venerated in Japanese culture this has not translated into a concern for the environment itself. Arthur Koestler argued in *The Lotus and the Robot*, originally published in 1960, that the wire rack used to shape the *bonsai* tree is evidence of the need to conquer ‘uncouth’ nature (Koestler, 1966, 198). Furthermore, in his essay ‘Identification of the Self in relation to the environment’ Augustin Berque explains that the ‘scrupulous attention’ given to the environment by the Japanese has been a selective process and not applied to the environment in general. For example, aspects of nature including *meisho* (some places), *momoji* (some plants) and *jûgoya* (some moments of the year) have been celebrated whilst other aspects of nature have been neglected. *Kôgai* (environmental destruction), for example, was ignored until it became an international concern (Berque, 1992, 97-8). Thus, despite the reverence for nature in Japanese culture, it is only certain aspects of the environment that have been valued. In this way, Berque explains that the

Japanese have only ever loved and respected certain aspects of nature despite their reverence for nature (98-99).

In the second phase of Yoshimoto's career, there is evidence of a shift away from the traditional Japanese reverence for nature to a concern for the environment itself. There are a number of scenes in which her characters comment explicitly on the destruction of the environment. In *Amrita*, Sakumi writes to Ryuichiro:

I feel bad when I think that people gave up on mountains, the scent of the ocean, and the commotion in the trees just to build an upper-class suburban neighbourhood (*Amrita* 1994a, English Translation 1997, 250).

Further to this, in *Umi no Futa (There is no Lid on the Sea)* (2004d), Mari wants to cry when she remembers the sea creatures that are missing in the harbour which has been 'developed' (60). *Umi no Futa*, like *Tsugumi*, is set in a seaside town on the Izu Peninsula and tells the story of 'two young women who meet in the town and who gradually come to find joy in the work they do together one summer season' (*Yomiuri Daily Online*, 2004). The novel is interesting because Yoshimoto not only articulates an awareness about environmental issues but also what she considers to be the best options for dealing with this problem. On the other hand, in response to the question 'What can we do to restore the former beauty of the Japanese landscape and start living a healthy life again?' Yoshimoto is typically reluctant, however, to advocate any large scale action. Instead she advocates that 'such a place can be revived without much investment'. To this extent, she continues to show a preference for individual action over large-scale organised action. Thus, when the heroine starts her own business Yoshimoto says she wanted to 'show that it's possible for people to realize their dreams if they

have firm ideals – and they don't have to borrow money from adults to do it' (*Yomiuri Daily Online*, 2004).

Further evidence of the destruction of the environment is shown in *Ôkoku Sono 1*. (2002b). Shizukuishi, the narrator, lives with her grandmother on a mountain where they make herbal teas with healing properties. Despite their lifestyle being poor, people bring them food such as wild rabbits and pig while they can get fish from the river (21). In some ways, Shizukuishi reflects, it was a 'luxurious life' as they had a television, a video, a big stereo and the internet (25). The mountain is 'fatally changed', however, when the river is dammed. Shizukuishi reflects that the people who ruined the mountain are 'hateful' and it is observed that although the flow of the river has been altered only a little, the mountain will take decades to recover (32-3). When asked by Sugiyama Yumiko (2002) what kind of reader she had in mind when she wrote *Ôkoku Sono 1*, Yoshimoto replied 'People who are tired of living in big cities'. In response to Sugiyama's suggestion that it is an 'ambitious' work, Yoshimoto replies that she would like it to be part of a long running series. She sees it as 'philosophical' in nature and compares it to *Sophie's World* (1991) and the writings of Carlos Castañeda. By 'philosophical' Yoshimoto is presumably referring to the increased amount of authorial commentary in her writing on topics such as the impact of environmental destruction on the lives of her characters. Whilst this destruction has a significant impact on Shizukuishi and her grandmother, Yoshimoto is, however, more interested in exploring Shizukuishi's subsequent relationships with Kaede and Shinichiro and her grandmother's new life in Malta, courtesy of a chance relationship formed on the internet. Thus, Yoshimoto's interest remains fixed on

the individual and in her reassuring, homespun philosophy it is the individual, rather than movements, that can make a difference.

So how seriously can we take Yoshimoto's concerns for the environment? It must be acknowledged that Yoshimoto is more of an environmentalist, as defined by Greg Garrard (2004), than an advocate for deep ecology. The term environmentalist referring to someone with concerns for the environment but who wishes to 'maintain or improve their standard of living as conventionally defined and who would not welcome radical social change' (Garrard, 2004, 18). Yoshimoto is clearly exploring environmental issues without advocating 'radical social change'. As discussed in Chapter Three, Yoshimoto's attitude to social issues can best be described as non-confrontational. It reflects her desire as a writer not to burden her readers with too much reality. Those readers seeking to engage with environmental issues on this level would need to turn to a writer like Ariyoshi Sawako, whose 1975 novel *Fukugô osen* (*Compound Pollution*), Aoyama (2008) describes as containing 'detailed information about some of the toxic chemicals around us' (89). This approach, however, is clearly incompatible with Yoshimoto's non-realist mode of writing.

'Tired of living in big cities'

Living in big cities, then, is clearly seen to contribute to the pressure and stress suffered by Yoshimoto's characters. Thus, in *Amrita* (1994a), Sakumi observes that in Tokyo she was 'frustrated with her unclear perception of life' (165). In *Niji* (2002a), Watashi (I), the narrator felt disconnected from the world when her

mother passed away and waited for time to pass 'like a stone'. After her breakdown, she even lost touch with her friends at the shop and her boss (42). Moreover, in *Argentine Hag* (Bilingual edition 2002), Mitsuko says about her town, 'we were in a Japanese town with car noises sounding in the distance, an ugly skyline of buildings destroyed and replaced without plans, and a dingy sky' (89).

Yoshimoto's characters find life in a big city like Tokyo oppressive and they need to escape in order to heal themselves. Thus, in *Amrita*, Sakumi watches her boyfriend 'against a golden ocean and a western sun' and observes 'I could never have experienced such a simple thing back in my native Japan' (199). In *Niji*, Watashi managed to recover her health by travelling to Tahiti where she enjoyed the subtle strength of nature on Moorea (43). In *Argentine Hag*, Mitsuko's father withdraws to the Argentine Building with Yuri after his wife dies. Even though it is in a city, it is described as being 'totally detached from its surroundings' (49). In fact, as if in a fairy tale, it looked 'far away' with 'abundant vines with thorns everywhere among the foliage' (49). The narrator has to climb over a fence and lands with a 'thud' (51). Significantly:

The everyday life I belonged to was on the other side of the world, so far away; a world with cars running, the big supermarket, the hustle and bustle of daily miscellaneous affairs (*Argentine Hag*, 2002b, 53).

Here, the narrator realises to her shame, after doubting Yuri's motives in having a child with her father, 'It was my father and me who had been saved by her in every respect' (133). This kind of healing and this kind of character does not exist in the everyday world of cars and supermarkets. This is a world Yoshimoto is

critical of due to its unnecessary distractions and complications which add to the stress and frustrations of her characters.

Yoshimoto's criticism of city life is echoed by that of Shimada Masahiko. Shimada defines the suburbs as a 'prison', and describes states like Japan as 'immoral', because they are part of a system which exploits the third world and exports 'invasion and war offshore'. Within the suburbs, 'boredom and decadence flourish' and Shimada notes that it is only through 'mass-produced images' like television dramas, Hollywood movies, pop music, animated cartoons and comics that peoples' lives overlap, creating a sense of reality enabling them to 'preserve their internal stability' (3-4). This notion of 'internal stability' is crucial to Shimada. Without it, he suggests, people cannot survive. As evidence, he suggests recent 'grotesque events' in the suburbs

... which should be basically confined to the realm of fantasy, are ever increasing. Starting from cult terrorist attacks using poison gas, serial killings of young girls, doctors murdering mothers and children, primary school children being murdered by junior high school children, an infant kidnapped and murdered by a housewife and so on, destructive and hateful instincts suddenly leap out from the monotony of daily life (Shimada, 2000, p. 5).

Yoshimoto also makes links between aberrant behaviours that seem to dominate Japan's media and the urban environment. This will be discussed later in this chapter. For the moment, I would like to stress again the connection that Yoshimoto is making between the unease of her characters and the absence of nature in the urban environment. When Sakumi arrived back in Tokyo she says:

I had the impression that Tokyo was a place full of people with too much time on their hands, but even then there wasn't a mountain or an ocean in sight. No wonder their eyes were never at ease (*Amrita* 1994a, English Translation 1997, 223).

Clearly, in terms of an ecocritical reading that focuses on the relationship between 'literature and the physical environment' (Glotfelty, 1996, xviii), the awareness that Yoshimoto is raising of the negative impact living in big cities has on her characters is significant. This feature of her writing extends it well beyond the enclosed world of the *shôjo*.

'Sermons in stones'

Whilst the destruction of the environment is a significant theme in the second phase of Yoshimoto's career, she continues to explore the spiritual needs of her characters. In the second phase of her career, these spiritual needs have an environmental focus which can be described as a desire to reconnect with nature. This kind of New Age spirituality can be expressed in the West as a desire to return to pagan or pre-Enlightenment beliefs or, in Japan, a return to pre-modern or esoteric Shinto and Buddhist beliefs. Apart from the belief in ghosts and a life in the hereafter, which Yoshimoto explores in the first phase of her career, she explores the notion that intelligence is possessed by plants, precious stones and animals. This is a notion with which readers of Shakespeare would be familiar. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Laurence observes 'O mickle is the powerful grace that lies in Plants, herbs, stones' (Shakespeare, 1986, 390). Furthermore, in *As You Like It*, the Duke Senior describes his exile in the Forest of Arden saying:

And this our life, exempt from public haunt
Finds tongues in trees, books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything (Shakespeare, 1986, 712).

This speech is of great interest. Obviously there is a difference between Elizabethan sensibility and that of twentieth-century Japan, but Yoshimoto's characters, like the Duke Senior, are similarly 'exempt from public haunt'. Like the Duke Senior, Yoshimoto's characters also communicate with plants and stones. Additionally, in *As You Like It*, Jacques describes the world as 'a stage'. The notion that human beings are actors playing a part is a major theme in Yoshimoto's writing which makes it postmodern. In *Amrita* (1994a), Sakumi is just one example of many of Yoshimoto's protagonists who struggle to create a sense of identity in difficult circumstances, or, as stated in the previous chapter, painfully struggle to find a script.

Yoshimoto's exploration of communication between human characters and 'intelligent' plants or stones, positions itself to be read within the kind of ecocritical framework outlined previously. Four hundred years after Shakespeare, Yoshimoto is writing at a time when, according to Christopher Manes (1996), 'Nature is silent in our culture'. Manes argues that compared to animistic cultures, in which stones and rivers are 'perceived as being articulate and at times intelligible', the idiom of Renaissance and Enlightenment humanism 'veils the processes of nature with its own cultural obsessions, directionalities, and motifs that have no analogues in the natural world' (1996, 15). Ultimately, Manes argues that a new language is needed that 'incorporates a decentred, postmodern, post-humanist perspective' (17). Postmodernism is useful, then, not only in

deconstructing gender and nationalism but also relationships from a posthuman or human-centred perspective.

Yoshimoto has always been interested in plants, which is evidenced in Eriko's lament in *Kitchen* about being 'a typical male', '...at that time I didn't know benjamin from saintpaulia' (80), not to mention Yoshimoto's *nom de plume*, Banana. Yoshimoto's interest in 'intelligent plants', however, shows a development from descriptive writing to a more philosophical form of writing. In *Kitchen*, the narrator at the start of the novel is described leaning against the 'silver door of a towering, giant refrigerator' (*Kitchen*, 1993, 3). This description emphasises the isolation of the protagonist and her sense of claustrophobia in the 'inner space' into which she has retreated which, she says, is 'just a little nicer than being all alone' (*Kitchen*, 1993, 4). Yoshimoto's writing draws upon this style of descriptive writing derived from *manga* to emphasise the inner state of mind of her characters in her early writing. In Yoshimoto's more recent writing, however, there is more commentary on social issues which takes the reader beyond the 'enclosed world of the *shōjo*'. An example of this 'philosophical' development in her recent writing can be seen in *Niji (Rainbow)* (2002a) when Watashi, the narrator, speculates on the nature of development and observes that too many buildings are pulled down and new ones built in their place (25). Her grandparents, on the other hand, ran the same shop in the small town where she grew up for fifty years (28). As a compromise, the narrator suggests that 'Even if there is one person who is accepted by both the land and the tourists, business can co-exist with nature and survive downturns in the economy as well as poor weather' (26). In *Mizuumi (The Lake)* (2005b), Yoshimoto's narrator becomes

embroiled in a debate about her mural art. The townspeople are unsure of its artistic merits and compare her work to children's graffiti, but after the president of her sponsor's company received a letter from her professor he went to see the mural, liked what he saw. He asked that the company be mentioned in any articles or TV interviews about her work (*Mizuumi*, 2005b, 150). Moreover, in *Umi no Futa (The Lid on the Sea)* (2004d) Mari, the narrator, speculates about the creatures at the bottom of the sea and wonders what they are like. She compares it to outer space being beyond the reach of man. She herself feels like an 'alien' watching the creatures swimming in the sea and considers it a miracle that these creatures meet in the same place year after year. She is filled with a sense of sense of wonder and thinks this is what humans should be like. She speculates about God and how we as human beings are swimming in a world in which the balance between mercy and otherwise cannot be fully understood (*Umi no Futa*, 2004d, 64-66).

