Thesis: The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari

Exegesis: The Analysis of Amber's Adventures.

Yeon woo Kim

2014

A thesis and exegesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing (MCW)

School of Language and Culture

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Contents

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Abstract

The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari is a creative thesis part of Master of Creative Writing project. The novel is set in fantasy and urban setting, written in a way to incorporate narrative tools from comics and games, aiming to draw readers, who have become accustomed to fast paced, effortless way of story-telling. The purpose of the novel was not only to tell an exciting adventure story but to explore themes of forgiveness, bullying and redemption. It is told in a teenager's first person subjective view to help young readers identify with the protagonist. It is accompanied by the exegesis, The Analysis of Amber's Adventures, which frames the creative work exploring the definition of the young adult genre, the common clichés in it and the limitations and success of incorporating the comic and game tools in my thesis.

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except that which appears in the citations and acknowledgements. Nor does it contain material which to a substantial extent I have submitted for the qualification for any other degree of another university or other institution of higher learning.

Signature: _____Yeon woo Kim

Date: 24th of November 2014.

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Acknowledgements:

I would like to thank the following people for their help and research in creating *The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari*. Doug Braschler, principal of Hamilton High School in MI, United States – who allowed me to visit his school and study the layout and classes. His insight in bullying in the US was valuable for my novel which was set in an American high school. Bianca Brown, for her knowledge in youth psychology and treatment of schizophrenia.

For the writing process - The Creative Writing department at Auckland University of Technology for all their guidance and wisdom, my supervisor and mentor Mike Johnson for his guidance, wisdom, encouragement and humour throughout the year, Paul Mountfort for his supervision and support for the exegesis.

My husband Rory Rackham for all the story board, editing and game design knowledge, friends Bianca Brown, Krystal Lankheet and Christel Jeffs who tirelessly critiqued, edited and encouraged me. Above all else, I would like to give my thanks to the Big Guy up there.

Intellectual Property Rights.

The content of the thesis is confidential for commercial reasons.

An application of PG-16 form for embargo for 36 months has been submitted to School of Language and Culture to restrict access to the thesis.

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Exegesis: Analysis of Amber's Adventures

> "Amber Rivera" – Yup that is my name in a super creepy whisper and I certainly
> do not appreciate how it has been following me everywhere. Hmm. Maybe it
> will turn out to be some sort of magical invitation that leads me to an encounter
> with a handsome man in a floating castle in a magical world. Of course there
> will be danger and cut throat action, all that jazz. Ah, but what if the guy turns
> out he was too good to be true?

This exegesis frames my creative thesis, a novel titled *The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari*, in terms of my motivations as a writer, the wider young adult (YA) and urban fantasy genres with which it shares elements, my intention to avoid the clichés of these genres, and how I drew on comics and gaming media to inform and inflect my prose writing.

My creative work, *The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari*, was inspired by a dream where I found myself walking through a hall of mirrors. Instead of my reflection, a man dressed in regal robes walked with me, telling me he was just a figment of my imagination and I was a fool for believing he was real. When I shrugged my shoulders and told him "fine, you're right, you're my imagination," and carried on, he became agitated and tried to convince me otherwise. When I denied his existence, he went to great lengths to prove to me he was real. What was his motivation? Where was he from? Why did he want to prove he existed so badly? I wanted to give him a story.

The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari is a story of a young teenager Amber Rivera who meets a dashing magic king, Simeon Stradivari. She falls in love, but discovers that it has all been a ruse to kill her. Upon perceiving his motive, Amber rejects Simeon and is banished back to her world. Just when she comes to believe she is safe, Simeon torments her, offering her a choice. To have all her wishes granted at the cost of her life or to live in a cruel world he creates.

My story aims to be a fast paced narrative which explores themes such as redemption, bullying and self-identity. While the story has elements of fantasy and romance, the genre my story comes closest to is YA urban fantasy.

Genre

It was difficult to place my story in the YA genre. A teen protagonist, first person narration, the absence of adult intervention and the presence of teen life issues all seem

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

to tick the box for a YA genre (key features of which I will discuss below) but with an adult antagonist, the themes of temptation, sacrifice, forgiveness and redemption and the weight of one's life versus many, it would appeal to a wider, older audience. However, in the end I wanted to place the book in YA category as I felt the voice, pace, characters and form better suited a teenage audience. My first research aim stems from a need to clarify the YA Genre: "What makes a story fit in the YA genre and what can be done to appeal to readers who are not young adults?"

I hope my story will be one both teens and adults can share, I did not start writing the book with a particular demographic in mind. I did not look at the increasing popularity of Young Adult novels (often adapted as movies) and decide to jump into the category, nor did I separate myself as an 'adult' while writing. I simply wanted to create a story that I would enjoy reading both as a teenager and in my later years. C.S Lewis in his *On Three Ways of Writing for Children* (1952) states that writers should write "…a children's story because a children's story is the best art-form for something you have to say: just as a composer might write a Dead March not because there was a public funeral in view but because certain musical ideas that had occurred to him went best into that form." (p.1)

Style

As a comic artist who turned to manga, drama and games for stories rather than novels, my perception of plot flow, characters and dialogue are influenced by media other than text-based literature. Many readers who reviewed my story commented that it "felt like I was reading a comic." This lead to my second research question: "To what extent is comic narrative different from novel narrative and what tools could I use from different storytelling media to create a more engaging story or way of reading?"

Aside from the two research questions above, the rest of my exegesis will focus on the writers, stories, teachings and inspiration that influenced my story and furthered the understanding of my writing style.

