Voices of Abused Children in Contemporary Japanese Fiction: Sayaka Murata's *Tadaima Tobira* and *Chikyūseijin*[1]

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1. Introduction

Contemporary Japanese writer Sayaka Murata 村田沙耶香 (1979) is well known for her unique depiction of sexuality, gender roles, and social nonconformity. For instance, in her Akutagawa Prize-winning novel, *Konbini Ningen* コンビニ人間 (*Convenience Store Woman*, 2016), she portrays a 36-year-old asexual woman who – being unable to assimilate into society, – finds her purpose in life as a convenience store clerk. As a socio-cultural critique of the contemporary family system, Murata has repeatedly addressed the issue of child abuse in her fiction. In her debut work, *Junyū* 授乳 ([Breastfeeding], 2003), she portrayed the problematic relationship between a seductive junior high school girl and her private teacher, a 28-year-old young man with an abusive childhood. She has elaborated further on the topic in her more recent works, such as *Tadaima Tobira* タダイマトビラ ([The Welcoming Door], 2011) and *Chikyūseijin* 地球星人 (*Earthlings*, 2018).

Child abuse has been a recurring topic in contemporary Japanese literature. However, the literary representations of child abuse in Japanese fiction have remained under-researched. Therefore, in order to provide a basis for further discussions, this essay provides some background information on child abuse as a relevant social problem in contemporary Japanese society and introduces some of the most significant literary texts written on the issue.

Despite being a common social phenomenon, child abuse often remains undiscovered. Neglected and abused children tend to remain silent about their condition[2], and social taboos around domestic violence and child abuse also make it difficult for victims to share their experiences. As psychiatrist Judith Herman wrote in her famous work, *Trauma and Recovery*, 'When the victim is already devalued (a woman, a child), she may find that the most traumatic events of her life take place outside the realm of socially validated reality'; therefore, 'her experience becomes unspeakable'[3]. The word 'unspeakable' refers not only to the social taboos surrounding traumatic events but also to the nature

[1] This article is based on my presentation 'Voices of Abused Children in the Works of Contemporary Female Writers' at the 16th International Conference of the European Association for Japanese Studies on 26 August 2021 (online).

[2] Ruth S. Kempe and C. Henry Kempe, *Child Abuse* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 39–40.

[3] Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, 3rd edn (New York: Basic Books, 2015), p.8.

of the traumatic experience itself. J. Roger Kurtz elaborates on the psychoanalytic understanding of trauma as an 'event so overwhelming that it cannot be processed normally at the time of its occurrence, so that its memory is effectively blocked but returns to haunt the victim until it is appropriately confronted and dealt with'[4]. Since reconstructing the traumatic memory is essential for recovery[5], literary narratives have gained significant attention in trauma studies. Many trauma theorists have argued that literary narratives that evoke traumatic experiences could communicate psychic pain more effectively than direct representations that often fail to capture the essence of the 'unspeakable' traumatic experience[6]. In other words, literary narratives can provide a platform where the 'unspeakable' can be spoken by those whose voices might never be heard otherwise.

Supported by psychiatric-psychoanalytic findings on childhood trauma, I will analyse how Murata uses literary narratives to explore the harmful effects of child abuse and neglect in *Tadaima Tobira* and *Chikyūseijin*. Through a close reading of the texts, I will discuss how Murata employs grotesque and surrealistic elements to describe the characters' 'unspeakable' experiences.

2. Child abuse as a social phenomenon and its literary representations

In 2018, the tragic death of five-year-old Yua Funato 船戸結愛, also known as the 'Meguro Ward Child Abuse Case' (目黒女児虐待事件), was widely reported in the Japanese media and raised social awareness about the lack of adequate child protection structures in Japan. The first Child Abuse Prevention Act (児童虐待防止法) was enacted as early as 1933 (repealed with the Child Welfare Act [児童福祉法] in 1947). However, the problem of child abuse did not gain notoriety in Japan until the nineties, and the law did not define the term child abuse (児童虐待) until 2000. The new Child Abuse Prevention Act (児童虐待の防止等に関する法律, enacted in 2000) distinguished between physical, sexual, psychological/emotional abuse and neglect, making it easier to report child abuses cases[7]. However, as recent tragic cases demonstrate, child abuse remains an unresolved problem in Japanese society, and the number of victims continues to rise[8].

Following recent high-profile cases, the Japanese Cabinet approved amendments to the Child

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[4] J. Roger Kurtz, 'Introduction' in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. by J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 1–17 (p.3).

[5] According to Judith Herman, recovery from traumatic experiences unfolds in three stages: establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning (reconstructing the traumatic memory), and reconnection with ordinary life. Herman, p. 155.

[6] Joshua Pederson, 'Trauma and Narrative' in *Trauma and Literature*, ed. by J. Roger Kurtz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), pp. 97–109 (pp.97–98).

[7] Makiko Okuyama, 'Child Abuse in Japan: Current Problems and Future Perspectives', *Japan Medical Association Journal – JMAJ*, 49.11–12 (2006), 370–374 (pp.370–371)
<https://www.med.or.jp/english/pdf/2006_11%2B/370_374.pdf> [accessed 5 June 2021].

[8] 'Japan Sees Record Number of Children Abused in 2020 Amid Pandemic', *Kyodo News*, 13 March 2021. <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/03/57be964f08a4-japan-sees-record-number-of-children-abused-in-2020-amid-pandemic.html> [accessed 1 August 2021].