Yoshimoto's 'philosophical' musings explore many of the same New Age themes that are to be found in the writing of Carlos Castañeda. This is not surprising given that it is with Castañeda's 'teachings' that Yoshimoto says she is most comfortable (Yoshimoto, 2003d, 209). In Castañeda's *A Separate Reality* (1971), Don Juan, a Yaqui Indian, is said to understand the power of plants (39). On a trip to the mountains he tells Carlos, his apprentice, 'You must talk to the plants before you pick them... You must get to know them individually; then the plants can tell you anything you care to know about them' (100). Ultimately, Don Juan warns Carlos that:

we must be on good terms with all the living things of this world. This is the reason why we must talk to plants we are about to kill and apologize for hurting them; the same thing must be done with the animals we are going to hunt. We should take only enough for our needs, otherwise the plants and the animals and the worms we have killed would turn against us and cause us disease and misfortune. A warrior is aware of this and strives to appease them, so when he peers through the holes, the trees and birds and the worms give him truthful messages (Castañeda, 1971, 232 – 33).

Yoshimoto's interest in Castañeda reflects a more general interest in North American Indian culture which has seen the publication of a number of books in Japan such as *Amerikan Indian no Oshie (The Teachings of the American Indians)* (Kato, 1990) and *Amerikan Indian no Oshie: Anata no Shiawase ga Koko ni Aru (The Teachings of the American Indians: Your Happiness Lies Here)* (Kato, 1993) as well as the translation of *The Education of Little Tree* (1991) by Forrest Carter into Japanese. Significantly, Yoshimoto compares Kawai Hayao, the Jungian psychologist, to an elder in a Native American village (Yoshimoto, 2002c, 124).

In Yoshimoto's writing, the intelligence of the plants is manifested by their ability to communicate with her characters. In *Ôkoku Sono I.* (2002b), Shizukuishi watches her grandmother's cactus closely and says that cacti have a 'pure spirit' that is rarely seen. If you open your heart they will soothe you. When she visited a 'famous' cactus garden Shizukuishi looked respectfully at a ninety-year-old-cactus which emitted a smell 'full of vigour and the power to endure' and she felt 'possibilities' that she hadn't yet learnt from the cactus (78). This is communicated through the senses rather than spoken. Kaede, her psychic employer, tells Shizukuishi that when a cactus befriends you it is 'forever, unlike people' (110).

Shizukuishi tells Kaede about how her grandmother came to like cacti. When she married she had moved with her husband to the city, but she wanted to return to the mountain where she was brought up (106). When her husband died a 'green man' appeared and her grandmother thought she was going to be with her husband. The green man, however, disappeared in the direction of the study. Her grandmother followed and she could smell her husband. She switched on the light and, to her surprise, a cactus tree which had not flowered in fifteen years was in full bloom (109). Kaede explains that the cactus tree had flowered possibly to comfort her grandmother and maybe even at her husband's request. He explains that there are 'all sorts of possible connections' (116). Kaede asks Shizukuishi to bring the cactus, which is now in Shizukuishi's apartment, to him. He wants to hear its 'story'. He feels that the cactus wants to talk to him (112).

Yoshimoto's characters reach out to each other like plants reach out to the warmth of the sun. In *Hinagiku no Jinsei* (2000b) it is no coincidence that Daisy and Dahlia are named after flowers. Daisy's mother had a Nolina plant that she kept by the window. One day a yellowed leaf fell and without thinking Daisy watered the plant. The soil is dry and she can hear the water being absorbed into the soil. She suddenly feels worse and fell to the floor sobbing. Because her mother's 'white hand' has not been looking after the tree it is dying. Regardless of how long the plant waits, Daisy's mother is not coming back. At that moment Daisy no longer feels alienated from her surroundings. She feels that she and the plant have something in common. Daisy senses that plants essentially inhabit the same world as people.

Plants are also shown to possess qualities that can literally almost bring people back from the dead. In *Hinagiku no Jinsei* Daisy observes that ‘Plants are not merciful but they show the passage of time through their big and kind hearted lives’ (80). In *Hard Luck* (1999a) the narrator visits her sister Kuni who has been hospitalised after collapsing at work. Her sister is in fact brain-dead and is being kept alive on a life-support system. Sakai, another visitor to the hospital, splits a *mikan* (Japanese mandarine) in two and the room is filled with a ‘sweet, tart aroma’. Both of them watch as her sister sits up in the hospital bed and says “God, what a wonderful smell!” Sakai explains later “That vision we had was brought on by the *mikan*. It brought something back for the two of us, because it remembers Kuni’s love” (107). In *Maboroshi Hawaii (A Vision of Hawaii)* (2007b), arriving at the airport in Honolulu, Ohana compares the smell of death inside the artificial world of the aircraft with the sensual charge being generated in the cells of her body after being thrust outside into the world of plants eating sunlight (33). In this way, plants are shown to have extraordinary qualities.

Yoshimoto is not the first writer to introduce these New Age themes into contemporary Japanese literature. In the short story ‘The Shadow of the Orchid’ (2006) by Takagi Nobuko, winner of the Akutagawa prize in 1984, a young female patient dying of cancer gives a plant to her doctor. The doctor’s wife Michiko ‘couldn’t help feeling that the orchid was more than just an ordinary plant’ (211). Under the influence of the flower she meets the woman who died (and had an affair with her husband) and strangely enough it has a positive effect on her. The plant thanks her for the doctor’s love (226) and after a while the wife’s mood improves as does the colour in her face and energy levels (232). The

story ends with the doctor recalling his time with the young woman and the feel of her arms around his neck. What separates Yoshimoto's writing is that she attempts to place her human and non-human characters on an equal level. The removal of a humanistic or anthropomorphic framework puts Shizukuishi (unlike Tsugumi) in an uneasy position trying to defend her actions when she rescues her plants from the fire in the apartment block before realising that she has forgotten about her neighbours.

Yoshimoto's interest in plants can be traced back to *Kitchen* (1988a, English translation 1993) when Mikage says of her ex-boyfriend Sotaro 'for some reason I keep getting connected to men who have something to do with plants' (*Kitchen*, 1993, 23). Another character who is connected to a man with 'something to do with plants' is Shizukuishi who, unlike Mikage, however, consummates her relationship with Shinichiro in *Ôkoku Sono I.*. The question then is, has the wait been worthwhile? For readers with a predilection for sex and drugs, they are probably better served reading hard-edged authors like Dazai Osamu (1956), Ishihara Shintaro (1966), Murakami Ryu (1977, 1993, 1995) and Yamada Amy (1996), as Yoshimoto's interest remains focussed elsewhere. Shizukuishi thanks the cactus for introducing her to Shinichiro (82) and thus 'intelligent plants' can be seen as another character type that Yoshimoto has introduced into her writing like the 'fantasy woman' and 'wise child' characters. This new character type, like the ones that preceded it, gives Yoshimoto's female characters strength and courage.

In his discussion of a painting called *Hasu wo Kiku* ('Listening to the Lotus Flowers Popping') by Hashimoto Meiji (1936), Pilar Cabañas writes that:

The title of the painting suggests that the lotus from the left corner are talking to the women. Nature talks to our spirit. They talk subtly through their changes of shapes and colours and the women listen in silence. *Nihonga* (Japanese painting) artists managed to paint this dialogue between humans and nature, more frequently developed by poets (Cabañas, 1997, 76).

The idea that 'nature talks to our spirit' is a concept that Yoshimoto increasingly explores in the second phase of her career. 'Intelligent plants', however, have an uncomplicated existence and ask for little more than air, water and sunlight. This is an ideal situation in Yoshimoto's world where her female narrators do not seek wealth or status and avoid romantic entanglement. In fact, it could be argued that Yoshimoto's characters are becoming more plantlike with names like Hinagiku (Daisy), Daria (Dahlia), Yuri (Lily), Kaede (Maple) and Azami (Thistle). Even Shizukuishi is named after a type of cactus plant.

Aoyama (2004) notes that flower motifs permeate the novel *Indian Summer* (1988) by Kanai Mieko. These characters also have names associated with flowers and in their admiration of a young woman, Aoyama argues that they remind the reader of 'the classic of *shôjo shôsetsu*' (girl's fiction) *Hana Monogatari* (*Flower Tales*) (first serialised in 1916, and published in book form in 1920 by Yoshiya Nobuko) (2004, 9). Yoshimoto's indebtedness to *shôjo manga* and young girls' fiction such as the Cobalt Library has been discussed in Chapter Three. With the blurring of boundaries between human and plant life in the second phase of her career, Yoshimoto moves beyond her earlier influences to

tackle issues such as the importance of the relationship between people and their environment. However, Yoshimoto's focus is not so much to raise awareness for political action as to explore in a non-realistic mode of writing a posthuman setting in which the boundaries between her human characters and plants are erased.

'Magicians of the universe'

As well as introducing non-human characters such as 'intelligent plants' into her writing Yoshimoto also attaches an increased sense of importance to relationships between her human characters and animals. Like the other New Age themes she explores, this reflects lifestyle developments in contemporary Japanese society that are well documented in the media. With the decline in the birth rate there is considerable media attention being given to the numbers of pets in Japan. According to Russell Skelton (1996), more than one-third of people living in Tokyo own pets. Moreover, according to a survey from the *Yomiuri Shimbun*, seventy-two percent of Japanese consider pets to be family and thirty-six percent prefer animals to people (Cameron, 2005c, 22). This interest in pets can be seen in the blog *Neko Brogu Manga* (Cat Blog cartoon) by Kyoko serialised in *Josei Seibun* magazine (January, 2009) featuring the adventures of a number of cats with voice bubbles superimposed over their photographs. Clearly the significance Yoshimoto attaches to animals reflects these trends.

In literary terms, Yoshimoto has often described her writing as 'fables'. The fable has a long and rich tradition in the West and is a genre that has been used by

Japanese writers such as Miyazawa Kenji. There is a significant difference, however, in the way Yoshimoto writes about animals compared with Miyazawa. Miyazawa Kenji wrote traditional fables using animals instead of human characters for a moral purpose. For example, in Miyazawa's short story 'The Fire Stone' (1992), a hare by the name of Homoi rescues a baby lark from drowning. In return, the king of the larks presents Homoi with a jewel (107). At first Homoi is pleased but with the jewel comes great responsibility. Because of his personal failings, a speck appears on the stone and at the end of the story it flies away (132). This fable teaches the reader a lesson about humility. The animals in this story are to all intents and purposes human beings in disguise. Yoshimoto, however, is more interested in exploring a world of the senses in which her human characters, animals and plants are equal. In doing so, she is free to create, as I have argued in this discussion, new ways of being which are not bound by a humanistic framework. Instead Yoshimoto blurs the boundaries established between her human characters and the rest of the living community as described by Westerling (2006, 30). Westerling notes that in Virginia Woolf's 1941 novel *Between the Acts*, 'Animal voices interweave with the human voices in the conversation that opens the novel' (2006, 40). In doing so, Westerling argues that Woolf 'restored human affairs to their embedded place in the wider community of earth's beings and forces' (41). Westerling is excited by the possibilities that ecocriticism offers 'at the beginning of a dangerous new millenium'. According to Westerling, literature can help bring the voices that French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty wrote were 'assumed to be silenced' into 'presence for a post-humanist future' (44). Yoshimoto, it can be observed, is exploring these same possibilities in her writing. To this extent, some of Yoshimoto's human

characters claim they are able to communicate with animals in novels such as in *Honeymoon* (1997a).