Young Adult Genre

A common problem with the YA genre is the definition of what the YA genre actually is. A fairly recently coined term, it sits in an awkward space between children's books

like Eric Carle's *The Very Hungry Caterpill*ar and 'adult' books like Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Hundred years of Solitude*. When *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* was published in 1950 by C.S. Lewis, it was published as a children's book. Nowadays it is sold both as YA and children's genre, often in the YA corner of bookstores. Writers such as Wendig (2010) state outright that young adult is not a genre but a "demographic," while many YA authors including Hanley (2008) and Cart (2010) agree the age line drawn for the YA genre is fuzzy, at best. They dispute the general belief that the YA genre is for 12-18 year olds. Marano (2007), Kantrowitz and Springen 2005 (cited in Cart 2010), share the view that in our current society, many readers in their early twenties are struggling to find their place in the world and reaching adulthood at much later years, increasing the age that defines 'Young Adults". It is argued that our society now sees 30 as the new 20 and most Americans now believe a person isn't an adult until age 26. (Cart 2010).

The problem also arises in the wide age variety. Generally, a 12 year old would have a very different view and intellect from 20 year old. Gillespie and Naden (2003) argue that older teens face very different situations, interactions and emotions to younger teens, making it very difficult to have a genre that is for all young adults. The term 'Older teenager' is something that is very difficult to place as well, as individuals have different rates of growth and taste. The genre is so unclear that Fitzpatrick (2005) argues that increasingly YA books with wide themes and subjects are being sold as YA and adult books at the same time.

If this is the case, how does one distinguish between a Young Adult book that is written for 12-15 year olds and one that is written for an audience in its early twenties? Cart, Wendig, Fitzpatrick suggest that the Young Adult genre has little to do with age and more with the themes that are prevalent in the story. Prevalent themes and situations such as first love, trying new and dangerous things for the first time and becoming independent from adults, and other situations that a young person would associate themselves with. Rosenberg (2012) also states that the one universal thread in the YA genre is the "…process of grappling with the formation of an individual identity during an emotional and psychological stage of the no-man's-land between childhood and adulthood." (p.31) He states that in such times for adolescence where one can easily feel isolated, it is very important for their development to have stories that they can relate and feel is part of their own life. Wendig in his blog '*25 Things You Should Know about*

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Young Adult Fiction' states that YA books are about books that speak to teenagers, and "speaking to them means talking about their problems." (p.1)

In 2012, Bowker Market Research released a report that among people who buy books designed for children, 55% were aged 18 years and older, 30 to 44 year olds being most of them. 78% of these buyers responded that the book was for their own reading purposes. Blockbuster hits like J.K *Rowling's Harry Potter* (1997-2007), Suzanne Collin's *The Hunger Games* series (2008-2010) and John Green's *The Fault in our Stars* (2012) have certainly brought attention to and interest in YA books. There are split views of YA and those who read YA books.

YA readers are sometimes met with scorn. In what some writers and readers call 'literature snobbery', YAL, young adult literature, is met with prejudice on the grounds that it has unsophisticated storytelling, one dimensional characters and that it challenges nothing. Liang (2013) and Jago (2000) argue that YAL cannot be taken seriously and earns little credibility compared to classic literature. In *Against YA: Yes adults should be embarrassed to read Young Adult books*, Graham (2014) argues that YA readers are asked to abandon their mature insights and perspective to enjoy the story. She also notes that YA books are riddled with simple happy endings, escapism, instant gratification and nostalgia. They mutually state YAL should only serve as an entry point for teenagers to reach better literature and should be kept out of the classrooms, as it hinders readers from reading 'deep' and more 'intelligent' literature.

Rosenberg, in her counterargument, *No you do not have to be ashamed of reading young adult fiction* post on Washington Post, (2014) debunks Graham and common prejudices against YAL by pointing out that YAL spans multiple genres that Graham cannot identify all YA books as having such features. She challenges Graham to fit books such as *A Ring of Endless Light* by Madelein L'Engle (2008) and *Tortall* Novels by Tamora Pierce (1983-2004) into her idea of what YA books are like. For adults who read YAL, not only does it provide entertainment, she argues that Adults who read YA books gain insight and common ground with young adults, which helps encourage wider discussion and interaction.

YA Writers such as Terry Trueman (2013) states he "…believes that great literature exists to expand the humanity of the reader, beyond deciphering

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

words/sentences/paragraphs etc." (p. 89). C.S Lewis (1959) also notes that being an 'adult' and being afraid of embracing their childlike qualities only highlight one's own childishness and picking up children's books does not make one lose the ability to read other types of literature.

Not all YAL have happy and shallow themes and storylines, Cart (2010) Fitzgerald (2005) notes a trending type of novel in YAL known as 'Bleak books' that are emerging in US and Canada. These Bleak books deal with the darker side of adolescence, addressing dark topics such as madness, sexual abuse, mental torture, serial killing, rape and murder. Often these books have ambiguous endings and most kids barely survive, rather than bettering their lives.

My story was not created for the purpose of prompting an insightful discussion of life as we know it, moral views and the society around us. It was created solely to be a book that could be enjoyed, with a positive message, and to stretch the imagination of the reader. While writing the book with teens in mind, I created scenes and themes with my own experiences to help relate to my readers. As C.S Lewis (1959) describes, "…there is no question of 'children' conceived as strange species whose habits you have 'made up' like an anthropologist or a commercial traveller… Nor, I suspect, would it be possible, thus face to face, to regale the child with things calculated to please it but regarded by yourself with indifference or contempt. The child, I am certain, would see through that." (p.1)

Themes such as bullying and redemption are explored and I hope it has a lasting effect on my readers even after they close the book. I admit my story does not prompt readers to question their own morality nor prompt a deep discussion of the world, nor I have any intention of changing my story to defy all criticism against YAL. I believe each book has a message that the author wants to share, whether it is YAL or any other genre. The degree of that impact would vary based on the reader, but it seems unlikely and also hasty to judge that "YAL challenges nothing."

Forgiveness is such an important part of my life, I wanted to show this throughout the story. Simeon, the antagonist of the story breaks Amber's heart, attempts to ruin her connections and tries to kill her. As the story progresses, Simeon changes and tries to atone for his actions. He later saves Amber countless times and sacrifices many things for her. During my earlier drafts, the story featured Simeon slowly losing all his five senses and ultimately becoming blind and deaf due to overuse of magic for

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Amber. Perhaps influenced by *Jane Eyre*'s (1847) Mr Rochester's loss of a hand and eyesight as a price for his transgression. However after learning more about forgiveness from my own beliefs, I have inserted my new view of forgiveness, which was to forgive without strings attached.