Welfare Act and the Child Abuse Prevention Act in 2019, such as banning corporal punishment against children by their parents and strengthening the ability of welfare workers to intervene when necessary. Meanwhile, children's right to express their opinions has also become a subject of legal debate[9]. It is often difficult for children to voice their experiences and views, and victims who try to raise their voices are most likely to face social rejection. This was the case in 1993 when manga artist Shungiku Uchida 内田春菊 published her semi-autobiographical fiction, *Fazāfakkā* ファザーファッカー [Father Fucker]. By breaking the taboo around the representation of incest and domestic violence, *Fazāfakkā* gained wide attention and triggered conversations on the topic. While psychiatrist Satoru Saitō 斎藤学 praised Uchida's novel for allowing a rare insight into the psychology of child abuse from the victim's perspective[10], she was attacked for publishing her story[11].

Along with the growing public interest in child maltreatment in the nineties, child abuse has become a frequent topic in Japanese literature[12]. For instance, in 1999, Arata Tendō 天童荒太 published a mystery novel, *Eien no Ko* 永遠の仔 [The Eternal Child], which centres on three childhood abuse survivors who help each other to overcome their traumatic past while solving mysterious cases. Exploring contemporary social problems, *Eien no Ko* became a bestseller in a short time and was adapted into a TV series in the following year. It was nominated for the Naoki Prize and awarded the Mystery Writers of Japan Award in 2000. We can agree with Tendō that the prize was also a recognition of those people 'who are doing their utmost to stay alive despite their trauma'[13].

Another novel that gained recognition is Fuminori Nakamura's 中村文則 *Tsuchi no Naka no Kodomo* 土の中の子供 (*The Boy in the Earth*) from 2005. The Akutagawa Prize-winning story

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[9] Asako Kuroda, Satoko Nakagawa and Eri Misono,'Listening to Children's Concerns Key to Japan Legal Revisions for Stopping Abuse', *The Mainichi*, 4 June 2021.
<https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20210603/p2a/00m/0na/022000c> [accessed 1 August 2021].

[10] Satoru Saitō 斎藤学, 'Kaisetsu Subete ha Shōsetsu Fazāfakkā kara Hajimatta 解説　すべては小説『ファザーファッカー』から始まった [Commentary It All Started with the Novel *Fazāfakkā*]', in *Fazāfakkā* ファザーファッカー by Shungiku Uchida 内田春菊 (Tōkyō: Bunshunbunko, 2018), pp. 215–221.

[11] For a detailed analysis of *Fazāfakkā* see Adrienne Carey Hurley, *Revolutionary Suicide and Other Desperate Measures: Narratives of Youth and Violence from Japan and the United States* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2011).

[12] Atsushi Hirata 平田厚, *Gyakutai to Oyako no Bungakushi* 虐待と親子の文学史 [A Literary History of Abuse and Parent-Child Relationships] (Tōkyō: Ronsōsha, 2011), p.257.
Hirata provides a detailed list of the related literary works published before 2011 in *Gyakutai to Oyako no Bungakushi*. As he is a lawyer, his focus is on exploring the historical and social changes through the texts, not on the literary analysis itself. Nevertheless, his book provides an excellent basis for literary studies as well.

[13] Tendō's award acceptance remarks. Nihon Suirisakka Kyōkai 日本推理作家協会, '2000nen Dai 53kai Nihon Suirisakka Kyōkaishō Chōhen oyobi Rensakutanpenshū Bumon, 2000 年第 53 回日本推理作家協会賞 長編及び連作短編集部門 [The 53rd Mystery Writers Association of Japan Award for Novels and Short Story Cycles, 2000]' (2022), <www.mystery.or.jp/prize/detail/10532>
[accessed 10 January 2022]. (My translation.)

describes the struggle of a young, severely depressed taxi driver trying to overcome his abusive childhood. He was raised in an orphanage after his parents abandoned him, and his foster parents attempted to bury him alive. As an adult, he daydreams of suicide and repeatedly pictures himself returning to the earth. His traumatic memories come back to haunt him when his birth father suddenly reappears in his life. The fact that *Tsuchi no Naka no Kodomo* received the prestigious Akutagawa Prize illustrates the growing interest in literary representations of childhood trauma. However, the mixed reviews to Nakamura's story show the difficulties of such attempts even though it was announced as the winner. Among the members of the selection committee, the most critical was Ryū Murakami 村上龍, who stated that Nakamura's first-person narration simply imitates the seriousness, without any real pain or fear[14].

Over the past decade, the topic of child abuse has become even more abundant in Japanese literature; with works ranging from personal confessions, such as Miri Yū's 柳美里 nonfiction *Famirī Shīkuretto* ファミリー・シークレット ([Family Secret], 2010), to suspense and other forms of entertaining fiction. Some of the better-known titles include *Saka no Tochū no Ie* 坂の途中の家 ([The House on the Slope], 2011–13) by Mitsuyo Kakuta 角田光代, and *Kimi wa Ii Ko* きみはいい子 ([You're a Good Kid], 2012) by Hatsue Nakawaki 中脇初枝 – both of which have been adapted into the screen. In addition, novels based on actual cases have been published as well, such as Amy Yamada's 山田詠美 *Tsumibito* つみびと ([Sinners], 2019), which explores the 2010 Osaka child abandonment case[15] from a complex, multigenerational perspective. Listing all the related novels would exceed the scope of this essay; however, the above summary gives us an insight into the significance of child abuse fiction in contemporary Japanese literature.