In *Honeymoon* (1997a), Hiroshi who has been abandoned by his parents and is the victim of bullying is described as liking dogs more than people (17). He also says that he can sometimes ‘understand’ animals. Manaka, the protagonist and his bride, thinks he is being stupid. She tells him sarcastically that when they go and see the koalas he can tell her what they are thinking (129). However, when Manaka and Hiroshi take a boat trip to see the dolphins, they see lots of ‘magnanimous’ dolphins who ‘deign’ to play with the humans. It is observed that from God’s eyes, human beings are like dolphins playing ‘wild’ and ‘primitive’ games. By watching the dolphins, Manaka and Hiroshi learn to see themselves in a new way and find a sense of meaning and purpose in life that has escaped them in Tokyo (149 - 154). Observing animals in the wild helps Manaka and Hiroshi discover this new sense of being.

Yoshimoto often depicts human and animal interaction in a positive light which is in stark contrast to the many examples of destructive human behaviour which are referred to in her writing. In *Mizuumi (The Lake)* (2005b), Chihiro, the narrator, sleeps with Nakashima-kun and suspects that he has been sexually abused because he treats sex as if it is a ‘bad thing’ (40). Later, she learns that he was kidnapped by a religious cult when he was a child. When he escaped from the cult he remembers walking past a farm where he saw some horses. Significantly, they were not scared by him and gradually he felt better until he patted them. He describes their eyes as being like the sea, ‘pretty and engulfing everything’.

Nakashima-kun cried and was thankful to the horses whose wild eyes returned him to himself (192). Together he and Chihiro plan to return to Shimoda to thank the horses (204).

Animals are important because of the role they often play in the rehabilitation of Yoshimoto's characters. In *Niji* (2002a), the narrator known as Watashi (I) is given a job looking after some animals and a garden after her third nervous breakdown. After her initial reticence towards them, Watashi begins to realise that they are helping her rehabilitation (68). Having lost her zest for life she is surprised by their vigour and strength and feels guilty that they are giving her so much strength. The effect of this interaction on Watashi is not surprising given the observation by Fox that:

Humans relax when there are animals around – just seeing them lowers the blood pressure – and this mix of human and animal has an ancient, primitive feel to it in a world where separation of man and beast, coupled with a kind of enforced sterility, is the order of the day (Fox, 2002, 52).

Estes argues that dogs 'are the magicians of the universe'. 'By their presence alone', she suggests, 'they transform grumpy people into grinning people, sad people into less sad people...' (1997, 130).

Yoshimoto depicts animal human interaction on an even higher level than this, however. In her stories, animals like plants, are capable of interacting and communicating with human characters. Thus, in *Honeymoon* (1997a), on the night that Olive died, Manaka recalls taking her for a walk. There was a strange feeling in the air that Olive was going to die (28 – 33). In *Argentine Hag* (2002b),

Mitsuko's father makes a tombstone for his wife in the shape of a dolphin. When she sees what he is doing, Mitsuko says, 'I forgive my father for not being present at mum's death. Totally.' The dolphin tells her 'firmly' that it is much harder for him because he was not there (85). This is one of a number of scenes in Yoshimoto's writing, both fiction and biographical, where dolphins and humans are shown having this kind of interaction. Even more so than other animals, dolphins have an added significance in New Age thinking. David Tacey writes in his study *Jung and the New Age*

It is little wonder that the dolphin and the whale have become key symbols of the New Age, because they express perfectly the condition of oceanic engagement and at-one-ment to which the New Age aspires (Tacey, 2002, 55).

Oceanic engagement is also at the heart of Miyazaki Hayao's 2008 animated film *Gake no Ue no Ponyo (Ponyo on the Cliff)*, which is a loose adaptation of Hans Christian Anderson's 1836 fairy tale *The Little Mermaid*. In a recent interview, Miyazaki stressed the importance of this theme saying

It's my personal belief that you can't separate yourself from nature. As you dig further into yourself, you would eventually reach the point of returning to the ocean. You're connected (Miyazaki, Quoted in Barlow, 2009, *The Age* EG 4).

Dolphins and humans experience at-one-ment in a number of scenes in Yoshimoto's books. Apart from the dolphins appearing in the wild in *Honeymoon* (1997a) and the statue of a dolphin that urges Mitsuko to forgive her father for his absence at her mother's death in *Argentine Hag* (2002b), in the novel *Iruka (Dolphin)*, published in 2006, Kimiko visits an aquarium with her boyfriend on their first date. She later recalls watching the dolphins play not yet realising that

she is pregnant (42). When she realises and tells Goro, her boyfriend, Kimiko then visits the aquarium to say farewell with thanks in her heart (219). Her baby is described as being a ‘little baby from the world of dolphins’ (247). It is also described as having moved ‘from the world of water to the world of air’ (252).

Given the significance of animals in the lives of her human characters, the cruelty of humans toward animals is then especially distressing in Yoshimoto’s writing. In *Iruka (Dolphin)* (2006a), Goro’s friends take him to visit a taxidermist’s shop in Bali, where they see some illegally stuffed gorillas with glass eyes that seemed to follow them around the shop. Later, Goro and Yukiko take it in turns to throw up in their hotel room (58). Unlike the idealised restaurant and shops where Yoshimoto’s heroines work, the taxidermy shop is not a healthy environment and the shop assistants look like they too have been ‘stuffed’ (59). Later in the novel, Kimiko moves into a friend’s house where she feels ‘something bad’ (91). In the closet she finds a stuffed *tanuki* (badger) and pheasant in a plastic bag. She cannot understand why people stuff animals, as a trophy or otherwise. In her dreams she is warned repeatedly that there is something evil in the house. She finds more stuffed animals in the attic and when the psychic, Mami, comes to tell her that she is pregnant, they bury the animals in the garden (146). Yoshimoto is clearly concerned about the treatment of the animals and as Yukiko tells Goro in Bali, ‘all living things feel regret’ (59).

Yoshimoto’s exploration of these New Age themes has not escaped critical attention. Apart from Ann Sherif (1999a), Yumiyama Tatsuya (1995) provides a general social context for Yoshimoto’s interest in healing in his paper “Varieties

of Healing in Present-Day Japan”. Yumiyama writes that interest has been growing in Japan in healing since the 1970s. Three factors have spurred this interest including the oil shock in 1973, the publication of Shirley MacLaine’s book *Out on a Limb* in Japanese in 1986 and the collapse of the bubble economy in the late 1980s. Yumiyama notes that defining the term healing is difficult especially since its contemporary usage applies not only to a sense of harmony between body, spirit and nature, as well as having an individual focus. Yumiyama argues that healing also embraces interpersonal relationships as well as the environment and world peace. Yoshimoto’s interest in the New Age can be seen as part of a general trend in Japan from the 1970s onwards.

Of interest to this discussion is a series of letters written by Yoshimoto Banana and Patrice Julien, an Italian chef living in Tokyo, published as *News From Paradise* (2005c). On the 6th of June, 2003, Yoshimoto wrote to Julien that soon after she had become pregnant, she had a dream in which a dolphin played with her and looked like it wanted to tell her something. She suggests that the dolphin wanted to let her know that she was pregnant (29). Clearly, Yoshimoto is not only interested in establishing links between the human and animal worlds, but also blurs the boundaries between the worlds of her fiction and her own life.

Finally, in her depiction of equitable interaction between animals and humans, Yoshimoto shares a similar sensibility with Japanese choreographer Teshigawara Saburo. Teshigawara’s dance company, Karas, performs a piece called *Green*, which features a cow performing a duet with a guitarist, geese marching behind a trombonist, dancing goats and frolicking rabbits, dancers and a live band.

Teshigawara sees both the dancers and animals as being ‘living, breathing creatures who will respond to the music and each other’. Sato Rihoko, a dancer with the company explains, human beings ‘are animals too and everything around us is artificial, so we have lost our connection with nature’ (Young, 2005).

This kind of thinking also found political expression in the seventeenth century through the fifth Shogun of Japan, Tsunayoshi (1680 – 1709). George Sansom (1963) writes that under his rule, whilst wild and hungry dogs may have been a problem in the city, it was punishable by death to wound a dog. The use of honorific terms such as Mr. or Mrs Dog (*inu sama*) was also prescribed when addressing dogs (134). Clearly, the significance Yoshimoto attaches to the relationships between her human and non-human characters such as animals and plants is not without historical precedence. And it makes her writing less insular, despite its focus on the inner lives of her characters.

A ‘pure heart’

In the second phase of her career, then, Yoshimoto explores how animals and plants help in the rehabilitation of her human characters. These characters have often been damaged in their interactions with other human characters. Not all human relationships, however, are destructive and perhaps not surprisingly those human interactions that are described in positive terms often have qualities that associate them in some way with animals and plants. This is particularly important given the non-realist style of Yoshimoto’s writing. Yoshimoto is not writing about nature as a naturalist and her depiction of animals and plants is heavily influenced by *kawaii* (cute) culture. Brophy has described this culture as

an ‘idealised, social world in which people, animals and things were infinitely happy and kind to each other’ (Brophy, 1994, 45). Thus, Yoshimoto’s depiction of animals shares more in common with the depiction of *anime* characters or *nuigurumi* (stuffed) toys like Totoro than descriptions of real animals. In fact, some of her characters are *nuigurumi*.

As has been discussed in Chapter Four, childhood is privileged in much of Japanese popular culture. Empowered by their innocence, it is children who fight the good fight against corruption. In a world beset with political scandal and economic crisis and a growing sense of ecocrisis, childhood has an added significance. In the short story collection *Nanbei to Furin (Affairs and Argentina)* (2000a), in the story ‘Mado no Soto’ (‘Outside the Window’) a teddy bear helps a child to come to terms with the death of a beloved grandmother. In the story, the narrator recalls something ‘strange’ that happened when she was seven years old. Her grandmother was critically ill and she spent the night alone while her parents stayed at the hospital. When she woke up at dawn she saw that the fluffy teddy bear that her grandmother gave her was not in bed. She looked around and saw it sitting with its face pressed up against the window (165). Looking out the window the narrator sees a beautiful dawn painted by God. She realised that despite her childish notion that ‘life is forever’, her grandmother would die as would her parents and she herself. She sensed something ‘unfathomable’ (167) and in this way the narrator comes to terms with death. By using a non-realist style of writing Yoshimoto is able to create not just ‘wise’ children and ‘fantasy’ women characters but also, as is the case here, a character based on a teddy bear that helps the narrator appreciate a sense of the cosmic mystery by admiring the

dawn together as well as reassuring her that death is not to be feared. In this way, Yoshimoto is continuing to subvert the conventions of 'serious' literature by infusing the world of childhood with a significance that some critics, as discussed in the previous chapter, argue threatens to lead to the infantilisation of Japanese society.

Rather than the infantilisation of Japanese society, Yoshimoto is actually engaged in a purge of those aspects of contemporary life that have led to the sad and sorry state in which Japanese society now finds itself. It is time to call a halt to the corrupt practices of the past which includes sleaze, hence, as has been discussed in Chapter Three, Yoshimoto's writing can be characterised by the absence of sex. Alwyn Spies (2000) might be correct when he says that there is considerable evidence to suggest that Yoshimoto's characters are sexually experienced but that experience is marginalised in Yoshimoto's writing. Yoshimoto's writing is predominantly part of a movement which Saitô (2002) argues is a 'distant descendant of girls' fiction' (1). Unlike Yamada Amy, Yoshimoto's writing attaches greater importance to textual pleasure than sexuality (Aoyama, 2004, 12). Thus in *Tsugumi*, Tsugumi and her cousins gather each week to watch their favourite program on television. When the series comes to an end, Maria lies in her *futon* in the 'grips of a wrenching sadness' (*Tsugumi*, 1989a, English translation 2002a, 67). It also comes as no surprise that in *Ôkoku Sono I.* (2002b), when Shizukuishi finds Kataoka-san and Kaede in bed together, she observes them in their 'nest made from small branches and dead leaves' and wonders why they are so 'pure hearted'? (69). This passage is significant because it shows how Yoshimoto idealises domesticated rather than sexualised human relationships.

Kataoka-san and Kaede are resting amidst leaves and branches in a scene that could have come from the 1942 Disney classic, *Bambi*. Elsewhere they fight and bicker but Shizukuishi observes that ‘only here can they return to their childhood selves’ (69). In this way, Yoshimoto continues to privilege childhood and innocence over adulthood.