> "Are you asking me to forgive this man? The same man who tried to kill both of us? Can you honestly tell me you forgive this man for trying to kill you?"
> "Yes?"
> Once again, he clasped his mouth shut and looked away, seeking answers somewhere else. Clearly frustrated, he looked back at me.
> "Why?"
> "Dunno."
> "For whom?"
> "Me?"

In the future re-writes of my story, I would like to expand this theme a little more and create more questions in the story to encourage readers to seek answers for themselves.

Cart (2010) and Wendig (2013) point out the importance of acknowledging today's teenager's problems and issues, which involve sexual relationships, alcohol, substance abuse and violence. Cart (2010) states that excluding these themes in YAL and pretending it never happens is "to agree to a de facto conspiracy of silence, to imply to young readers that sex is so awful, so traumatic, so dirty that we can't even write about it." (p.144) Sex, drinking and drugs have little place in my story. The only reason for this was because putting focus on it didn't bring anything to my story.

Another criticism against YAL is the lack of diversity. From 1965 by Walter Dean Myers's article *The All-White World of Children's Books* to Doll (2012), Reese (2013) and Myers (2014), this problem is addressed in their respective articles lamenting the lack of diversity in color and sexual orientation. That is to say, most YA protagonists are usually a white, straight teen.

In 2010, a blogger Kate Hart looked at the covers of top YAL and found that 90% of the covers featured a white model. Movements such as 'Diversity in YA' and CBC Diversity Committee promotes YAL with diverse characters but according to CNN article, *Where's the African-American Harry Potter or the Mexican Katniss*? Published in 2014, it has seen little success. This criticism is not exclusively aimed at

YAL, but since YAL aims to grow with the young readers and help them identify themselves and the world, diversity should be an important issue to acknowledge in YAL. Myers notes in his article, *Where are the People of Color in Children's Books?* That as he was undergoing a quest to discover himself, he felt as an African American teenager, he was alienated by the white characters. "What I wanted, needed really, was to become an integral and valued part of the mosaic that I saw around me." (p.1)

While *The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari* has characters of different color, Amber is a straight, white girl from a middle class family. I have been careful not to state the ethnicity of my characters. I hope a wider number of readers will relate to my characters due to the ambiguity of their ethnicity.

What can be done to appeal to readers who are not young adults? Belbin (2011) warns that writers who set their stories to be a 'Crossover' are doomed to fail as their craft should solely focus on young adults rather than keeping an "eye on adults who would probably, if they gave it a chance, enjoy many good YA novels rather than the handful that happen to 'cross over'." (p.141) However, it is my cautious hope that my story could be regarded as a book which engages readers of all ages much like Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) and Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series (1995-2000). Writers such as Craig (2008), Wendig (2010) and Cart (2010) insist that a good story and the power of storytelling will always have readers of all ages picking up YA books. Fitzpatrick (2005) also adds that sophistication of themes, and questions asked inside a book will help it succeed at being a 'Crossover' book.

Cliché of YAL and using them in my story.

Cliché in narratives is not exclusive to YAL and its effect on readers is something writers of all genres and mediums should be warned about. *Daily Infograph* (2013) in *How does Writing affect your brain,* highlighted a study conducted in Spain about cliché in writing. It was found that while certain writing activates different parts of the brain and sensory responses light up whenever readers read a cliché, the brain only interprets it as words and nothing more. Although this was a study focused on clichéd phrases, I believe clichéd setting, characters and situations also dull the experience of reading and shortens the imagination of the readers.

Cole (2008) notes a teenager protagonist, teenager's narrative, absent parents

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

and coming of age issues are the historical trends of YAL. While YAL shouldn't be defined by such a list, common characteristics do exist. It is my belief that while some characteristics should be used to promote familiarity to the story, certain types were too specific and became clichés. The types I found appearing in YAL and Shojo (girl) comics included plain girls falling for jerks, destined first love, perfect prom nights and love triangles. In *Serenade of Simeon Stradivari*, instead of avoiding such clichés altogether, I decided to use the same clichés with twists to surprise the readers. First love turns to be a flat, boring love, prom night is a night of homework and my protagonist hates the dashing jerk.

One particular cliché I wanted to break was the cliché of passive heroines. As it is infamously demonstrated in Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005), I felt Bella had no goals, no dreams and was ready to give up her life at the drop of a hat for what was arguably an abusive boyfriend. My immediate concern was that teen girls who grew up reading this story would see Bella as a role model, and try to emulate her. Through my story, I wanted to create a heroine who was the opposite of Bella, someone that teens can and should look up to. This is not to say Amber is perfect but what I wanted to portray from her was that no matter what happens, she gets up and dusts herself off before continuing on her chosen path.

> "And hurt? What? From you? Because you're going to waste away in this pathetic state? Don't think yourself so high and mighty. I'll get over you."
> "Pardon?"
> "Pretty quickly too, actually. Seeing all you do is hide and mope around, yeah. I can see me getting over you in a week or so."

Another cliché, more prevalent in fantasy stories, but plaguing Shojo comics is the cliché of protagonists going to a magical parallel world where they have a special role. In the first act of my story, Amber falls into a mirror to a magical, parallel world that seems to answer all her dreams. This was to highlight Amber's adventurous spirit and a perfect setting for her to fall in love with Simeon, but it was also done to go against the cliché setting of the heroine escaping to a different world and finding their true self and love. Although many fantasy novels use the same setting, I was primarily influenced by *Labyrinth* (1986) by Jim Henson, *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) by Lewis Carroll and by a large number of Shojo comics from Japan and Korea. *Fushigi Yuugi* by Yuu Watase

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

(1992-2003), *Anatolia Story* by Chie Shinohara (1995-2002), *Inuyasha* by Rumiko Takahashi (1996-2008), *The Vision of Escaflowne* by Katsu, A (1996-1997), *Queen's Knights* by Kim Kang Won (1997) and many more. I wanted to create the first act on the pretence that my story would be following the same familiar setting, then surprise my readers by doing the complete opposite, where the accidental transportation was intentional, the prince charming was the evil wizard and the blossoming romance was a tool for murder.