In Murata's case, the emergence of neglectful and abusive mothers in her fiction can be associated with her continuous attempts to challenge the existing stereotypes of traditional gender roles and motherhood. The complexity of the mother-daughter relationship is a recurring theme in her novels, as along with the characters' antipathy towards society and the modern family system. However, in *Tadaima Tobira* and *Chikyūseijin*, the protagonists' unique and often disturbing views on society are inseparable from the abuse they suffer at home. In these novels, Murata portrays various forms of child maltreatment and invites readers to approach the problem from the victim's perspective.

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[14] Ryū Murakami 村上龍 and others 'Senpyō 選評 [Review]', *Bungeishunjū*, 83.12 (2005), 382–386 (p. 384).
Ryū Murakami also addressed the issue of child abuse in his fiction. For instance, his 1980 novel, *Koinrokkā Beibīzu* コインロッカー・ベイビーズ (*Coin Locker Babies*) follows the life of two coin-operated-locker babies and can be read as a social commentary on the increasing child neglect around that time.

[15] A 23-year-old single mother abandoned her children, a three-year-old girl and a one-year-old boy, in an apartment in Osaka, letting the children die.
'Mom Held After Children Found 'Starved to Death' in Osaka Flat,' *The Japan Times*, 31 July 2010. <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2010/07/31/national/mom-held-after-children-found-starved-to-death-in-osaka-flat/> [accessed 10 January 2022].

3. ‘Children that nobody is looking for’ – Emotional neglect in *Tadaima Tobira*

Tadaima Tobira was first published in the August 2011 issue of the literary magazine *Shinchō* 新潮, and was shortlisted for the 25th Mishima Yukio Prize. It is narrated retrospectively by a teenage girl named Ena Arihara 在原恵奈. The novel opens with a prologue where we learn that Ena has been desperately looking for the door that will finally take her home, and now she has finally found it. The following chapters describe Ena’s struggles to find that door throughout her adolescent years, as well as her changing notions of family.

Weiquing Lu, who discussed the novel from the perspective of ethical literary criticism, assessed the story as Murata’s attempt to create a new family ethic unconcerned with maternal love[16]. As Lu pointed out, the Arihara family is dysfunctional – both parents fail to fulfil their responsibilities. The mother does not love her children, and the father is mostly absent. While Ena’s little brother, Keita 啓太, suffers from the situation, Ena does not expect her mother to love them. Instead, as a fellow woman, she sympathises with her. Focusing on the fact that Ena learns how to replace maternal love on her own, Lu argued that the novel is an attempt to liberate women from the failed system of the family[17]. Lu’s argument is thought-provoking, but we should not overlook the circumstances that led to Ena’s behaviour and her rejection of maternal love, namely, her abusive childhood.

In the novel’s opening chapter, Ena is a fourth grader in elementary school and lives in a small, light blue house with a white door in the suburbs. Ena’s friend, Chie 千絵, envies her for living in such a cute house, but the building reminds Ena of an aquarium where the four of them were ‘swimming freely’ (自由に泳いでいた)[18]. As noted above, Ena’s mother is incapable of loving her children. Disturbingly, instead of hiding her true feelings, she talks openly about her antipathy towards motherhood in front of her offspring. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, a neighbour comes to complain about Keita, who hits her son. Ena’s mother apologises but starts complaining about people who love their children too much as soon as their neighbour leaves. Ena reassures her mother that she does not expect her to love them just because she gave birth to them, but Keita is hurt by his mother’s words.

According to the Child Abuse Response Manual (子ども虐待対応の手引き) issued by the Ministry of Health Labour and Welfare of Japan, neglect includes the ‘failing to meet the child’s emotional needs (e.g. love deprivation)’ besides other negligent behaviours that endanger the child’s well-being. Emotional neglect shows similarities with emotional abuse that includes ‘repeatedly

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[16] Weiquing Lu 呂衛清, ‘Murata Sayaka Tadaima Tobira ni Taisuru Bungakurinrigakuteki Hihyō 村田沙耶香『タダイマトビラ』に対する文学倫理学的批評 [Understanding *Tadaima Tobira* from the Perspective of Ethical Literary Criticism]’, *Hikaku Nihon Bunkagaku Kenkyū*, 9 (2016), 87–100 (p. 96) <http://doi.org/10.15027/50075>.

[17] Lu, p. 96.

[18] Sayaka Murata 村田沙耶香, *Tadaima Tobira* タダイマトビラ [The Welcoming Door] (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 2012). All translations from *Tadaima Tobira* are mine. Hereafter the same.

saying things that hurt the child's feelings'[19]. Ena's mother is apparently unaware of her abusive behaviour and its consequences. When Ena warns her not to say hurtful things in front of Keita, she bluntly asks if she has said something inappropriate again. The mother's attitude in *Tadaima Tobira* is exaggerated to the point of being comical. Nevertheless, the consequences of her unintended behaviour are serious.

For instance, Keita is desperate to get adults' attention: he constantly misbehaves, pretends to be sick, and frequently runs away. However, his attempts remain fruitless, as his mother does not show any particular interest in him. Unlike Keita, who describes their home as 'hell' (地獄), Ena accepts that they are raised without love and is annoyed by her brother's behaviour. On an occasion when she is sent to find her missing brother, she simply notes that they are 'children that nobody is looking for' (私達は探されない子供なのだ) and despises her brother for not understanding it.