Another sign of a ‘pure heart’ in Yoshimoto’s writing is an appreciation of food. Food is prominent in Yoshimoto’s writing and though her descriptions of foods such as the *tonkatsu* that Mikage delivers Yuichi in *Kitchen* (1988a) and the delicious sandwiches that Saseko makes in *Amrita* (1994a) she emphasises the pleasure of food rather than sex. Yoshimoto’s approach to food, however, has changed in the second phase of her career. Where fast food made the world of Yoshimoto’s writing recognisable, despite the occult fantasies and supernatural themes, her more recent novels like *Southpoint* (2008) and *Ôkoku Sono 1.* (2002b), have a focus on healthy food reflecting her wider interests in environmental themes. In *Southpoint*, Tetora’s mother Mao escapes to the country with her daughter to get from her husband who has recklessly created debts he is unable to pay. Like Shizukuishi and her grandmother in *Ôkoku Sono 1.*, their new lifestyle is a healthy one. Mao works in a natural foods café which is a significant departure from the predominance of fast food or comfort food in Yoshimoto’s earlier books. At first the locals thought Mao was crazy but they slowly change their minds as people start visiting the café for the organic coffee and homemade cakes she sells. She also starts to import organic cosmetics from the U.S. on the internet, organises workshops on making beeswax candles and sells organic vegetables grown by her uncle’s hippy friends (8). The shop is such

a success it is even listed in guide books to the region. A psychic friend subsequently moves to Gunma and opens up an Indian curry shop which is also a great success. In this way the enjoyment of food continues to be a prominent activity in the lives of Yoshimoto's characters.

Interestingly, the enjoyment of food is also an aspect of Yoshimoto's writing that lends it to being considered an example of a 'separatist literature of inner space'. Aoyama (2008) notes that in modern Japanese literature, food and cooking has long been considered a 'feminine' concern (7) which has led to the marginalisation of it as a 'serious subject in the academic and literary worlds' (8). Clearly, this is an aspect of Yoshimoto's writing that distinguishes it from the hard drinking, drug taking and sexually explicit masculine tradition of hard-boiled writing that Yamada Amy embraces but from which Yoshimoto has distanced her writing.

Living a creative life is also central to the development of a 'pure heart'. Yoshimoto's characters are variously involved in cooking, translation, jewelry making, traditional stone masonry, tea making, mural painting, music and quilt making. Involvement in these activities allows them to not only develop specific skills but also to gain an insight into the nature of existence. In *Mizuumi* (2005b) the narrator reflects on her work as a mural designer. She enjoys it because she gets plenty of work and she works on her own terms (42). Her current project, which is designing a mural for a kindergarten, is particularly pleasurable because she can focus on the children. They are her inspiration (44). She enjoys being able to draw on her surroundings in this way. Things come to her in an

‘unexpected harmony’ and she gets a sense of time and the world ‘dancing together’ (27). Like many of Yoshimoto’s characters, Chihiro’s job is a dream job and she feels that working on murals is ‘like a holiday’ (48). She also feels that her murals will never age (48) but hers is a ‘small mark on the world like a dog urinating’ (49). This last comparison is, of course, another example of the way in which Yoshimoto’s human characters are given non-human characteristics as a sign of approval.

The creative lives that Yoshimoto’s characters pursue in order to gain spiritual awareness and enlightenment (the equivalent of a ‘pure heart’) are, however, under threat. Thus in *Mizuumi* (2005b), Chihiro is given some bad news by her friend Sayuri in which there are plans to put the sponsor’s mark on the mural (127). They laugh when they see it (128). Sayuri plans to speak to the council on Chihiro’s behalf. It is important for them that Chihiro be recognised as a mural artist, not a billboard artist. In *Argentine Hag* (2002b, Bilingual Edition), the threat to the creative lives of Yoshimoto’s characters is even greater. Mitsuko’s father is an artisan who specialises in traditional stone masonry. His trade has diminished, however, because of the advent of wholesale discount stone shops. The narrator suggests that ‘in fact anyone can cut and burnish stones as long as he has a machine’ (5). Because of this threat to his livelihood, Mitsuko feels that her father had lived through a ‘turbulent age’ (75). In the pursuit of a ‘pure heart’, this story presents the reader with yet another anti-modern message to do with the dangers of progress. Mitsuko’s father’s skills as a stonemason are being rendered obsolete by machines. Yoshimoto is at pains to describe the importance of these skills that are being lost.

The greatest threat to the 'pure hearts' of Yoshimoto's characters, however, comes from urban life itself. In *Niji (Rainbow)* (2002a), the narrator falls in love with her boss, the owner of a restaurant, but finds herself in a dilemma because she hates affairs. She wonders why people have to be so 'complicated'? (174). Yoshimoto suggests that the reason human beings are so 'complicated' is because of the lives they have made for themselves in big cities. In *Niji* (2002a), the narrator, Watashi, and her boss fall in love with each other through their shared love for the animals and the garden. Significantly, their relationship develops on an intuitive rather than physical level. In these scenes, Yoshimoto explores how positive human relations are facilitated through an interaction with plants and animals. This relationship is contrasted with the boss' marriage which is the product of lies and deceit. His wife is pregnant to another man and the narrator wonders if this is what happens when you get rich? More significantly, given the ecocritical themes in Yoshimoto's writing, his house does not have the 'lived in dirty feel of a bird's nest' (54). Yoshimoto is critical of their lifestyle for having lost the simplicity and virtue of the bird's nest.

Yoshimoto's characters ultimately, then, seek uncomplicated relationships. Furthermore, given the ecocritical themes that this thesis has explored in Yoshimoto's writing the most fascinating development in the evolution of her thinking in this context comes in *Ôkoku Sono 3*. (2005a), when Shizukuishi observes, whilst on holiday in Taiwan, that the sensation of the heat of the sun and the cold of the water on her skin is like having 'sex with the environment' (182). In a sense, she is like Birkin rolling naked in the flowers in *Women in Love*, who observes that 'he wanted nobody and nothing but the lovely, subtle,

responsive vegetation, and himself his own living self" (1969, 120). Shizukuishi is at one with nature in a physical sense. This is significant because it dispenses with the complications of being involved in a relationship with another human being. This is comparable with Yoshimoto's treatment of death, in her early writing, which is usually sudden as in the case of a car accident, leaving her characters no time to come to terms with the death of a loved one. As these earlier characters confronted the fact of death alone, Shizukuishi now observes the pleasure her body receives from the environment without being distracted by the claims another human character might make in a reciprocal relationship. Whilst this can be seen as a selfish act in the sense that it is a case of pleasure being received and not given, the complication that another human character would introduce is eliminated. Thus the environment itself, like plants and animals both living and fluffy, is shown to be capable of interacting with Yoshimoto's human characters in a relationship that is free of complications.

The complications that Yoshimoto has eliminated from the relationship are the subject of the short story 'Denwa' ('Telephone') (In the short story collection *Furin to Nanbei*, 2000a). Masahiko and his lover are described as being so tired after he helped repack her suitcase that they fell into an 'exhausted sleep'. They are an adulterous couple but they are described as 'talking like any other couple' (21 – 22) and the room is filled with the smell of the 'home-made' *onigiri* that Masahiko has made. Yoshimoto describes this as a 'stupid setup that could only exist in big cities' (22). The narrator reflects, 'These days, you meet so many people it's hard not to have an affair. If your partner is busy, it's easy for you to have an affair'. The conclusion she draws is that 'neither love nor marriage last

forever' (22). Clearly, like Shimada Masahiko, Yoshimoto is suggesting that urban environments are unhealthy places in which to try and have a relationship because there are too many obstacles in the way of forming close relationships.

In *Argentine Hag* (2002b), there are further examples of these aberrations in human behaviour brought about by the urban environment. Mitsuko recalls how during her childhood her cousin became 'more and more unpleasant' after his parent's divorce and tried to rape her. Later, after he started living with his father, Cousin became addicted to pornography (109). Yuri (the Argentine Hag) tells Cousin 'you shouldn't look at women with your lust'. He asks if his lust is that 'obvious' and Yuri explains:

Well, yes, but that's not the point. You will miss the important person that you are destined to meet. Don't be led by lust when you are identifying the person who will be really important to you, and save it for that person' (*Argentine Hag*, 2002b, 113 – 7).

The lust that has replaced a 'pure heart' in *Argentine Hag* is presumably the result of divorce and Cousin's later addiction to pornography. The 'complicated' lives lived by people in big cities is blamed by both Shimada and Yoshimoto for leading to the development of perverse and aberrational behaviours.

Whilst Yoshimoto highlights elsewhere the importance of establishing a reconnection with nature, in the short story 'Miira' ('The Mummy') from the short story collection *Karada wa Zenbu Shitteiru (The Body Knows All)* (2000c), she continues to focus on the inner lives of her characters and the importance of having a 'pure heart'. In 'Miira' the female narrator is kidnapped and raped but

Yoshimoto is not interested in writing about her protagonist as a victim. The narrator observes the ‘terrible’ things that her attacker wants to show her from the tombs in Egypt and later, when she is able to pick up a statue and hit her attacker, she goes back to university and reflects that it would not be so bad to be made into a mummy (167-8). By focussing on the narrator’s internal response to these artifacts, Yoshimoto draws attention away from the attacker and, thus, the narrator is placed beyond the control of her attacker. A feminist critic might criticise Yoshimoto for ignoring the issue of imprisonment and rape. The narrator neither informs her parents nor the police. But, most importantly for the purposes of this story, Yoshimoto weaves a powerful narrative in which the male attacker is almost to be pitied. He acts as if he has learnt about sex from a video and reaches orgasm time after time but his pleasure is ‘deviant’. The narrator asks him when he last had sex and he tells her that it was in high school (102). Though she uses a non-realist mode of writing and avoids scenes that may burden the reader with ‘too much reality’, Yoshimoto shows that she is quite capable of exploring harmful relationships while at the same time creating strong female characters who can stand up for themselves.

Travel in the New Age

The Egyptian artefacts with which the narrator is fascinated in ‘Miira’ reflect Yoshimoto’s long held fascination with New Age themes. Apart from noting that she was interested in reading about New Age themes at the time of a 1995 interview, Yoshimoto also recalls enjoying non-fiction adventure books about topics such as the voyage of the Kon Tiki, the mystery of the Incas and

Tutankhamen whilst she was at junior high school (1995a, 41). Yoshimoto explores some of these mysteries in *Sly* (1996) as well as in stories such as 'Miira'. It is a theme in her writing that the artist and musician Hara Masami explores in the art work that he has contributed particularly for her travel books. These books feature photographs as well as colourful artwork depicting in a naive style, wide eyed young women in beautiful locations such as Bali, Egypt, South America, Tahiti and Hawaii, as well as local customs and traditions. These books are very much a collaboration between Yoshimoto and Hara. His artwork underlines the dreamlike quality of Yoshimoto's writing. They relate to the destinations that are documented in the photographs but only on a surface level. Yoshimoto's 'travel' fiction is a fiction of the interior. It is Hara Masami's music, however, which seems to have had the biggest influence on Yoshimoto as a writer. In a 1991 interview Yoshimoto explained that she wanted to create a musical atmosphere in her writing rather than that of a movie. Yoshimoto describes herself as a 'music person' compared to Murakami Ryu who is a 'movie person'. She says that 'I want to write words like music'. In relation to Hara's music, she says that her writing is 'very close to his music':

To an extent it wasn't as if I was looking for his music. It's a problem related to the Japanese language. I was looking for the association between the Japanese language and music – to me Hara's music is the embodiment of this. After that whatever music I heard I could feel myself growing (*Interview shu*, 1992, 14).

Hara Masami's music is clearly significant in the development of Yoshimoto's writing. His artwork further strengthens the relationship. Importantly, however, it is the dreamlike quality of their work together with a sense of adventure, beauty and mystery that is contrasted so much with the sterility of city life. Yoshimoto

once described the thing that was most distant from her as being a *daikigyo no OL* (an office lady in a big company) (1995a, 77). City life and the lifestyle options it offers, then, are not conducive to a sense of fulfilment for Yoshimoto Banana.

As has been discussed, Yoshimoto's characters often need to escape city life in order to heal themselves after experiencing some kind of trauma. Because of the increasing development of the Japanese countryside, the Japanese people are increasingly unable to experience a sense of the wild in their own country. Nancy R. Rosenberger writes that where in 'ancient times, the deities and creatures of the other world, residing in rocks, trees and mountains, represented this aspect of nature... In more recent times, it is represented by foreign lands' (1997, 146). Consequently, as a writer for her time, Yoshimoto has written a series of 'travel' books about places such as Bali, Egypt, South America, Tahiti, and Hawaii. She has also written about trips to Saipan and Australia. Interestingly, Italy, which she has visited a number of times and where she has won a number of literary awards, is a place she has not written about in her fiction. Ann Sherif observes that Yoshimoto emphasises the spirituality of Asian countries such as Indonesia, the Middle East and India in her writing which matches the marketing of Asia to Japanese tourists as a 'spiritual home' (Sherif, 1999a, 282). So, as is the case in Yoshimoto's writing, Asia has become the preferred option for those Japanese intent on making a pilgrimage travelling overseas. However, Sherif points out, 'Yoshimoto never denies the spiritual potential of Japan' (282). Like Miyazaki Hayao, Yoshimoto explores the rich tradition of spiritualism and animism that is central to Japanese culture.