Another cliché in typical fantasy YAL was the cliché of prophecies. The hero is prophesised to do great things. Other heroes flock to the hero, giving a prophecy utmost credibility. Even the Antagonist fears this prophecy and does all he can to stop this. (*Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series (2005-2009), *The Belgariad* series (1982-1984), *A Song of Ice and Fire* series (1996-2011) and so on) In my story, a prophecy is told that Amber would defeat Simeon. While this does serve the story's purpose of Amber being in danger due to this prophecy, this does not make her a special hero nor have allies follow her. Instead, this causes more trouble for her and no one helps her to fulfil this prophecy. Even Simeon, who is affected by the prophecy treats it as trivial news and makes no effort to stop her.

> "Don't let it go to your head." He clicked his tongue. "There are millions of prophecies made daily. Jhi Kinara's prophecy can be interpreted in one of a million ways."
> "You're… not even worried?"
> "Why should I be? If she is correct, then no matter what I do, you will manage to bring my downfall. But it is very likely that her words have been twisted to fit an individual's fantasies, and I simply don't have the time to deal with every single one of them."
> "You're like the most arrogant bastard I have ever met." I was pretty impressed.

It is my belief that certain clichés that plague YAL can and should be used to surprise the readers and I hope it comes across through my story.

Bullying

Bullying is a theme that is prevalent in young adult's lives. According to Cohen & Canter (2002) cited in Pytash, Morgan and Batchelor (2013), approximately 3.2 million students are bullied yearly and approximately 160,000 students skip school daily in fear

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

of being bullied by other students. (Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001). Bullying is something that I strongly identify with as I have been both the victim and the bully when I was young and have seen it happen from a teacher's point of view as well. Using my experiences I wanted to create a book that helps identify bullying and encourage victims. Counsellors calls this a Bibliotherapy: when YAL is used as a simulation for young adults in challenging situations. Hoover & Oliver (cited in Larson & Hoover (2012)) note that "well-written fiction exposes readers to challenging scenarios that can serve as grist for processing life's dilemmas and for considering alternate solutions." (p.50) In using these bibliotheraputic methods, having identifiable characters, access to inner thoughts, feelings and actions of these characters and having a story that young adults can use for their own benefit are the key steps. Pikas (as cited in Hillsberg & Spak 2006) writes that victims can be comforted or derive coping strategies from reading about a similar situation and bullies may identify with the bullied character and learn to empathise with them. A study done by Hillsbery & Spak in 2006 introduced two YAL that had bullying themes per grade six, seven and eight (respectively year seven, eight and nine in New Zealand) and the results of this study was positive, students expressing that the stories gave them comfort and provided coping strategies for bullying.

With the hope of my story being used in a similar way, I wanted to create a book that helps readers identify the situation and empower those that are bullied. Similar to YA books with a theme of bullying like Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007), Lyga Barry's *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl* (2006), Yoko Kamio's *Hana Yori Dango* (1992-2003), Lee Bin's *Ge Ttongi* (2003).

Hopeful as I am, I do not think that my novel will single handedly stop bullying or make the victim of the bullying immune to it. Through Amber I hope readers would find encouragement in coping with school violence.

The character Tsukushi from *Hana Yori Dango* fought against her bullies in a fulfilling and refreshing way. Much like Batman or other vigilantes such as Sergeant Angel from *Hot Fuzz* (2007) and Edmond Dantes from *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1984), I wanted Amber to overcome her situation and fight back in a satisfying method that would make readers cheer and feel empowered.

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

As much as I appreciate strong characters who overcome their situations, I feel the methods they use to deal with their opponent are very important. Not everyone can suddenly become confident and strong. Glessner, et al,. 2006; Hoover & Oliver, 2008 (cited in Larson & Hoover (2012)) suggests bully victims fighting back against the bullies is not recommended by experts. While it provides a satisfying conclusion, it is a maladaptive behaviour. With this in mind, three characters in movies and comic books in particular influenced the creation of Amber and how she deals with her bullies. First was Olive from the movie *Easy A* (2010). She fought against bullying by simply not letting it bother her; Olive was always equipped with sassy comebacks and healthy self-confidence which made me think your outlook on the situation can have far greater impact on the situation than any action. Ge-Ddong from *Ge-Ddong ii* (2002), instead of fighting her past friends or trying to prove her innocence, she turns her attention to her love life and family, earning her classmates trust through her actions. Tsukushi from *Hana Yori Dango* (1992) fights bullying by proudly standing up for herself and coming to terms with who she is. Each of these girls were affected by ill treatment but they all decide that in the end, bullying was such a trivial thing compared to more important matters in their lives.

When I was seventeen, I hated messages that said 'stand up for yourself' 'love yourself' and 'fight back against bullies'. How was one supposed to wake up one day and suddenly be filled with brimming self-love and respect? None of that entered my head or convinced me when I was being bullied. I was too busy feeling sorry for myself and missed so many wonderful things. I personally wanted to tell my readers that when something out of your control hits you, one should never blame oneself or dwell on it but live life to the fullest.

The young adult genre is defined by how the content of the story relates to a certain demographic rather than the age of the protagonist. While there are many debates on what exactly YAL is, it is safe to presume the story is YAL when the focus is to speak to young adults, which can be up to 25 year olds. Topics and experience explored in the story should be something that can be empathised with by young adults and hopefully something that can help them in a similar situation. While *The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari* aims to speak to young adults about issues such as bullying, first love and friends, it is my hope that the story's content and how it is told will appeal to a

wider audience that enjoy YAL in general.

Fitzgerald (2005) states in her study that YAL is known for introducing non-conventional ways of writing, such as writing in letter or diary format. This leads to my next research question, "To what extent is comic narrative different from novel narrative and what tools could I use from different storytelling media to create a more engaging story or way of reading?"