Over the years, Ena has developed her own idea about the ideal family in which kinship has no significance. She is ten years old when she overhears her parents arguing with each other. Ena's father blames his wife for not showing enough affection towards the children and letting the family fall apart. The mother argues that she does not understand why she should love someone just because she gave birth to them. Ena agrees with her mother, calling the things her father said 'creepy' (うす気味悪い). As a counterpoint to her father's idealised expectations of family life, Ena describes her version of the ideal family as follows:

> There were countless doors from the dark narrow place to the world, and I just happened to open the one between my mother's legs — a door made of flesh and blood that I kicked in to come into this world.
>
> My 'real family' is not determined by blood but by someone choosing me for who I am. If I marry someone for 'real love' then I can have a family with someone who has found me 'for who I am' not 'because I am their child'.
>
> この世には、狭い暗がりから世界に向けたドアが無数にあって、私はたまたま、母の足の間についているドアを開けただけだ。この世に出てくるために蹴破った、血と肉でできた扉。
>
> 「本当の家族」とは、血なんて理由ではなく、私だからという理由で選ばれるということだ。「本当の恋」をして結婚すれば“自分たちの子供だから”ではなく“私だから”という理由で自分を探し出してくれた人と共に家を作ることができる。(p. 28)

Ena is obsessed with the idea of a 'real family' (本当の家族) and 'real love' (本当の恋) and believes that her current family is just temporary. For Ena, a 'real family' is based on personal choices and has

[19] Kōseirōdōshō 厚生労働省, *Kodomo Gyakutai Taiō no Tebiki* 子ども虐待対応の手引き [Child Abuse Response Manual] (2022), <https://www.mhlw.go.jp/bunya/kodomo/dv12/01.html> [accessed 10 January 2022]. (My translation.)

nothing to do with kinship. Ena's approval of her mother's behaviour and her ideas about a 'real family' indeed can be understood as 'the rejection of the myth of motherhood'[20]. However, given that Ena grew up in an emotionally abusive environment and her parents' behaviour has formed her ideas, we can see her attitude as a form of adaptation. As Herman wrote about child abuse,

> Repeated trauma in adult life erodes the structure of the personality already formed, but repeated trauma in childhood forms and deforms the personality. The child trapped in an abusive environment is faced with formidable tasks of adaptation. She must find a way to preserve a sense of trust in people who are untrustworthy, safety in a situation that is unsafe, control in a situation that is terrifyingly unpredictable, power in a situation of helplessness.[21]

Ena does not consider her experience traumatic. Nevertheless, her repeated comparison of her mother's behaviour to that of a little girl, and nurturing the idea of the 'real family' in contrast to her actual one suggests that she is trying to control the situation in which she would be utterly helpless otherwise. Moreover, as Dorota Iwaniec points out, 'In order to protect itself from more emotional hurt', the emotionally rejected child 'tends to insulate its emotions, and ultimately stops trying to get affection from the people from whom it craves emotional warmth'[22]. At the beginning of the novel, Ena is only ten years old but has already stopped trying to get affection from her mother. Instead, she developed her own method to replace the love she could not receive from her family.

Ena was nine years old when she first heard the word masturbation from the boys in her class. Not knowing what the word meant, Ena asked her teacher, who explained the term as 'to take care of your urges on your own' (自分の欲求を自分で処理する). Ena was excited by the idea and experimented with various urges, such as hunger or sleepiness. At the same time, she discovered that she also felt a desire for family, or *kazokuyoku* 家族欲, as she put it. Believing that her urge to be loved is not different from any biological urge, Ena attempted to take care of it alone. To replace the love from her parents, Ena started what she calls *kazokuyonanī* カゾクヨナニー. Murata invented the word *kazokuyonanī* by combining *kazoku* 家族, the Japanese expression for the family, and *onanī* オナニー, a frequently used term for masturbation. Ena's partner in *kazokuyonanī* is her curtain, Ninao ニナオ. It must be noted that sexual relations with objects and non-humans have been recurring motifs in Murata's fiction[23]. What makes *Tadaima Tobira* interesting in this regard is that, in Ena's case,

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[20] Lu, p. 96. (My translation.)

[21] Herman, p. 96.

[22] Dorota Iwaniec, *The Emotionally Abused and Neglected Child: Identification, Assessment and Intervention: A Practice Handbook*, 2nd edn (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), p. 37.

[23] Yūko Iida 飯田祐子, 'Murata Sayaka to Jendā-kwia: Konbini Ningen, Chikyūseijin, Sonota no Sōsaku 村田沙耶香とジェンダー・クィア ：『コンビニ人間』、『地球星人』、その他の創作 [Murata Sayaka and Genderqueer: *Convenience Store Woman*, *Earthlings*, and Other Works]', *JunCture: Chōikiteki Nihon Bunka Kenkyū*, 10 (2019) 48–63 (p. 54) <https://doi.org/10.18999/juncture.10.48>.

sexual desire and craving for maternal love are inseparable. Touching and hugging Ninao gives Ena the comfort and love her parents fail to provide her.

Simultaneously, Ena is desperate to find the door to her 'real family'. In junior high school, she starts spending time at Nagisa's 渚 place. Nagisa is an elder girl from the neighbourhood who keeps an ant, Arisu アリス, in a glass jar and replaces it with a new one whenever it dies. Accompanied by her friend Mizuki 瑞希, Ena frequently visits Nagisa's home. It serves as an occasional shelter but cannot substitute the 'real family' – Ena is eager to grow and find the right person to start her own family.