In her 1993 study of the development of the *Bildungsroman*, Fraiman notes that travel, 'is not necessarily a literal journeying, say, from country to city; it may involve mental travel to a higher moral or emotional ground' (126). Ian Buruma notes that 'One of the earliest forms of travel in Japan, as in many countries, was the pilgrimage' (1984, 209). Denis Hirota writes that *yama bushi* (wandering holy men) like Ippen (1239 – 1289) 'roamed the landscape of medieval Japan' (1997, xxi). In the contemporary context, Opkyo Moon explains that, according to a study by Brian Moeran in 1983, nature tourism becomes a 'sacred journey' in Japan because of urbanisation. People who live in cities want to be surrounded by something else apart from 'packaged food, blocks of concrete and tight work schedules' (1997, 226). Whatever the reason, the Japanese have become famous for being tourists and in Tawada Yôko's story 'In Front of Trang Tien Bridge' Kazuko, the narrator, refers to herself as being a member of 'the tourist race' (*Facing the Bridge*, 2007, 56).

The yearning for a sense of mystery by characters who are trapped in urban lifestyles can be seen in *Marika no Nagai Yoru* (1994c), when Orange, one of the multiple personalities who live inside Marika, the protagonist, describes Bali as 'mysterious' and says that 'there are things in the air that you don't find in Japan' (65). In *Amrita* (1994) Sakumi observes on holiday in Saipan:

My chest ached. The air that surrounded me was so heavy it felt like it was winding itself around my heart. The trees and plants and flowers of the jungle twisted to form weird shapes, and the ground and the sky began to shake as if I were seeing them on the other side of a great kettle of boiling steam' (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 159).

Elsewhere in 'Mado no Soto' ('Outside the Window') in *Furin to Nanbei* (2000a), the narrator senses on a trip to Brazil, an 'overwhelming' darkness outside her hotel window that she has never known in Japan. She can feel the 'force of nature' and senses the vulnerability of people in the face of such power. Later, standing in front of the Iguasa Falls, she cannot take in the scope of the scene before her eyes which are attuned to the scale of 'ordinary Tokyo' (168). Alienated by the immensity of size and distance the narrator feels that she is dreaming.

Given Yoshimoto's reiteration that Isaac Bashevis Singer is a major influence on her writing (Ramsay, 2007), it is interesting to compare these observations with those of the narrator of Singer's short story 'Brazil'. Singer's narrator has also travelled from a large metropolis, in this case New York, to Brazil where his senses are assailed by the 'force of nature'. He notes:

The sky hovered low, thickly strewn with southern constellations. The stars appeared as large as bunches of grapes in a cosmic vineyard. Crickets sawed trees with invisible saws. Frogs croaked with human voices (*Old Love*, 2001, 14).

It is easy to see here the attraction for Yoshimoto of Singer's non-realistic style in which frogs croak with 'human voices' and in his shared interest in the 'force of nature'.

Travel allows for more than just the opportunity to experience the 'force of nature', however. It also allows Yoshimoto's characters to experience time in different ways. Kyburz (1997) notes that compared to the linear destiny of Judeo-Christian thought, human existence extends through an 'indefinitely cyclical

continuum' in the Buddhist tradition and ultimately, Yoshimoto's characters reject linear time and adopt a Buddhist sense of circular time. Kyburz also notes that 'Mankind in this environment is felt to be one of the numerous potential forms of existence, with no particular vocation for supremacy' (259). Yoshimoto's posthumanist blurring of the distinction between man, animals and plants is consistent with such Buddhist thought.

Because of her interest in spirituality, Yoshimoto has been described as a New Age writer. As has been noted, in his analysis of contemporary Japanese literature and spirituality, Philip Gabriel characterises Yoshimoto as a 'pop novelist' who writes 'New Age influenced narratives' (2006, 4). Gabriel is critical of postmodern literature, however, on the basis that 'spiritual questions are more likely to be deflected into parody' (2). This criticism of postmodernism as some kind of trickery that can only lead to a sense of spiritual vacuum ignores, however, Yoshimoto's focus on the inner lives of her characters as they struggle to make sense of their lives during a period of existential turmoil. As they struggle, they experience spiritual growth, particularly as they reconnect with nature. As such, Yoshimoto is very much a writer interested in spiritual themes.

The importance of spiritual themes in Yoshimoto's writing has been highlighted by Ann Sherif (1999a), who argues that during the 1990s Yoshimoto 'exhibited a growing obsession with searches for spiritual meaning in her fiction' (295). Furthermore, Yoshimoto's search for spiritual meaning has coincided with a wider search for spiritual meaning in Japan. However, she has not used this as a convenient opportunity to display her New Age credentials. As with her

reluctance to identify her writing with feminism, Yoshimoto has distanced her writing from New Age religions on the basis that they do not ‘resonate’ with her (Matsuye, 2001, 22). As a result, Yoshimoto’s search for spiritual meaning is essentially a solitary quest as opposed to the embracing of a movement.

Yoshimoto’s quest is typical of the search for meaning by the ‘outsider’, those artists and writers identified by Colin Wilson in his study *The Outsider* (1978). The outsider is an artist or writer typically engaged in an internal struggle. Like Nietzsche, they sense that ‘the world is not the human bourgeois surface it presents’ (233). This is reminiscent of the attitude presented to the reader by Mikage in *Kitchen* (1988) when she questions the idea that her behaviour can be measured by an arbitrary ‘standard of measurement’. Further, Wilson (1978) notes that according to William Blake, when men spend less time ‘getting and spending’ they can truly see and appreciate the world around them for ‘every leaf of every tree in the world, every speck of dust, is a separate world capable of producing infinite pleasure’ (254). This attitude is especially typical of Yoshimoto and the way in which she captures the ‘joyous intensities’ which surround her characters. The importance of food in Yoshimoto’s writing has been identified in this respect. Interestingly, Wilson argues that this way of thinking ‘comes more easily to the Eastern mind than to the Western mind’ (255) and ultimately, an outsider, is a ‘man who feels in the Chinese way’ (263).

The danger of cults

Yoshimoto's search for spiritual meaning, then, engages her characters in an internal struggle. They do not, however, turn to organised religion. On the contrary, there are warnings about the dangers of religious cults in novels such as *Hachiko no Saigo no Koibito* (1994b), *Honeymoon* (1997a) *Mizuumi (The Lake)* (2005b) and *Southpoint* (2008). Her warnings correspond with those of Doris Lessing whose own experimentations with Eastern religions in the 1960s led her to the conclusion that a spiritual guide is essential. She writes about how she watched many 'rash people' over the years 'come to grief without a guide' (Lessing, 1997, 321). In Japanese literature there is also the cautionary tale of the acolyte in Mishima Yukio's 1956 novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* who is delusional and burns down a famous temple in Kyoto. Clearly, the spiritual life is one in which caution is required. The male character in Yoshimoto's story 'Miira' who collects Egyptian artefacts and imprisons and rapes the narrator can also, perhaps, be seen as a victim of these 'dangerous religions'. He becomes possessed and wants to add the narrator to his collection as if she were some kind of stuffed animal. She herself is almost seduced by the sense of mystery that surrounds the artifacts that he has collected.

The most significant event in any discussion of 'dangerous religions' in recent Japanese history are the *Aum Shinrikyô* subway gas attacks in 1995 which had a profound effect on the Japanese psyche. Having had his sense of 'detachment' first shaken by the first Gulf War, Murakami Haruki's response to the 1995 subway gas attacks was to become more engaged with the world around him as

novelists, such as himself, need to write novels in order to challenge the ‘black magic’ of Asahara. Murakami describes writing as ‘white magic’ which can ‘transform something sick into something positive (Murakami in Ukai, 1998, 15). Murakami is careful to point out, however, that the danger of such cults exists only because the young people of the 1990s, like those of the 1960s, cannot adopt society’s values. Whereas the young people of the 1960s were saying ‘no’ to Japan as it was during that period of high economic growth, the young people of the 1990s were saying ‘no’ to the superficiality of the 1980s bubble economy. Whereas there was the possibility of political solutions to the problem of Japan signing the Japan-U.S. security treaty in the 1960s, there were no such solutions at the end of the century. This is the reason, Murakami suggests, so many young people decided to join the spiritual world during the 1990s.

Yoshimoto also had her perceptions about Japan challenged by the subway attacks. When she was writing *Honeymoon*, she said that:

I had thought until then that cult groups in America were more serious than those in Japan. But that changed in a single day. Up until then the subways were considered absolutely safe. You assumed that the stranger sitting next to you meant no harm. There was a feeling that that sense of safety had been destroyed. *Honeymoon* changed and I thought it was better to put the cult further into the background (Yoshimoto, 2001a, 22).

Apart from the threat to personal safety, these events also challenged the idea that the spiritual life is a life of spiritual peace and enlightenment. In 1988, the director, Itami Jûzô, made the satirical comedy *Marusa no Onna 2 (A Taxing Woman 2)* in which a lecherous cult leader creates a personal fortune by taking advantage of Japan’s tax laws. The Sarin gas attacks on the Tokyo subway,

however, alerted Japanese people to the dangers that these new religions presented and the fact that they were no laughing matter.

In the novel *Mizuumi (The Lake)* (2005b), Yoshimoto explores the danger posed by cults. The male character Nakashima-kun was the victim of kidnapping by a cult when he was a child. To emphasise the hardship this poses to his family, Yoshimoto compares his mother to the mother of Yokota Megumi, a high profile Japanese *rachi mondai* victim (a victim as a child of kidnapping by the North Koreans in the 1970s), when she describes how Nakashima-kun's mother uses the media to keep the spotlight on his disappearance until he manages to escape (178). By describing Nakashima-kun's mother as having the 'prototype of a mother's face' and the 'face of a Bodhisattava' (179), Yoshimoto also preserves the sanctity of religion and perhaps reminds the readers that cults are evil and are not be confused with true religion.

Yoshimoto first wrote about the dangers of cults in the short story 'Blood and Water' (In *Lizard* 1993, Translated into English 1995). In this story, the narrator, Chikako, leaves her family and the esoteric Buddhist sect her parents had joined twelve years earlier to go and live in Tokyo. Chikako says 'it struck me that the village and my parents reeked of defeat, and that I did too. A village full of losers'. Having grown up in the village Chikako is engaged in a search for the people of her dreams, people who 'weren't afraid of betrayal or heartbreak. They had a sense of purpose, and wouldn't give in even to abuse' (*Lizard*, 1995, 95-96). The reference to abuse is significant given the subsequent threats to the well-being of her characters described in Yoshimoto's writing.

In her 1994 novel *Hachiko no Saigo no Koibito* (*Hachiko's Last Lover*), which Sherif observes has a plot similar to 'Blood and Water', the narrator Mao tries to escape the 'shallow spirituality' of the religious cult that was started by her grandmother and to which her mother 'devoted herself' (Sherif, 1999a, p. 297). The fact that Mao's life is later placed in danger is a demonstration of the danger posed by the cult. In *Southpoint* (2008), Yoshimoto continues the story of Mao who is now living in Hawaii with her son Tamahiko, who explains to his lover Terako, how his mother had to escape from the cult after the villagers wanted to imprison her (*Southpoint*, 2008, 91).

In the 1997 novel *Honeymoon*, Yoshimoto explores the sinister aspects of a cult in more detail. When a member of the cult that Hiroshi's father belongs to, visits Japan from America, Hiroshi is reluctant to see him. Manaka dreams that Hiroshi has disappeared. When she goes out into the garden, something about his house is different. It has become concrete and Western. Manaka realises that Hiroshi is in America and, in some senses, Yoshimoto is revisiting the *Nihonjinron* theories first explored in *N.P.*. To further add to this sense of an anti-Western rhetoric, Manaka sees a piece of paper caught in the window in her dream which has a mark on it like a cross. Manaka plucks up her courage and enters the 'Western' house and in a scene reminiscent of Dario Argento's horror films, there is a thick smell of blood in the house and water in the hallway. Manaka finds a Western style altar inside, which fills her with 'apprehension' (*Honeymoon*, 1997a, 58-59). Later, when Manaka helps Hiroshi clean up his house after his grandfather's death they find an altar left behind by his parents. Inside, wrapped up in a bandage, is what looks like a human bone. Hiroshi is stunned. He tells Manaka to

wait when she tries to take it away. Hiroshi starts to cry like a child. He believes that the bone is his brother's (51). Later he learns that members of the cult had sex and then sacrificed and ate the child that was born in a ceremony that would give them power in the after-life (156).