Using tools from different storytelling media

As strange as it may sound to a writer, although I love stories, I have a lot of trouble reading books. Instead of books, I usually turn to media such as Japanese/Korean comic books and web comics. When I open a novel to read, I need time to adjust to the long passages of descriptions and monologues. In order to ease comic readers such as myself into novels, I wanted to merge elements from comics and games into my stories.

There is little research on the difference between narratives in different storytelling media. It is my personal view that whether it's comics or novels, the story itself and how to create that story share the same core. The only difference is how that narrative is told. Between comic books and novels, the main difference stems from the visual nature of comics, which includes frequent use of gutter space, symbols and caricature. Just as writing can be converted into comics, so could these tools be converted into novels. In regards to comics, McCloud (2008) writes that all storytelling media share the same basic goals, to provoke emotions, make readers care and to find new and interesting conflicts between characters and worlds.

The need to use tools from comics in my novel stemmed from my aversion to reading long texts. At first I thought I was in the minority for my lack of patience when reading novels, but according to Carr (2008) and Eisner (2008), this is a problem for a lot of people ranging from teenagers to English Literature professors. Carr and Eisner both argue that readers have been exposed to other fast paced mediums to receive story, ideas and information with little effort, so long passage of text can be quite irritating and even unreadable. Internet, games, film, and TV have become so readily available, Carr argues our brains are becoming wired to adapt to this change. He adds that our way of reading has changed due to the internet's way of presenting its text through blogs,

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

twitter (with its limit of 140 characters), and news. I have noticed online news editors have presented the news by breaking the text into smaller sentences and creating breaks in between.

Fast and effortless reading is something I have been exposed to since I was a child. Why read the long description of beautiful scenery when I could see it on the screen (especially with improving visual effects and 3D modelling)? As Carr and Eisner described, I was feeling fatigued whenever I came across a large body of text without dialogue breaks of any kind. To ease readers like myself into reading my story, I have decided to incorporate increased spacing between blocks of text, which is known as the 'Gutter Space' by a comic artist, Scott McCloud (1993).

McCloud (1993) describes "Gutter Space" – where "Human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea" (p. 66). By creating two different images and letting the readers imagine what happened between the panels, readers become involved in the storytelling. While film uses black screens and novels uses chapter breaks and white spacing for the same purpose, comics have the capacity to do this more frequently. An example McCloud gives was two pictures, one with a man holding an axe over another then another picture with a scream piercing through the neighbourhood. The gutter space allows the readers to imagine what has happened, how it happened and who screamed, effectively 'putting the axe in the reader's hands.' As an example of how I tried to use space to similar effect in my story, I had originally written:

…"Perhaps I did underestimate you." His smile was colder than usual.

"Perhaps it's time to do something drastic."

The spacing between the two pieces of dialogues was put in here for two reasons. Firstly, to allow my readers to imagine what had happened between the lines. Did the speaker raise his eyebrows? Did his eyes narrow? I wanted to give a space for the reader's imagination to fill rather than simply writing what he had done. Secondly, the space lets the dialogue stand out from the rest, giving it more importance. This isn't to the same extent as Danielewski's *House of Leaves*, (2000) but an attempt to replicate the effect of pausing the reader's eyes on the page.

I was faced with two alternatives: One, to accentuate the comic influence in my

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

story or two, to hide the traces and keep a subtle comic feeling throughout the story. At first I attempted to replicate the frame layout of the comics. I replaced the illustrations with text and kept the rules of comics the same. I was surprised that the comic layout fit more text than the normal layout. The results are shown in fig 1 (with frames) and fig 2 (without frames).

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

"Amber Rivera,"

I looked to my left.

I looked to my right.

As usual, no one was around.

Then again, I shouldn't expect anyone standing in my bathroom at six thirty in the morning besides serial killers and stalkers. I thought I should check the cupboards just in case though. mirrors spanning from ceiling to tiles reflected one single person. Me.

Wary, apprehensive.

I didn't blame her.

Through the sunlight that made the tiny specs of dust glitter, I stepped forward and stopped just short of the mirror. Pressing my hands on my cheek, I turned it this way and that. I groaned, as the dark circles under my green eyes were a shade deeper than yesterday. I pulled my cheeks down and whispered a guttural "...Brains...".

To my disappointment, I looked perfect for the part.

Pouting, I gathered a bunch of my hair and pulled it down, attempting to hide my face. Now I looked like something that had crawled out of a well. I released the tight hair, which sprang back immediately. I blew a strand of my hair out of my face and rolled my eyes at my hair that barely passed my shoulders. I hated how it always got in the way of things. It stuck to chapstick, glued itself onto my face, and blinded me. Truthfully, I would love to just tie it up and stop worrying about it, but people warned that only those who were very proud of their faces tied their hair up. There was no way I was going to shout to the world I was vain.

"Amber Rivera,"

The brush hit my foot and clattered noisily on the floor.

Every. Single. Damn. Time!

You would think when some mysterious voice calls your name every day for the past month, you would get used to it. But nope, not I, not Amber Rivera.

"What do you want?" I asked scathingly, not expecting any response.

None came, of course.

With a sigh, I picked up the brush and tried to tame my unruly hair.

The voices didn't scare me anymore. They were more like echoes. Fluttery soft sighs. Maybe I had unlocked some super power ghost whispering abilities?

Doubtful.

As a normal high school student born and raised in Michigan, apart from my interest in chemistry, I couldn't see how that had come about. Mercury poisoning? No, I'd definitely been careful in the lab.

"Amber"

Fig 1.

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

"Amber Rivera,"

I looked to my left.

I looked to my right.

As usual, no one was around.

Then again, I shouldn't expect anyone standing in my bathroom at six thirty in the morning besides serial killers and stalkers. I thought I should check the cupboards just in case though. mirrors spanning from ceiling to tiles reflected one single person. Me.

Wary, apprehensive.

I didn't blame her.

Through the sunlight that made the tiny specs of dust glitter, I stepped forward and stopped just short of the mirror. Pressing my hands on my cheek, I turned it this way and that. I groaned, as the dark circles under my green eyes were a shade deeper than yesterday. I pulled my cheeks down and whispered a guttural "...Brains...".