She starts dating Kōhei 浩平, a university student in high school, and feels that she has finally found the right door. They get along well, even agreeing to get married after Ena graduates. However, when Ena decides to spend the summer break at Kōhei's, her vision of the ideal family starts changing. She spends a night at Nagisa's house and learns that Mizuki does not want a family until she becomes independent from her parents and can support herself. For the first time, Ena feels that her dream of having a 'real family' is rather immature – she cannot get Keita's words out of her head, who called her dreams childish and predicted her failure. However, the real change happens the following day when Kōhei fondles her. Hugged by her boyfriend, Ena suddenly realises that she has become Kōhei's partner for his *kazokuyonanī,* which frightens her. Struck by the idea that she will become a failure just like her mother (and as her brother predicted), Ena kicks Kōhei in the stomach and runs to Nagisa's house. Having completely lost her trust in the current family system, Ena concludes that it is not she and her mother who need to change, but the system itself. Watching the ageless ant in the jar, Ena realises that it is not *Arisu*, but them who have been living in a wonderland[24]. Here, she finally finds the right door:

> At that moment, I certainly opened some kind of door. Before I knew it, I muttered those two words to myself:
>
> '**Welcome home, Ena.**'
>
> A familiar voice that did not belong to Nagisa or Kōhei echoed behind the door. I smiled and stepped through the door as if that voice had been guiding me.
>
> その時、私は確かに、何かのトビラを開いていた。私は自分でも気付かないうちに、あの四文字の言葉を呟いていたようだった。
>
> **『おかえり、恵奈』**
>
> 渚さんでも浩平でもない、懐かしい声がドアの奥で響く。私はその声に導びかれるように、微笑みながら、そのトビラの中へと踏み出した。(p. 161)

This door only exists in Ena's imagination, which allows us to understand her state as the result of the

[24] Arisu is the Japanese equivalent of Alice.

repeated emotional neglect and abuse she suffered. To quote Herman again, 'The pathological environment of childhood abuse […] fosters the development of abnormal states of consciousness in which the ordinary relations of body and mind, reality and imagination, knowledge and memory, no longer hold'[25].

Triggered by Kōhei's intimacy, Ena falls into a state of consciousness in which she can no longer distinguish between reality and imagination. She now considers herself a mere 'life form' (生命体) and decides to return to the world, in which concepts such as 'family' and 'human' (ニンゲン) do not exist. She starts referring to the people around her as male and female species of 'homo sapiens sapiens' (ホモ・サピエンス・サピエンス) and tries to convince her mother to come with her. Ena's mother gets scared by her daughter's strange behaviour and asks Ena's father to come home from his lover's place. The parents finally reconcile and agree on starting over as a loving family. Keita welcomes the change, but it is already too late for Ena, who has already dissociated from reality. In an apocalyptic scene, a voice rises from behind the entrance door and an unknown force takes Ena's family one by one. The novel ends with Ena smiling at her mother and saying her last human words: 'welcome home' (おかえりなさない) as the force violently takes her mother away.

Given that traumatic experiences can alter the individual's state of consciousness, we can interpret Ena's escape to an imagined world as a psychological manifestation of chronic childhood trauma that she has suppressed for years. At the same time, the surrealistic ending of the story can be understood as the projection of Ena's imagination, which takes over and re-creates reality.

4. 'Survive, whatever it takes' – Emotional and sexual abuse in *Chikyūseijin*

'Survive, whatever it takes' (なにがあってもいきのびること)[26] could be the motto of *Chikyūseijin* (first published in the May 2018 issue of *Shinchō*), in which Murata takes the theme of child abuse further by introducing physical and sexual abuse into the story. The first two chapters describe Natsuki Sasamoto's 笹本奈月 (the narrator) abusive childhood and her antipathy towards society. The next four chapters introduce Natsuki's struggles to fit into society in her mid-thirties and her final escape.

The novel opens with the Sasamoto family arriving at Akishina 秋級 in Nagano for the Obon holiday. Natsuki is eleven years old and believes that she is a magician, and her plush hedgehog, Piyyut (in the original Japanese Pyūto ピュート) has been sent from a planet called Popinpobopia (in the original Japanese Pohapipinpobopiasei ポハピピンポボピア星) to protect the Earth. It soon becomes clear that Natsuki's fantasy world is more than just a game. Natsuki, similar to Ena, suffers from continuous abuse at home, mostly from her mother. Unlike Ena's mother, who treats her children equally, Natsuki's mother favours her elder daughter, Kise 貴世, and constantly bullies Natsuki. She

[25] Herman, p.96.

[26] The English translation is from Sayaka Murata, *Earthlings*, trans. by Ginny Tapley Takemori (New York: Grove Press, 2020). The original Japanese is from Sayaka Murata 村田沙耶香, *Chikyūseijin* 地球星人 [Earthlings] (Tōkyō: Shinchōsha, 2018). Hereafter the same.

frequently calls Natsuki 'hopeless' (みそっかす), 'disgusting' (気持ちが悪い), and 'stupid' (頭が悪い) in front of others and abuses her physically as well.