Despite her concerns about cults, Yoshimoto has continued exploring her interest in New Age themes such as the existence of U.F.O.s and the 'oceanic engagement' with dolphins. Yoshimoto also often draws upon the influence of Buddhism on her writing (2003d). In *Amrita* (1994a) Sakumi says:

I believe in cycles. People associated with religion would probably label them karma, but I choose not to call them anything but what they are - simple and ordinary. Nothing more (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 208).

Further evidence of this influence can be seen in *Honeymoon* (1997a) when Manaka lies down in her garden under the *tsubaki* (camellia) and looks up at the blue sky. She observes the contrast between the fallen pink petals and the black earth and reflects that the same cycle is repeated year after year. It is only the people in the 'background' who disappear (15). Importantly, given the ecocritical focus of this chapter, this scene also paints a word picture in which, given the relegation of her human characters to figures in the background (rather than nation-building titans), her writing can be described as post-human. Even though the scene is described by a human character, the role of humans within the cycles of nature is peripheral.

The power of dreams and the importance of living a creative life

In Yoshimoto's writing her characters often withdraw from human society in order to heal themselves. Travel, as we have seen, is one form of withdrawal. Dreams are another. In the Japanese context, Reader writes that 'dreams are common vehicles for the transmission of spiritual messages, commands and powers throughout Far East Buddhism' (1991, 210). The Romantics also stressed the importance of dreams. Al Alvarez observed that, turning away from 'polite society', the Romantics 're-established the private self at the centre of the world' (1995, 181). The idea of a 'private self' distinguishes between man as an individual and man as a social being. The 'private self', ultimately, is the focus of Yoshimoto's writing. It is the 'private self' where the spiritual growth and healing of her characters takes place.

In *Hinagiku no Jinsei (Daisy's Life)* (2000b), Daisy dreams the same dream each year on her birthday after her friend Dahlia moves to Brazil. However, when she turns twenty-five, Daisy realises that she has not seen the dream for some time and she starts to worry. That night she sees the dream again but it has changed. In an interview with Kagami Ryuji, a researcher into astrology and a professional interpreter of dreams, Yoshimoto explains that:

The dream of the isolated cliff top house in *Hinagiku* is one I frequently had in junior high school. It was a horrible dream, which I usually had once a year but I started to see it every two months. A bad dream is saying something to people, so it is even better if I write about it. Of course I changed it to suit the novel (Yoshimoto, 2000b).

Despite acknowledging the importance of writing about her dreams, Yoshimoto says later in the same interview ‘I don’t think I ever want to know what it means’. Carl Jung wrote that having spent half a century investigating natural symbols, he had come to the conclusion that dreams and their symbols were not ‘stupid and meaningless’. In fact, Jung argues that dreams have much to tell those who try to understand their symbols. Whilst this may have little to do with buying and selling, Jung argues that a bank account does not answer the ‘deep desire of the human heart’ (Jung, 1964, 102). Despite denying any significant knowledge or understanding of his teachings Yoshimoto attaches the same importance and significance to dreams (Ramsay, 2007). Unlike money and technology, it is seen to enrich the lives of her characters. Furthermore, dreams are the key to Yoshimoto’s non-realist writing style in which chance encounters are perhaps not chance encounters after all.

Ultimately, however, Yoshimoto’s characters are most alive when they reconnect with nature. In pre-war Japan, nature was still a force to be reckoned with and Tezuka Osamu, recalling his childhood in a series of essays entitled *Grasu no Chikyu o Sukue: Nijyu Seki no Mikitachi e* (*Save our Mother Earth*), writes:

... I was very lucky to grow up in an abundantly natural environment. The mountains, the rivers, and the fields where I ran free, and the insect collecting which fascinated me in my early years deeply imbued my body and soul with an unforgettable nostalgia and sparkle...

We humans are always a part of Nature, no matter how far we evolve or material civilisation progresses. No advance of science can deny Nature, for that would be a negation of ourselves, as human beings (Tezuka, 2006, 12 - 13).

Today, Yoshimoto's characters are no longer able to experience an 'abundantly natural environment' in Japan. This is the cost of the economic miracle of the postwar years. The nihilism and fear of nuclear annihilation of the postwar period and the political activism and engagement of Yoshimoto's father's generation has receded in the face of global warming and questions of environmental sustainability. In Yoshimoto's writing, urban lifestyles are shown to contribute towards relationship breakdown and aberrant behaviour as well as impacting in a negative way upon the environment. Today, more than ever, the bursting of the economic bubble in 1989 coupled with disturbing phenomena such as *hikikomori* (social withdrawal), *enjo kôsai* (teenage prostitution), crimes committed against children, the rise of religious cults like *Aum Shinrikyô*, suicide pacts being formed on the internet, political corruption and the indiscriminate killing of people in Akihabara in June 2008, have led the Japanese to question the direction in which their country is headed. To this extent, like a Yoshimoto short story, there is no road map or technology that appears to be of any assistance during this period of crisis. Yoshimoto, then, is a writer for now, who writes about a world in which young people are turning their backs on corporate lies and failures and are searching for new ways of being that are obviously concerned with more than just selfish *shôjo* dreams about not growing up and avoiding responsibility. Like the quilts that Tetora makes in *Southpoint* (2008), Yoshimoto is at pains to stress the importance of a creative life that not only embraces the power of dreams but also the need to reconnect with nature as she weaves stories that blend sadness and joy encompassing experiences that extend well beyond the enclosed world of the *shôjo*. Whilst she takes her writing seriously she has managed to avoid burdening the readers with her concerns.

CONCLUSION: THE REALISATION OF A DREAM

What are we to make of the new ways of being that Yoshimoto has explored in her writing?

In general terms, this thesis has examined Yoshimoto's writing from two main perspectives. First, in terms of its relationship to Japanese literature as a national discourse, arguing that Yoshimoto's writing, like that of Murakami Haruki, represents a break from the goals of Meiji Period Japan where the impulse towards nation-building was based on a growing sense of economic and military power, patriarchy and established state sponsored 'ideals of femininity'. Secondly, this thesis has examined Yoshimoto's writing in relation to her position as a female Japanese writer during a period of great social change. Yoshimoto's writing reflects this changing society not only in terms of fluid notions of identity but also changing 'ideals of femininity'. Ultimately, this thesis argues that Yoshimoto Banana's writing should be read as opposing the essentially male *junbungaku* (postwar pure literature) movement that includes writers like Kawabata, Mishima and Ôe. Whilst there were a number of successful women writers in pre-war and post-war Japan such as Yosano Akiko, Sono Ayako, Ariyoshi Sawako, Hayashi Fumiko and Enchi Fumiko, they received far less critical attention than their male counterparts. One of the main reasons for this being the effect of the discriminatory label *josei joryû* (women's writing) being attached to their writing discussed in Chapter Two. Yoshimoto's writing has, by comparison, received far more critical attention even though it is best seen as an example of paraliterature rather than 'literature' itself. Yoshimoto's writing exists

on the margins of literature as it is written for a wide readership and eschews theory and dogma. It has popular appeal and commercial success but at the same time Yoshimoto manages to deal with serious themes found in mainstream, serious literature. Unlike writers of 'literature', however, Yoshimoto does not aspire to communicate with what Murakami Haruki has labeled a small group of like-minded people' (Murakami in Rubin, 2005, 202). Further, Yoshimoto is consciously writing outside what has essentially been a male tradition of writing. Like all writing, Yoshimoto's work must reflect the great social issues of the day but it does so in the language of her peers, in language that is inclusive rather than exclusive. Even when Yoshimoto flirts with narrative theory or *Nihonjinron* theories (theories of Japanese uniqueness) as she does in *N.P.*, her characters continue to speak in a conversational style. In her search for new ways of being, healing and spiritual understanding, dreams are central to Yoshimoto's writing. Yoshimoto is not promoting an agenda for social change. Instead, her writing focuses on the inner feelings, lives and moods of her characters. Ultimately, however, the message that comes through in Yoshimoto's writing is that, in the words of Mikage, 'Women are strong'. Or, as Saseko says in *Amrita*, 'I'm here just to be happy' (*Amrita*, 1994a, English translation 1997, 284). It is, therefore, this inclusive, positive nature of her writing that ultimately sets it apart from her more hard boiled contemporaries such as Yamada Amy and younger female writers such as Kanehara Hitomi.

Nation-wreckers or nation-builders?

The era of nation-building during which the Japanese anticipated the emergence of a Japanese Tolstoy (Starrs, 1998, 207), is well and truly over. The imperative towards nation building has been replaced by a postmodern sense of the collapse of a centre. A dynasty of flag-waving nation-builders has gone the same way as the traditional family. Women are constructing new 'ideals of femininity' and opting not to marry or have children. Yoshimoto, by exploring these changes and subsequently new ways of being, can be described as a postmodern, if not a feminist, writer. Postmodern in the sense that there is a blurring of high and low culture in her writing as well as a fluid sense of identity in her characters in which the blurring of gender differences is a characteristic feature. Conservative critics such as Yamada Masahiro (1999), paint these female characters as 'parasite singles' and the subtext is that they are nation-wreckers as opposed to nation-builders. This assertion ties in perfectly with the criticism of Yoshimoto as the writer of a 'selfish' or 'arrogant' literature. In the future, Yoshimoto may very well be seen to be undermining Japanese nationhood (as well as Japanese womanhood). The Japanese, as has been discussed in Chapter Three, have been warned in the past to be on their guard against 'the soft, effeminate, and grossly individualistic lives of women' (Rubin, 1984, 264).

On the positive side, the social changes in postwar Japan have allowed for individual differences which provide alternatives to government or military imposed 'ideals of femininity'. The Japanese nation was built on strictly enforced principles and there were harsh punishments for those who did not share the goals

of the nation-builders of the Meiji Period or the Japanese military during the 1930s. Currently, with the collapse of the traditional family, there are fears about the future of Japan, especially in relation to the decline in population, the ageing of the population and the related issue of 'guest workers'. Yoshimoto's narrators, however, are in a position to explore 'changing ideals of femininity' and provide positive outcomes from social change which are non-confrontational.

As has been discussed in Chapter Three, the 'New Breed' writers such as Yoshimoto Banana have explored notions of identity in a way that breaks with traditional writing in Japan. As her father Takaaki observes, a major feature of Yoshimoto's writing is the possibility for change that her characters have in relation to their sex or relationships (Yoshimoto, 1997b, 125). In this 'time of turmoil' (*Argentine Hag*) the 'New Breed' voice their concerns about marriage, employment, the ageing population, AIDS, juvenile crime, political corruption, environmental degradation and the need for political and economic reform. The question needs to be asked, however, are they as their critics suggest part of the problem or are they merely representative of social forces for change that are inevitable? Moreover, in the Japanese context, the role of the individual in society is at the centre of this debate given that the freedoms being adopted by the individual, especially young women, have few cultural precedents in Japan. Media attention has been drawn to the insensitive comments made by male politicians on the one hand who are resistant to this change and the behaviour of young women on the other who blithely appear to take for granted their right to indulge themselves. The amnesia that surrounds Japan's war of aggression in South East Asia makes the amount of attention they receive seem extraordinary

by comparison. Issues such as compensation for comfort women and the need for an apology by the Japanese government for war crimes receive little attention or support. Yoshimoto is reluctant to add her voice to this debate. Her stated intention in her writing is to write stories that will hold her readers' attention without unnecessarily burdening them. The focus of her writing is on the healing of the individual, not the nation. In a sense, Yoshimoto can be seen as contributing to the amnesia identified above, which is one reason for the concern raised by Ôe Kenzaburô about the 'New Breed' and their lack of political engagement. Despite Yoshimoto avoiding conflict, she like so many other young Japanese women, is perceived as a threat by more conservative, older, largely male, Japanese.