To my disappointment, I looked perfect for the part.

Pouting, I gathered a bunch of my hair and pulled it down, attempting to hide my face. Now I looked like something that had crawled out of a well. I released the tight hair, which sprang back immediately. I blew a strand of my hair out of my face and rolled my eyes at my hair that barely passed my shoulders. I hated how it always got in the way of things. It stuck to chapstick, glued itself onto my face, and blinded me. Truthfully, I would love to just tie it up and stop worrying about it, but people warned that only those who were very proud of their faces tied their hair up. There was no way I was going to shout to the world I was vain.

"Amber Rivera,"

The brush hit my foot and clattered noisily on the floor.

Every. Single. Damn. Time!

You would think when some mysterious voice calls your name every day for the past month, you would get used to it. But nope, not I, not Amber Rivera.

"What do you want?" I asked scathingly, not expecting any response.

None came, of course.

With a sigh, I picked up the brush and tried to tame my unruly hair.

The voices didn't scare me anymore. They were more like echoes. Fluttery soft sighs. Maybe I had unlocked some super power ghost whispering abilities?

Doubtful.

As a normal high school student born and raised in Michigan, apart from my interest in chemistry, I couldn't see how that had come about. Mercury poisoning? No, I'd definitely been careful in the lab.

"Amber"

Fig 2.

After many attempts to make my novel aesthetically like a graphic novel, in the

end, I decided to abandon this style. As most of my readers would be used to the conventional way of reading novels, where space between paragraph heralds a change in the scene, it would cause confusion and discomfort when reading my story. I had to try and find a way to appease readers from both worlds. Next, I drew inspirations from books such as Jay Asher's *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2007) and its use of cassette tape symbols, and Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet* (1991) with its use of small cloud icons between scenes. I initially intended to add symbols in the spacing to signal a change of scene and leave the white spacing for the two purposes described above. However this caused the page to look very cluttered and messy.

In the end I abandoned this style due to the confusion and discomfort expressed by readers. I also felt reading an entire novel in this style would alienate many readers when my goal was to reach as wide an audience as I could.

To minimize the confusion for many readers, I have opted for a subtle approach by putting few words between large bodies of text instead of leaving the space blank.

For example:

> …Swearing repeatedly in quick succession, I got down on my hands and knees under the counters full of expensive cylinders, measuring cups and canters. As I reached down to pick up the dusty marble, it suddenly cracked with a loud sound. It fractured again and again, with a loud crack and bang with each split. With a final crack, the marble shattered around my hands.
> Huh?
> With a moment to gather my mind, I turned my head to locate where the duster and pan was. When I turned back, the tiny fragments of the marble had melted into a small, shiny thick pool, just like mercury. The pools glided across and merged one by one, gathering under me…

The previous example turned to:

> …"Perhaps I did underestimate you." His smile was colder than usual.
> He then whispered,
> "Perhaps it's time to do something drastic."

The effect of the white space has lessened to a degree, but it abides by the rules of novel style and minimizes the danger of confusion amongst readers.

By doing this, I am not assuming I have assimilated comics and novels seamlessly, nor am I crediting myself with this form of writing. There are still many flaws and problems and there are many writers who already break their long paragraphs with dialogue, smaller sentences and action. I am merely trying to apply tools from

comics for use in scenes where the Gutter Space would exist and find a way to incorporate this without alienating novel readers.

Exaggeration/Caricature in my story.

According to the Webster Dictionary, caricature is defined as "[e]xaggeration by means of often ludicrous distortion of parts or characteristics." In narrative comics, caricature is often used to establish characters quickly, rather than being used as a tool for ridicule. For example, the way the character stands, the clothes they wear and their colour palette are all deliberately used to help readers establish the kind of characters they are (McCloud, 2008).

According to Eisner (2008), stereotypes and caricatures of characters are a necessary tool in comics to help readers visualize an idea or process quickly. This is due to the fact comics have little time and space to flesh out the character and their image must define the character instantly. It is noted that depth and pacing is a balancing decision by the author, where one must be sacrificed for the other. (M. Johnson, personal communication, 2014)

When drawing a comic, one page roughly equates to two to three sentences in a novel. As a comic writer myself, I struggle to fit as much meaning and story into the visual frame. Everything in the room must have a story. Pages full of text instantly turn readers off. Novels also use the aid of symbols and colours to help their narrative, but generally with less frequency than comics. Caricatures are part of the symbols artists must utilize to tell a story in a limited space.

In *Serenade of Simeon Stradivari,* I have opted to have many of my minor characters defined by caricature so the readers will have an image and experience they can use. For example, Gary, a friend of the heroine is portrayed as a soccer fan who is always equipped with one liners and jokes. Helena, advisor to Simeon, reveals nothing but her calm, collected and cold side. By sacrificing the depth of the secondary characters, I could further highlight the depth of the main protagonists, and progress their developments quickly. This has the danger of making the characters cliché and one dimensional, a weakness that is explored in YAL previously, so it could only be used in few places.

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

Another use of caricatures or exaggeration of the characters or their actions is to surprise the audience. McCloud (2008) explains that adding intensity to the page can make the page interesting. This is usually portrayed as drawing unrealistic proportions, expressions, pose or style for the characters. In order to translate this into novels, I have exaggerated the events, characters' action and speech. Amber's speech and her thoughts balance between those of a quirky teenager and a comic character.

For example:

> He offered to go to my world and grab the ingredients, but I threatened him with the kitchen knife that if he further shortened his life for sake of pasta, I would stab him.

Exaggerations, shocking actions and twists are a necessity for comic artists where each page, each chapter must have something shocking, refreshing and unexpected to have readers want to continue reading the next chapters. In Japan, comics are generally published in a monthly magazine like Jump, Hana to Yume and GFantasy. They hold a monthly rating survey which determines whether or not the comic will continue being published. For comic artists who get paid per page of comic they draw, this pushes them to create shocking plot twists, actions and characters that makes the comic stand out from the rest. Characters and events in my story have both been riddled with extremities complete with seven scenes where Amber has a close brush with death.