According to Iwaniec, 'emotional abuse is a persistent, chronic pattern of parental behaviour, often towards a particularly vulnerable child, which over the years becomes internalised and gives rise to the feeling that the child alone is to blame'[27]. Natsuki identifies with her mother's degrading language and considers herself a 'loser' (出来損ない) and the emotional 'dumpster' (ゴミ箱) of the family. She escapes into her fantasy world, which protects her from continuous abuse. Feeling alienated from her family, Natsuki finds a soul mate in her cousin, Yuu 由宇. They are of the same age, and, just like Natsuki, Yuu has a complicated relationship with his mother. According to Natsuki, after divorcing her husband, Yuu's mother became dependent on her son as though he were her husband. Yuu, just like Natsuki, feels alienated from his family – his mother repeatedly tells him that he was an abandoned alien, and she took him in. Therefore, Yuu spends the Obon holidays in Akishina looking for his spaceship that will take him home. Natsuki refers to Yuu as her boyfriend and asks him to marry her, so she will no longer be a burden for her family. They exchange wire rings and write a marriage pledge in which they promise each other to 'survive, whatever it takes'. Her fantasies and promise to Yuu give Natsuki comfort. However, even her fantasy world cannot protect her when her cram school teacher, Mr. Igasaki (伊賀崎先生), abuses her sexually.

Back in Chiba, Natsuki attends a cram school during the summer holiday. The young and handsome Mr. Igasaki frequently touches Natsuki and asks her to change her sanitary napkin in front of him once, and the abuse escalates when Natsuki enters sixth grade. During the summer festival, Mr. Igasaki tricks Natsuki into visiting his home, where he forces the child to perform oral sex on him. Murata describes the abuse in disturbing detail as a traumatic experience for Natsuki, who cannot comprehend the situation.[28]

> With my eyes firmly closed, I didn't know exactly what he was doing to me. I opened my eyes a little and saw he had raised his buttocks slightly from the sofa and moved his groin up against me and was making a strange motion I had never seen before. I felt even more scared and closed my eyes tight again. (...)
>
> Suddenly my vision crumpled. Before I knew it, I had left my body and was looking down from the ceiling at Mr. Igasaki holding my head.
>
> Wow, I must have summoned a super strong magical power. I had no idea how, since I hadn't used my wand or mirror. But despite this spectacular magic, I felt no emotion whatsoever and

[27] Iwaniec, p. 7.

[28] According to Murata, she has always wanted to write about the sexual exploitation of young girls, and despite her struggle, she did her best to portray the scene as accurately as possible.
Sayaka Murata 村田沙耶香 and Kanako Nishi 西加奈子, 'Ningen no Sotogawa he 人間の外側へ [Outside of Humanity]', *Shinchō*, 115.10 (2018), 165–176 (pp.168–169).

simply watched my own body in silence from the ceiling. (pp. 61–62)

先生が何をしているのか、強く目を瞑っている私にはよくわからなかった。薄く目をあけると、先生はソファからお尻を浮かせて私に股を近づけ、見たことのない変な動きをしていた。怖くなり、また強く目を閉じた。（中略）

気が付くと、私は幽体離脱して、先生に頭を押さえつけられている自分を天井のあたりから見下ろしていた。

あれ、私、魔法を使ったのかな、と思った。コンパクトもステッキも使っていないのに不思議だった。

こんなにすごい魔法が起きているというのに、なぜか何の感動もなく、私は黙って自分の肉体を眺めていた。(pp. 63–64)

What Natsuki describes here is the dissociation of the body and mind, a common experience among traumatised people.[29] Her detached state of consciousness helps Natsuki survive the trauma, but the event violates her bodily integrity. The oral rape 'destroys' Natsuki's mouth: she completely loses her sense of taste. Later, when Mr. Igasaki calls her on the phone and offers her another 'special class' (特別な授業), her right ear breaks as well. Fearing that her body will be taken away from her, Natsuki begs Yuu to get physically married to her.

A couple of days after the incident, Natsuki's grandfather dies and the family gathers in Akishina again. During the night, the children sneak out of the house to have sex near their grandfather's grave. They succeed and, while Yuu is asleep, Natsuki tries to commit suicide. She takes the pills she stole from her mother, but the tablets turn out to be candy. They get caught, and the experience leaves Natsuki even more deeply wounded.

When the adults confront them, Natsuki tries to explain the situation:

"Why shouldn't children have sex? There are plenty of grown-ups who want to have sex with children. So why is it wrong if they're both children?" (p. 88)

「子供はセックスしちゃいけないの？ 子供とセックスしたがる大人って、たくさんいるのに。子供同士だと駄目なの？」(p. 93)

Natsuki's explanation is a cry for help, but nobody listens to her, and she is strictly punished.

According to Herman, 'Traumatic events have primary effects not only on the psychological structures of the self but also on the systems of attachment and meaning that link individual and

[29] According to Herman, during traumatic events, 'the experience may lose its quality of ordinary reality' and the victim 'may feel as though the event is not happening to her, as though she is observing from outside her body, or as though the whole experience is a bad dream from which she will shortly awaken. These perceptual changes combine with a feeling of indifference, emotional detachment, and profound passivity in which the person relinquishes all initiative and struggle.' Herman, p. 43.

community'[30]. Like in *Tadaima Tobira*, Murata portrays this disconnection from the community by employing the motif of non-human beings in *Chikyūseijin*. As a result of continuous abuse, Natsuki loses faith in adults and human society. She refers to the town she lives as a 'factory for the production of human babies' (人間を作る工場) that resembles the silkworm room in her grandparents' house. In the third chapter, Natsuki is already in her thirties but her views on society have not changed. After the incident with Yuu, she was kept under strict control. In order to escape from her family and become an 'effective Factory component' (「工場」の一部になる), Natsuki gets married at thirty-one. However, due to her traumatic past, she cannot have sex and make children, as expected in the 'Factory'[31]. She met her husband through a website designed for social misfits, and the two now share an apartment as roommates.