What is it about the young Japanese that make them so threatening for older and more conservative, male Japanese? The era which has moulded this and subsequent generations was a prosperous one. And the idea that Japan is a victim of its own success makes it a bitter pill to swallow. To rebuild the nation and make sacrifices in the period of austerity after the war ennobled the postwar generation in many people's eyes. In addition, it was during this period of postwar prosperity and increased educational opportunities that many Japanese took to the streets protesting against the signing of the Security Treaty with America in 1960 and later against the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, in line with student unrest around the Western world. Many of the concerns of these protestors in the 1960s continue to be voiced today. Despite her distancing her writing from various causes and movements, Yoshimoto is giving voices to many of the concerns that are being raised. She manages to maintain this sense of

distance by focusing on the inner lives of the individual which is why Yoshimoto may be considered a radical by some and yet deeply conservative and safe by others. One perspective from which she is seen as radical is from a postmodern perspective. In the decentered literary landscape of the 1980s, Yoshimoto was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize for *Kitchen*. One of the achievements of postmodernism is that it gave a voice to writers who are not necessarily male, educated or middle class. As a result, during this period, there was a shift in focus from nation-building to questions about identity. Yet, in this, Yoshimoto is at her most un-postmodern. The literary critic and translator Philip Gabriel writes that he was initially enamoured with postmodernist literature for many years but later he found himself increasingly in agreement with Fredric Jameson's assessment of much of it as 'depthless' (2006, 1-2). Yoshimoto's writing is, however, not 'depthless' in the way he describes. It is an ongoing exploration of the spiritual lives of her characters. Her focus is on the inner lives of her characters, not a self-conscious parody of religious ideology or texts with the intention of dazzling critics with her inventive subversion of convention. Her intention is to write contemporary fables in which Rapunzel is empowered and can find her own way out of the tower. Men may physically build nations (and towers) but Yoshimoto's female characters refuse to be locked away as victims of abuse and in this 'separatist literature of inner space' look deep within themselves and their dreams to find new ways of being that allow them to express their inner selves.

A female Japanese writer

Thanks to the reach of the New Media and the translation of so many of her books, both in English and other languages, Yoshimoto Banana is widely known overseas. Not only does she publish widely in newspapers and magazines throughout Japan, she has also embraced the internet. The official Yoshimoto Banana website was launched in 2001 in English and Japanese. A search of the World Wide Web will yield an increasing number of sites that feature information about Yoshimoto Banana in English as well as various other languages. It includes answers to frequently asked questions, a journal and new information and is an example of her public persona writ large, making it truly an example of 'global literature'. Ultimately, the official Yoshimoto Banana website can be seen as an extension of the relationship that Yoshimoto cultivated with her readers in the Forewords and Afterwords to her early novels and essays.

Yoshimoto's embracing of new media via her website allows her to cultivate a relationship with her readers which she updates daily with stories about her life, her husband and son Hirochinko, whom she writes about extensively, and the people she meets such as the Italian horror film director Dario Argento, whom Yoshimoto has long admired. As well as embracing new media, Yoshimoto has also collaborated with a number of artists throughout her career, most notably Hara Masami, Yoshitomo Nara and Naka Bokunen, as well as musicians such as Sakamoto Ryuichi, the Hawaiian based singer Sandii and Yamashita Kumiko. All of this allows Yoshimoto to distance herself from being a writer of 'literature', of which she is dismissive. In particular, the artwork and photographs included in

her books emphasise the dreamlike and non-realist qualities of her writing, thus, highlighting the inner lives of her characters. Despite her eschewal of her writing being considered as 'literature' Yoshimoto Banana does, however, list the various literary awards that she has received on her website. Interestingly, on the subject of being a female Japanese writer, Yoshimoto says that it is not easy. Compared with people overseas, the Japanese find it hard to accept that a woman can write for a living (2002c, 88). Yoshimoto argues that even respected writers like Setouchi Harumi, who by becoming a nun, is more often identified by her devotion to Buddhism than her career as a writer (89). In relation to her childhood, Yoshimoto is most thankful that she was never reminded by her parents that she was female and needed to act accordingly (25). She clearly benefited from the socially progressive views of her poet and literary critic father Takaaki, who was an icon for the period of student unrest in the 1960s. Yoshimoto's disavowal of movements is symptomatic of her generation's disengagement from the radical politics of the 1960s but, as has been demonstrated in the lives of young Japanese women in contemporary Japanese society, many of these ideals have become 'mainstream' and are no longer considered 'radical'. This may explain the panic of older, conservative, male politicians.

The success Yoshimoto has achieved in her writing has undoubtedly helped to raise the profile of female writers in Japan. The latest example of this success came on January 15th, 2004, when the 130th Akutagawa Prize went to two young female writers Wataya Risa, nineteen years old, and Kanehara Hitomi, twenty years old. Previously, the youngest recipients had been male and included

Shintaro Ishihara and Ôe Kenzaburô, both twenty-three at the time. Of the 2003 winners, Ashby (2004) writes that 'It's been amazing to experience all the excitement surrounding the latest winners of the Akutagawa Prize'. Of the five finalists in 2003, three were women. In relation to the media interest that this provoked, Saitô Minako is reported as suggesting in the *Asahi Shimbun* that there is an element of sexism in the 'media frenzy over the two girls'. Why, she wonders, is it normal for men in their 30s but not young women to be finalists? (Saitô in Ashby, 2004).

Saitô's response suggests that gender is still an issue which Japanese women have to contend with in their professional lives. It corroborates Yoshimoto's observation that it is difficult for a woman to be accepted as a 'writer' in Japan. Despite more and more Japanese women abandoning the stay-at-home life of their mothers and grandmothers they are still treated as curiosities. According to Saitô, however, there has been a 'change in the attitudes of the older men in the literary establishment'. Writers such as Yoshimoto Banana and Murakami Haruki have paved the way for such a change.

Given Yoshimoto's prolific output, it is unlikely that critics will jump to the conclusion that Kanehara has said everything that she has to say or that the future of Japanese literature is in danger. Yoshimoto Banana, like Murakami Haruki, has moved on to what she has referred to as the second phase of her career and started to engage with a broader range of social issues in her writing. This is a move that, in Murakami's case, long time critic Ôe Kenzaburô has applauded. Jay Rubin (2005) writes that Ôe Kenzaburô, the chief spokesperson for the Prize

committee which awarded Murakami the forty-seventh Yomiuri (Newspaper) Literary Prize for 1995, said that in *The Wind-up Bird Chronicle*, Murakami was able to respond to the expectations of a wide audience whilst exploring themes that are deeply his own (Rubin, 2005, 235).

An ongoing feature of shifts in literary taste is the ‘shocking’ nature of such change. Ishihara Shintaro won the Akutagawa Prize in 1955 for *Taiyô no Kisetsu* (*Season of Violence*). In a review of Ishihara’s 2004 memoir *Otôto* (*Younger Brother*), Todd Croswell and James Bailey suggest that with sales of 2.6 million copies, *Taiyô no Kisetsu* ‘made the Akutagawa’ (Croswell and Bailey, 1996). The translators in the 1966 English language version *Season of Violence* noted that:

The stories in this collection of translated works are, in a word, shocking. They are shocking for their content no less than for their being completely different, image-breaking portrayals of postwar Japanese youth (*Season of Violence*, 1966, 7).

What was so shocking was the ‘wild, wilful, and seemingly amoral youth of the story’ (John G. Mills, Toshie Takahama, Ken Tremayne, Introduction to *Season Of Violence*, 1966, 7). People’s capacity to be shocked by the new does not seem to be diminished by time. There was just as great a sense of shock ten years later when Murakami Ryu won the Akutagawa Prize with his novel *Almost Transparent Blue* (1977). Murakami’s characters, members of the counter-culture, embark on various drug-fuelled escapades that include group sex with African American soldiers from the Yokosuka army base. There is a heightened awareness in the novel of their non-conformity. A policeman says to the group:

“Hey, you kids, you’ve got it too much your own way, it bothers us, all of you lying around naked in the daytime, maybe it doesn’t matter to you, but some people – not like you punks – know how it is to feel ashamed” (*Almost Transparent Blue*, 1977, 102).

Yoshimoto Banana herself shocked the literary establishment in 1988 when *Kitchen* was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize. This time the shock was due to Yoshimoto’s literary influences that included children’s *manga* such as *Doraemon* and Stephen King. If she had been writing about bad sex, bad drugs and youth ‘gone bad’ she might have been more acceptable. She could have been filed away with the school of rebellious male writers like Dazai Osamu, Ishihara Shintaro or Murakami Ryu or equally rebellious female writers like Yamada Amy and, more recently, Kanehara Hitomi of whose anti-social themes and vocabulary Otomo writes ‘this taboo-busting approach of hers has been ironically welcomed by the literary establishment, mostly older male writers of her father’s generation’ (Otomo, 2006, 17). Instead, Yoshimoto Banana has created a literary style distinguished by its New Age pursuit of spiritual rather than sexual awakening. Her characters (both human and non-human) communicate on an intuitive level or through their dreams rather than on a physical level.

An interesting aspect of change in relation to this discussion of Yoshimoto as a female Japanese writer is the ongoing nature of change. This thesis has discussed the debate that surrounded the emergence of the *modan ga-ru* in the 1920s and the controversy shrouding the exact definition of the term *shôjo* and therefore the specific nature of the threat posed by this figure. The freedom that postwar Japanese couples enjoyed by the 1960s, compared with previous generations, was the subject of much controversy described largely in photographic evidence in

Life World Library Japan published in 1966, written by the influential translator Edward Seidensticker. There are photographs of young couples going on dates which their parents ‘could not’, young people protesting in a Tokyo Tomobishi tea room and a group of *raritteru* (sleeping pill addicts) partying at the beach. Seidensticker lets the photographs do the talking but notes that:

The urban youth of today are heavily engaged in the search for new values to replace old dogmas in which they have no confidence. It is a process prickly for themselves and painful to their elders, who still submissively accept the authority of family, religion and state that is so brusquely rejected by their restless children. Sometimes the quest of youth ends bleakly in a withdrawal into self, but more often it ends in the excitement of new ideas and new heroes (Seidensticker, 1966, 83).

Today, forty years later, the dangers of ‘withdrawal into self’ identified by Seidensticker appear to be very prescient. This is so, especially taking into account the amount of controversy surrounding the figure of the *otaku* (a term now used to describe people with an obsessive interest in anything from martial arts to *anime* and *manga* but which was originally coined in the 1960s by middle-class housewives which meant ‘she who is her house’ [Otomo, 2006, 7]) and *hikikomori* (social withdrawal) in the Japanese media. Moreover, this is precisely the tendency exhibited by so many of Yoshimoto’s characters that perhaps enables her readers to identify so closely with her writing in such large numbers, not just in Japan but globally. On the other hand, rather than being a writing of despair, loneliness and alienation, Yoshimoto has made a ‘withdrawal into self’ a step taking her characters on a journey of self discovery and healing. It is a non-confrontational way of transforming the self which conforms to traditional expectations of self effacement in Japanese society but also draws in the idea of

retreating into an 'inner space' favored by British women writers from the Brontë sisters to Doris Lessing that enabled them to create their own voice in a 'separatist literature of inner space'.

Yoshimoto matures, continually reinventing herself. Having adopted Banana as a *nom-de-plume* prior to her debut in 1988, she later changed the way her surname is written from *kanji* (Chinese characters) to *hiragana* (Japanese characters) in 1998 before embracing the internet in 2001. In doing so she has consistently distanced her writing from the masculine Japanese literary style associated with Chinese characters and 'serious' learning (from which Japanese women were traditionally excluded). No doubt, Yoshimoto will continue to challenge conventional beliefs about the role of women in Japanese society but she will also continue to pursue her interest in the importance of living a creative life. The importance of living a creative life to the healing process whether it be the making of stories or quilts, the making of jewelry or murals, is a major theme in her writing. Interestingly, this is a theme explored by the hard-boiled film director Kitano Takeshi in his 1997 film *Hanabi (Fireworks)*, in which Horibe, a former detective paralysed from the waist down after being shot by a gangster, rediscovers the will to live through the creative act of painting. This suggests that Yoshimoto's interest in the creative life and its powers of healing is not restricted to those who prefer a softer or more subtle as opposed to a more hard-boiled approach. In addition, in today's increasingly urban and densely populated world, Yoshimoto's approach to life can be considered to be radical because it runs counter to the economic and social programs endorsed and promoted by both industry and the state. The non-realistic mode in which Yoshimoto writes and her predilection for popular culture and its trappings may obscure the 'serious' nature

of her message, but even if she is not likely to establish a community of like-minded souls in the hills, Yoshimoto is clearly exploring self-help rather than social change. In this she is like Bob Dylan in refusing to either join or become the face of a movement. By refusing to make political statements Yoshimoto will continue to disappoint some critics and readers but her writing continues to respond to the serious challenges facing young people today.