Fight Scenes

Influenced by many Shonen (boys) comics and games, my narrative is filled with fight scenes. They are charged moments to the story where it can offer a different way to progress the narrative.

Totalling five fight scenes in my story, the scenes were added to show the extent of the power Simeon and his enemies wield as well as making the danger imminent for Amber. Making the fight scene interesting was a challenge I encountered in my story. As Amber was an ordinary human without any special powers, I could not have her participate in the battles. For fights where she was an observer, I looked towards games for tools I could use to make the fight scenes more appealing.

After speaking with Rory Rackham, a game designer for Grinding Gear Games, he suggested a few techniques that I could incorporate in my novel that would intensify the emotion in the combat scenes. First was to make the opponent someone that readers

had previously encountered, leaving either a positive or negative impact.

"By involving someone the player previously met, you create greater emotional stakes for the characters. Readers who aren't drawn to action heavy scenes will be engaged as there will be a personal reward for them at the end of the encounter." (R. Rackham, personal communication, September 12, 2014). This helped me change some scenes; in a scene where I wanted to highlight a piece of information, I originally had unknown creatures attack Amber, Leo and Titus. After changing the opponent into someone Amber owed her life to, the scene became very important and felt more engaging.

The second suggestion from game design was to clearly state the limits of power wielded by all characters. For example, if the first opponent used a fire based attack in the previous scene, they should not use water in the next fight without any explanation. Giving the audience what they expect gives the idea that the fight is 'fair' and to some degree 'winnable'. "Nobody wants to play a game where you think the boss 'cheated'." (R. Rackham, 2014) This posed a challenge for Simeon, who used a variety of magic without any rules. This is something that will require a structural change in my story, where I will need to define a rule for each and every character.

Conclusion

With such hazy lines of what defines a YAL and with such broad age range that define what a 'young adult' is, I believe the *Serenade of Simeon Stradivari* would be placed somewhere in an older young adult section, with hopes of connecting and empowering young adults. I believe the definition of YAL will always elude writers and scholars' attempts to concrete the term. As society changes, not only will what we define 'young adult' as will change, their challenges and their circumstances will also change. Perhaps a new genre or age term will be created in the future to accommodate this.

As for using tools from other media, more books written in different forms may appear, as more people become exposed to different forms of storytelling and ways of reading. Incorporating transferrable tools from that media into novels may offer a solution for declining reading rates, especially in our youth. It is my hope that my story will create a further interest in reading for an audience who have come to embrace a fast paced story common in modern storytelling forms.

Writing *The Serenade of Simeon Stradivari,* I started to write the story to be an

entertaining and fun story for anyone to read. However, the more I learnt about the themes I originally put in half-heartedly and the intended audience, the more I wanted for it to help and contribute against what I saw as a problem in our society. Instead of selling as many books as possible, my aim is to have at least one teenager finds this story and for it to help them overcome their problems and find encouragement.

Yeon woo Kim 1391132
Masters of Creative Writing 2014

References:

Belbin, D. (2011). What is young adult fiction? *English in Education, 45, 2.* Doi: 10.1111/j.1754-8845.2011.01094.x

Bowker. (2012). *Young adult books attract growing number of adult fans: 2012 press releases.* Retrieved from

http://www.bowker.com/en-US/aboutus/press_room/2012/pr_09132012.shtml

Bucher, K & Hinton, K. M. (2013) *Young Adult Literature: Exploration, Evaluation, and Appreciation.* Pearson; 3 edition.

Carr, N. (2008). Is Google making us stupid? What internet is doing to our brains. *The Atlantic.* Retrieved from http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/

Cart, M. (2010). *Young Adult Literature*, *from romance to realism.* Chicago, United States: American Library Association.

Cole, P. (2008). *Young Adult Literature in the 21st Century.* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Eisner Will (2008). *Graphic Storytelling and Visual Narrative*. New York, United States: W.W.Norton.

Doll, J. (2012) The ongoing problem in race in Y.A. *The Wire.* Retrieved from http://www.thewire.com/entertainment/2012/04/ongoing-problem-race-y/51574/

Fitzpatrick, B. (2005). Young adult literature. *School Libraries in Canada, 25*(1), 3-4. Retrieved from

http://ezproxy.aut.ac.nz/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/222534547?acco

untid=8440

Gillespie, J. T & Naden, C. J (1989) *Seniorplots: A Book Talk Guide to Use with Readers Ages 15-18.* New York, United States: Bowker

Graham, R. (2014). Against YA. *The Slate Book Review.* Retrieved http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/books/2014/06/against_ya_adults_should_be_embarr assed_to_read_children_s_books.2.html

Hart, K. (2011) Uncovering YA covers: how dark are they? [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://www.katehart.net/2011/07/uncovering-ya-covers-how-dark-are-they.html

Hillsberg, C. & Spak, H. (2006) Young adult literature as the centrepiece of an anti-bullying program in middle school. *Middle School Journal, 38, 2, 23-28.*

Knickerbocker, J. L, Rycik, J. (2002). Growing into literature: adolescents' literary interpretation and appreciation. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy, 46, 3,* 196-208.

Jago, C. (2000). *With rigor for all: Teaching classics to contemporary students.* Portland, ME: Calendar Islands.

Lacy, M. (2013). How does writing affect your brain? *Daily Infographic.* Retrieved http://dailyinfographic.com/how-does-writing-affect-your-brain-infographic

Larson, J & Hoover, J, H. (2012) Quality books about bullying in the young adult tradition. *Reclaiming Children and Youth, 21, 1.* Retrieved from: https://reclaimingjournal.com/sites/default/files/journal-article-pdfs/21_1_Larson_Hoover.pdf

Lewis, C S (1959). *On three ways of writing for children.* Retrieved August 17, 2014 from http://mail.scu.edu.tw/~jmklassen/scu99b/chlitgrad/3ways.pdf

Liang, E (2013) *The midway review canonical angst in young adult literature.*

Retrieved from http://midwayreview.uchicago.edu/a/8/2/liang/liang.pdf

Marano, H. E. (2007) *Trashing Teens*. Retrieved June 12, 2014 from http://www.psychologytoday.com/articles/200703/trashing-teens

McCloud, S. (2006). *Making Comics: Storytelling secrets of Comics, Manga and Graphic Novels.* New York, United States: HaperCollins.

McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding Comics: The invisible art.* New York, United States: HaperCollins.

Myers, W.D. (2014). Where are the people of color in children's books? *The New York Times.* Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2014/03/16/opinion/sunday/where-are-the-people-of-color-in-childrens-books.html?_r=1

Nansel, T. R, Overpeck, M, Pilla, R. S, Ruan, W, Simons-Morton, B, Scheidt, P. Bullying behaviors among US youth: prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *JAMA*. 2001;285(16):2094-2100. doi:10.1001/jama.285.16.2094

Pytash, K. E, Morgan, E. N & Batchelor K.E. (2013). Recognize the signs: reading young adult literature to address bullying. *Voices from the Middle,* 20, 3. Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/library/nctefiles/resources/journals/vm/0203-mar2013/vm0203recognize.pdf

Roberts, M. (2013) Teaching Young Adult Literature. *English Journal 102, 5.* Retrieved from http://www.ncte.org/library/NCTEFiles/Resources/Journals/EJ/1021-sep2012/EJ1021Young.pdf

Rosenberg, A. (2014) No, you do not have to be ashamed of reading young adult fiction. *The Washington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/act-four/wp/2014/06/06/no-you-do-not-have-to-be-ashamed-of-reading-young-adult-fiction/

Rosenberg, P. (2012) The coming-of-age of young adult literature: adolescence, culture and narrative. *Temple University Diamond Scholars Program 2012*. Retrieved from http://www.academia.edu/5833024/The_Coming-of-Age_of_Young_Adult_Literature_Adolescence_Culture_and_Narrative

Strickland, A. (2014) 'Where's the African-American Harry Potter or the Mexican Katniss? *CNN*. Retrieved from http://edition.cnn.com/2014/04/09/living/young-adult-books-diversity-identity/

Wendig, C (2012) 25 Things you should know about Young Adult Fiction [Web log post]. Retrieved from http://terribleminds.com/ramble/2013/06/04/25-things-you-should-know-about-young-adult-fiction/

Bibliography

Asher, J. (2007). *Thirteen Reasons Why.* London. United Kingdom. Penguin.

Barry, L. (2006). *The Astonishing Adventures of Fanboy and Goth Girl.* New York, United States: HMH books.

Bin, L. (2002-2005) *Ge Ttongi. (Vol 1-8).* Seoul, S. Korea: Seoul Cultural Company.

Bronte, C. (1847) *Jane Eyre.* London, United Kingdom: Smith, Elder and Company.

Caroll, L. (1865). *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland.* London, United Kingdom. Macmillan

Carle, E. (1969) *The Very Hungry Caterpillar.* United States, Putnam.

Danielewski, M, Z. (2000) *House of Leaves.* New York, United States: Random House.

Devine, Z & Gluck, W. (Producer), & Gluck, W (Director) & Royal, B, V. (Writer). (2010) *Easy A.* [Motion picture]. United States: Olive Bridge Entertainment.

Dumas, A. (2003) *The Count of Monte Cristo.* New York, United States: Bantam Classics. (Original work published ca. 1984)

Eddings, D. (1982-1984). *Belgariad Series. (Vol. 1-4)* United States. Del Rey Books.

Kamio, Y. (1992-2003) *Hana Yori Dango. (Vol. 1-37)* Tokyo, Japan. Shueisha.

Katsu, A. (1994-1997) *The Vision of Escaflowne. (Vol. 1-8)* Tokyo, Japan. Kadowaka Shoten.

Kim, K. (1997). *The Queen's Knights. (Vol. 1-17)* Seoul, S.Korea. Haksan Culture

Company.

L'engle, M. (1980) *A Ring of Endless Light.* United States, Farrar, Straus & Giroux.

Martin, G. R. R. (1996-2011). *A Song of Ice and Fire Series. (Vol 1-5)* New York, United States: Bantam Books.

Marquez, G.(1967) *One Hundred Years of Solitude.* United States, HarperCollins.

Park, N, Bevan, T, & Fellner, E. (Producer), & Wright, E. (Director) & Wright, E & Pegg, S. (Writer). (2007) *Hot Fuzz.* [Motion picture]. France: StudioCanal & United States: Working Title Films & United Kingdom: Big Talk Productions.

Pierece, T. (1983-1988) *The Song of the Lioness.* New York, United States: Atheneum Books.

Pullman, P. (1995-2000) *His Dark Materials.* New York, United States: Scholastic.

Rattray, E. (Producer), & Henson, J. (Writer/Director), & Lee, D. (Writer). (1986) *Labyrinth.* [Motion picture]. United States: Henson Associates & Lucasfilm.

Riordan, R. (2005-2009). *Percy Jackson and the Olympian. (Vol 1-5)* United States, Disney Hyperion.

Rowling, J.K (1997-2007) *Harry Potter Series. (Vol 1-7)* United Kingdom, Bloomsbury

Shinohara, C. (1995-2002) *Anatolia Story. (Vol. 1-28)* Tokyo, Japan. Shogakukan.

Takahashi, R. (1996-2008) *Inuyasha. (Vol. 1-56)* Tokyo, Japan. Shogakukan.

Meyer, S. (2005-2008) *Twilight Series. (Vol. 1-3)* New York, United States:Little, Brown and Company.

Watase, Y. (1992-1996) *Fushigi Yuugi. (Vol. 1-18)* Tokyo, Japan. Shogakukan.

Watase, Y. (2003-2013) *Fuushigi Yuugi Genbu Gaiden. (Vol. 1-12)* Tokyo, Japan. Shogakukan.

Winton, D. (1991) *Cloudstreet.* Carlton, Australia: Penguin.