Natsuki's husband, Tomoya (in the original Japanese Tomoomi 智臣), has difficulties staying in a job for long, and just like Natsuki, he has problems with sexuality. According to Natsuki, her husband was forced to bathe with his mother until the age of fifteen, and the experience made him unable to handle a real female body. Coming from similar backgrounds, Natsuki and Tomoya settled down together. Tomoya shares Natsuki's antipathy towards the 'Factory' and soon believes he has acquired 'alien eyes' (『宇宙人の目』). Natsuki keeps talking about Akishina to her husband, and the two of them decide to visit the place together. Back to Akishina, Natsuki reunites with Yuu after twenty-three years, and her long-forgotten memories return. Nevertheless, recalling traumatic memories does not help Natsuki recover, but instead reinforces her belief that she is an alien.

It turns out that young Natsuki murdered Mr. Igasaki in a dissociated state and buried the memory in her unconscious mind. As a child, she believed that she had killed the Wicked Witch (悪い魔女) that possessed Mr. Igasaki at the command of Piyyut and could not realise the connection between her actions and her teacher's death. Following the incident, Natsuki is convinced that she is also a warrior sent from Planet Popinpobopia and lives lonely among the Earthlings. In contrast, Yuu has assimilated into society. However, he is currently unemployed and quickly falls under Natsuki and Tomoya's influence. To liberate himself from the Factory's 'brainwashing', Tomoya decides to commit incest with his bedridden grandfather. Initially, Yuu tries to stop him, but Natsuki urges him to turn a blind eye.

> "Hold on a moment," Yuu said, flustered. "How can I put this…? Anyway, sex without consent is a crime."
>
> "It's all right. Tomoya's grandfather is in a vegetative state in the hospital."

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[30] Herman, p. 51.

[31] Amiko Enami made a similar remark in her essay. However, she does not address the abuse Natsuki suffers at home and reads the story regarding the conflict between the individual and the system.
Amiko Enami 江南亜美子, 'Tsugi no Jidai no Yume wo Miru: Murata Sayaka Ron つぎの時代の夢を見る： 村田沙耶香論 [Dreaming of the Next Era: Essay on Sayaka Murata]', *Shinchō*, 115.10 (2018), 177–185 (pp.184–185).

"That's even worse!"

"Why?" I looked Yuu in the eye. "That sort of thing happens everywhere, you know. We just don't see it. Even now, someone somewhere in the world is being used as a tool. It'll happen again today too. That's all it is."

"Natsuki, what you are talking about is a crime. It's abnormal."

"So what? Adults are expected to turn a blind eye to anything abnormal, aren't they? That's the way it is. Why so virtuous now? You're just a regular adult, after all. All you have to do is ignore it, just like any other regular adult." (pp. 167–168)

「何を言えばいいんだろう……とにかく、合意の上でない性交は犯罪ですよ」

「大丈夫だよ。智臣くんのお祖父さんは、植物状態で、入院しているの」

「ますます駄目だ！」

「なんで？」

私は由宇の目を見た。

「由宇、そんなことは、目に見えないだけで、世界中で起きていることだよ。世界中で今もだれかが道具にされてる。今日もそれがまた起こる。それだけのことだよ」

「奈月ちゃん、それは犯罪だよ。異常だ」

「それがなに？　大人は異常を無視するのが仕事でしょう？　いつでもそうじゃない、なんで今だけ善人ぶるの？　由宇は『普通の大人』なんでしょう？　無視すればいいじゃない、『普通の大人』らしく」(pp. 164–165)

It becomes clear from the above conversation that Natsuki is still under the influence of the sexual abuse she suffered from Mr. Igasaki and that no one helped her. Tomoya eventually changes his mind, and instead of raping his grandfather, he decides to convince his brother to commit incest with him. Tomoya fails in his attempt and is severely beaten by his father. Back in Chiba, a strict 'interrogation' (尋問) awaits Natsuki and Tomoya, who decide to leave behind the 'Factory' for good. They escape to Akishina again, where the story takes a surrealistic and grotesque turn.

To eliminate the boundaries of human life and society, Natsuki, Tomoya, and Yuu ritually divorce each other and start training to behave like Popinpobopians. First, they abandon the concept of day and night, and then, following the needs of their bodies, go naked. The most bizarre of their methods is probably cannibalism. As it turns out, Natsuki's sister, Kise, saw Mr. Igasaki abusing Natsuki and figured out that Natsuki murdered him. Worrying that Natsuki's current behaviour would affect her marriage, Kise reveals Natsuki's secret to Mr. Igasaki's parents, who attack Natsuki, Tomoya, and Yuu in Akishina. The trio murder the Igasakis and decide to consume them to complete their alienation from society and the Earthlings. Finally, they decide on eating each other's flesh once they have run out of food.

Ironically, breaking the taboos of homicide and cannibalism helps Natsuki reconnect with her body: she becomes able to taste and hear properly again and even feels a kind of sexual excitement

around Yuu and Tomoya. Nevertheless, her physical recovery comes at a heavy price: she loses her humanity completely, dragging Yuu and Tomoya along with her. The novel ends with the three of them stepping out to the light, ready to take over Planet Earth.