Future directions

In a recent discussion in 2008, in *Rabukoto*, a magazine dedicated to raising awareness of environmentally friendly lifestyles, Yoshimoto, the writer and essayist Cho Cho and musician turned editor of *Rabukoto*, Sakamoto Ryuichi discuss love and lovemaking in an attempt to focus the ecological discussion on sex rather than diet. Significantly the discussion focuses on the decline of the ‘beast’ in young Japanese and the decline of sexual activity in favor of dating and friendship. Sakamoto argues that there is a lack of virile men (*Rabukoto*, 2008, 012). Yoshimoto jokes that the first time she met Sakamoto as a junior high school student she was aware of the ‘beast’ in him (*Rabukoto*, 2008, 014). The conversation covers a range of issues such as obesity, macrobiotic diets and the inability of young Japanese women to cook (015). Cho Cho also explains how she tried to live a more environmentally friendly lifestyle by not doing her nails, taking a bath every two days instead of daily and washing her hair with soap. Yoshimoto declares that she is incapable of doing this. She explains further that this is the major impediment facing the environmental movement, the idea that being environmentally responsible leads to an inevitable drop in quality of

lifestyle. It is her hope that industry can produce better products so that a drop in quality of life is not necessary (015). This discussion is revealing in that Yoshimoto's pragmatism is clearly at the fore. Whilst the environment is a significant issue in the second phase of her career, she also values the life that she lives and does not want to compromise the quality of that life. As always, Yoshimoto is both rebel and reactionary.

As a final observation, Yoshimoto's characters are compelled to live life fully to an extent that would be difficult in the world of ordinary, day to day work and family commitments. As such, these stories are fables which take the essence of what it means to be in love, or the essence of a sunset in order to explore the deepest possible meaning of things that are otherwise overlooked in a world filled with busy people. Yoshimoto is looking at the world through rose tinted glasses (which she refuses to take off) and in her writing she distils in essence all of those things that her readers may not otherwise have the time to savour and appreciate. It is this ability to stand back and appreciate the world that makes the world of Yoshimoto's writing unique, untainted by the wear and tear of reality. It is the distillation of a world which her readers will recognise but which takes them into a deeper understanding and appreciation of that world. It is like a religious experience, a communion but without overtly religious dogma. Yoshimoto's characters experience the joyous intensities of life but without the aid of drugs, alcohol or sex. Yoshimoto advocates instead a healthy inner life sustained by dreams, the imagination and the creative life. Needless to say money, business and the corporate world are the antithesis of this world. Instead, Yoshimoto's writing offers an antidote to readers who want to escape from the tired, stressful

world of modern life in big cities. This Jungian aspect to her writing makes it attractive and accessible to readers who share a similar need for a reconnection with nature. To give Yoshimoto the last word, she says of her writing that mood is the most important element: 'I don't think literature is such a great thing... It is great if a book can be like a weekly magazine someone picks up on the way home and loses themselves in for two to three hours or two to three days' (Yoshimoto, 1997b, 184 –185). This is a testament to her belief in the power of narrative, and especially of the power of dream, uninhibited by literary or political theory. As such it is a testament to individual vision, the inner life and the power of dreams.

APPENDIX 1

INTERVIEW WITH SHIMADA MASAHIKO

This interview was conducted in Melbourne, on 18/5/00. Shimada Masahiko is one of a number of contemporary Japanese writers of fiction with whom Yoshimoto is often associated such as Murakami Haruki and Yamada Amy. As well as participating in the 2000 Sydney Writers Festival, Shimada also visited Melbourne to present a lecture entitled 'The Dream of a Free Person: Talking about Suburbs, Suicide and Capitalism' at the Readers' Feast Bookstore. This interview gave me a chance to hear from a writer, as opposed to literary critic, about the reasons for Yoshimoto's literary success.

1. Kitchen was now published ten years ago. How did you react to it at the time it was published? Has your thinking about Kitchen changed over the last ten years?

Over the last ten years Yoshimoto has published lots of books. One comment I would make is that, Yoshimoto writes about themes such as sadness and happiness, very simple emotions which have been central to Japanese literature since the Heian Period and Sei Shônagon. In the Edo Period, Modori Norinaga, in a discussion about *karagokoro* (Chinese logic) and *mono no aware* (Japanese emotions), said that in Japanese literature there is a long tradition of expressing *mono no aware*. And yet there are many people who say that novels based on logic have taken over from those based on *mono no aware*. It is strange that in Japan *mono no aware* novels don't sell, isn't it?

2. What promise did Kitchen show at the time of its publication? Has this promise been fulfilled by Yoshimoto? In which novels do you feel this promise has been most fulfilled?

At first Yoshimoto sold lots of books, it would have been good if I had been able to buy shares. She has lots of secretaries and translators and she is researching about Argentina. Since *Kitchen* there has been some debate as to whether she would be able to continue writing.

3. In this thesis I am comparing Yoshimoto's fiction with novels by Murakami Haruki, Murakami Ryu and Shimada Masahiko. Do you think that this group (the shinjinrui) represents contemporary Japanese fiction? If so, what do they represent about the thinking and attitudes of contemporary Japanese people?

The term *shinjinrui* is no longer used. If you use that term you will be laughed at.

Murakami Ryu is like a stock dealer, he latches on to emerging themes and social issues faster than anyone else and also manages to write about them very quickly. That is his strength. He is like a journalist. He reflects the thinking of the people at that time. But it would be better to explore things that people don't already know. If you reflect the thinking of Japanese people today, as it is now, you will miss the boat. Reflecting the times is the job of the journalist not the novelist. But he is an excellent journalist.

Murakami Haruki is very complicated. He writes about contemporary themes but he doesn't attempt to provide any answers to any of the questions that he raises. The stories always have ambiguous endings. His conclusion is always that there is no suitable solution to the problem. Within that circumstance he will tell a romantic story and he has many readers.

4. *Ôe Kenzaburô has been critical of the shinjinrui saying that they are not serious enough. He fears that contemporary fiction will leave only a 'few objects like cars, TVs and microcomputers' behind. Do you think that this criticism is warranted?*

That comment was made nine years ago and the thinking at that time is now anachronistic. It was just an old person's cliché in denial. In relation to technology and literature, Ôe Kenzaburô learnt how to use a fax machine for the first time about six years ago. He thought he was keeping up with the times.

5. *Contemporary classical music (such as that of Steve Reich) is competing against music from the past and is experimenting with sound through sampling and other new technologies. Is contemporary fiction being influenced by similar factors?*

The writer has to do all they can to find a readership. They have to create their own readership. The writer has to establish a new communication with this readership. There are various efforts that need to be made. At the moment the biggest selling books, or the easiest books for a publisher to sell, are mysteries. There is a big market for these books.

6. *If the novel is being aimed at a wider audience, does this mean that the standards of literature are being lowered or is the awareness of the public being raised?*

Compared to twenty years ago, thirty years ago, the number of readers has increased. But what the reader is interested in has changed. The number of people who think that literature should entertain has increased whilst the number of people who think that literature must be high quality and contain new philosophies has decreased.

7. *What has been the greater need for Japanese novelists since the Meiji Period, the need to explain Japan to Japanese people or the need to explain Japan to an international audience?*

Japanese people don't really need Japan to be explained to them do they? They understand their own times and the common debates of their own times. But for foreigners the context needs to be explained. But to take that to extremes it is related to what kind of language is the Japanese language? How do you teach the Japanese language well? To explain these things you need to have a strong framework or logic to do it in. Amongst Japanese it is not necessary to have such a framework. But when you are talking to people who do not understand Japanese very well if you want to explain how Japanese people think you have to invent such a framework to do this in. There is a big gap I think.

8. *In a newspaper interview (Yomiuri Shimbun) in 1995 you said that 80% of contemporary Japanese writers are writing in an orthodox Japanese style. How would you define the 'orthodox' Japanese style? Is such orthodoxy possible in the global market?*

Under foreign influences we need to reform the Japanese language. There are not many people who are aware of this I think. We need to communicate in Japanese but also we need to consider how we represent Japan and what metaphor should we use to represent Japan. Should we use technology? Should we use tradition? Maybe we should use the romance genre?

When the average person writes a novel they fall into certain categories. There are only percent of writers who do not fall into these categories. Previously you chose the category that you will use and then wrote about Japan. But there are Japanese people who have been forgotten about in Japan, there is a forgotten Japan that nobody can find and a Japan that has not yet been discovered. Only 20 per cent of Japanese writers are working hard in the language to find the answers to these questions.

9. *Are contemporary Japanese novelists free from the need to explain Japan or is this still a function of Japanese literature?*

Yes, very much so because politicians misrepresent the country. It should not become misunderstood. If they were journalists, Japan wouldn't be misunderstood would it?

10. *In this environment, how would you define the difference between literature and fiction and literature? What category would you put Yoshimoto Banana into?*

Let's think about history and the novel for a while. History is about facts and the collection of those facts that come to the surface. Lack of historical material can be a problem. In a novel, invention or the use of the imagination is allowed. In history there is a plot. Historical plot is determined by the method of interpretation. The plot of a novel is determined by how the novel is going to entertain the reader, and what information is going to be provided to the reader. Therefore history and the novel are very different.

Of course literature includes history. The novel is also included in literature. And within the novel, fiction is a genre of literature... Romance.... Satire... Much data is collected like in an encyclopedia.... There are numerous genres. Banana writes fiction.

APPENDIX 2

INTERVIEW WITH YOSHIMOTO BANANA

Over the years Yoshimoto has been interviewed many times. These interviews have focussed on her book sales, her readers, authors she admires, movies and so on. In a recent interview (2000) Yoshimoto suggested she would like to write the type of book that might be picked up in a hundred years at a lonely mountain inn and hold a reader's interest. Yet Yoshimoto is a publishing phenomenon whose success has 'made her so famous the Japanese foreign ministry was handing out copies of her book to foreign visitors at the 1993 G-7 summit in Tokyo' (Buruma, 1996, p 31). Her success is inescapable. In 1993, Ôe Kenzaburô observed that Murakami Haruki and Yoshimoto were outselling all other Japanese writers put together. In 2000, Shimada Masahiko (Appendix 1) facetiously suggested that if Yoshimoto were a company, he would have liked to have bought shares when they were first released. Yoshimoto Banana was unwilling to grant a personal interview for this thesis but agreed to answer questions sent to her office. The following questions were sent and answered by email in January, 2007. The focus is the environmental themes that have emerged in the second phase of her career. In particular, I was curious as to who her main influences have been in this respect. Yoshimoto's answers add weight to the notion that she is a writer of global literature as she cites her main influences as being William S. Burroughs, Carlos Castañeda and Isaac Bashevis Singer.

1. In your writing there are references to archetypal figures such as Adam and Eve. Has Jung's writing on archetypes been an influence in the way you see your characters such as Tadokoro san?

I have only studied Jung's work briefly, therefore he has had little influence on my writing I think. I remembered hearing about a large Japanese company where there was someone who had nothing to do when I was writing Tadokoro san.

2. In your more recent writing such as Iruka and the Ôkoku series, your characters communicate with plants and animals. Again Jung wrote about these ideas. If not Jung, which other writers have influenced your thinking about this type of communication?

William S. Burroughs (*Inside the Cat*) and Isaac Bashevis Singer have both influenced me. But most of all I have been influenced by Carlos Castañeda.

3. What do you think is the significance of your characters being able to communicate with plants and animals?

There are many invisible things in the world, we can communicate without words. And so, in Japan, we believe that mountains and rivers, the earth and rocks have souls or else gods live there. This is an important element in my writing.

4. Do you believe that Shizukuishi was wrong to save the cactus plants before worrying about her human neighbours in Ôkoku Sono I.?

At that point, it was not possible to save her neighbours so the cactus was not saved ahead of other people. When you think that some people love their plants more than their neighbours, I guess this is possible.

5. In your recent writing you have criticized the effects of overdevelopment on the environment and the effect of city life on relationships. Do you believe this environmental perspective is new to your writing? How significant is this environmental focus on your writing?

It depends on the theme of the novel. There is no escaping the issue of the environment in Japan so it occurs frequently in my writing. I don't make a big issue of the environment in my writing.

6. Can you now be described as a writer with an environmental consciousness? Do you feel that you belong to a wider environmental movement?

I want to explore my ideas just in my novels, I don't want to be associated with any movements. When the reader finishes my book, I want them to realise the beauty of what is around them.

7. In your interview with Kawai Hayao you have said that your childhood in Tokyo's shitamachi was a wonderful time of risk taking. Since then Tokyo has changed. Do you think Tokyo is a good place to bring up children today?

Compared to the rest of the world it is in bad shape you have to say. It has many things and a good education system. Despite this, things are in an awful state. There is nowhere like Japan where there are so many stressed people and it is not good for children.

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