5. Conclusion

The texts discussed in this paper are not survivor testimonies or even based on actual events. Nevertheless, they provide valuable insight into the dynamics of child abuse and the social taboos surrounding it. In *Tadaima Tobira* and *Chikyūseijin* alike, the narrators' rejection of society and their aversion to the modern family system are inseparable from the abuse they suffered in childhood. Accordingly, we can understand their escape into a fantasy world as a consequence of their traumatic past. In both novels, Murata inserts surrealistic and horrifying elements into a realistic setting to describe the destructive effects of the 'unspeakable' traumatic experience, challenging the readers to approach child abuse from the perspective of the otherwise voiceless victims.

'It's really hard to put into words things that are just a little bit not okay' (すこしだけおかしいことは、言葉にするのが難しい), says young Natsuki in *Chikyūseijin* when Mr. Igasaki starts harassing her. She senses that something is wrong with the teacher, but struggles to find the right words to describe her experience. When she finally builds up the courage to talk about the weird things Mr. Igasaki did to her at cram school, she faces a firm denial. Her mother refuses to believe that a grown-up man could be interested in a child's underdeveloped body and beats her daughter for having a 'filthy' (いやらしい) mind. Thus, Natsuki is left to deal with the abuse alone. Her later attempts to reveal her story to her friends remain fruitless as well. Similarly, in *Tadaima Tobira*, Ena realises early in her childhood that her relationship with her mother is considered taboo in society, so she becomes very cautious about choosing the right words when talking about her family to others. The ending of *Tadaima Tobira* is also interesting in this regard. When Ena's fantasy takes over reality, she loses her ability to speak in human language, reminding us of the 'unspeakable' nature of the traumatic experience.

As Murata revealed in an interview, she was greatly affected by reading Jules Renard's *Poil de carotte* (*Carrot Top*, 1894) in elementary school. Feeling 'excessively restricted by being a girl', Renard's novel comforted her.

> I hated simplistic children's stories where, because mothers love their children, there was always a happy ending. So, I felt so comforted that *Carrot Top* was hopeless all the way through. Here was a writer with more dark places than me, and he wrote them all out without a word of a lie. It was the first time I felt close to an author.[32]

[32] Kimie Itakura, 'Aliens and Alienation: The Taboo-Challenging Worlds of "Earthlings" Author Murata

Similar to Renard's *Carrot Top* (1894), in which the narrator, a red-headed boy, suffers various abuse from his mother without any hope of change, *Tadaima Tobira* and *Chikyūseijin* are 'hopeless all the way through'. Instead of offering a comforting solution, Murata does not save her protagonists, at least not in the ordinary sense. They indeed survive their abusive childhood but never overcome their past. Instead, they grow to despise humanity, providing a scathing criticism of contemporary society in which 'adults are expected to turn a blind eye to anything abnormal'.

The representation of child abuse is a complex and significant phenomenon in contemporary Japanese literature which requires more attention. I aim to explore the topic in more detail and extend the research to other authors in the future.

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現代日本小説における被虐待児の声

―村田沙耶香『タダイマトビラ』と『地球星人』を中心に―

ダルミ・カタリン

村田沙耶香（1979～）は、セクシュアリティやジェンダーの問題を繰り返し描いてきた作家として知られている。一方で、デビュー作「授乳」（『群像』2003・6）を始め、村田文学においては児童虐待の問題もしばしば登場し、とりわけ近年刊行された『タダイマトビラ』（『新潮』2011・8）と『地球星人』（『新潮』2018・5）においては、ネグレクトや身体的・心理的虐待が重要なテーマとなっている。

児童虐待に対する社会的関心が高まるにつれ、1990 年代以降の日本現代文学においては、児童虐待を主題にした作品が増えてきた。児童虐待の問題を最も早い段階で取り上げ、話題を呼んだ内田春菊の自伝的作品『ファザーファッカー』（文藝春秋、1993）や天童荒太のミステリー長編小説『永遠の仔』（幻冬舎、1999）のほか、芥川賞を受賞した中村文則の「土の中の子供」（『新潮』2005・4）は、児童虐待を主題にした作品の代表的な例であろう。更に近年では、山田詠美の『つみびと』（中央公論新社、2019）のような、実際の事件に基づいた創作も増え、児童虐待をテーマにした作品が数多く執筆されてきた。一方で、これらの作品に焦点を当てた研究は極めて少なく、検討の余地がある。そこで、本稿ではまず、日本現代社会における児童虐待問題について概説し、児童虐待に関する代表的な作品を紹介することを通して、本研究の背景及び意義を明らかにする。

児童虐待は深刻な社会問題であるにも関わらず、その早期発見は極めて困難である。虐待を受けている子供たちは自らの置かれた状況について沈黙を守ることが多く、家庭内暴力や児童虐待が未だにタブー視されている現代社会においては、その被害経験を語ることはそもそも容易なことではない。こうした状況の中、親や周囲からネグレクトや身体的・性的虐待を受けてきた女性たちの視点から語られている『タダイマトビラ』と『地球星人』は、フィクションでありながらも注目に値する作品である。本稿では、近年のトラウマ研究を踏まえながら、両作品における児童虐待の描写に着目し、通常では語ることができないトラウマ及び虐待体験が、グロテスクかつシュールな物語展開によってどのように表現され、語られているのかを検討する。そして、これらの分析を踏まえ、虐待サバイバー文学とは異なる村田のフィクションは、虐待を受けている子供たちの声を如何に代弁しているのかを明らかにする。