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FROM NANSHOKU TO HOMOSEXUALITY: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MISHIMA YUKIO'S CONFESSIONS OF A MASK

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This article analyzes Mishima Yukio's *Confessions of a Mask* (1949), focusing on the sexuality of the male protagonist "I". Although "I" confesses his sexual desire to the same sex, it is not appropriate to apply the term "homosexual" to him, because his sexual inclination is not exactly equal to the "homosexuality" in the modern Western sense. The fact that he is attracted to men of a different age group from his own is related to the traditional make-up of the same sex couple in *nanshoku* (the Japanese tradition of male-love), which typically consisted of an older man and a younger boy. There were two different *nanshoku* traditions; monastic and military, and "I" possesses the features of both: the idolization of the love object of the former, and the educational function of the latter.

However, in contrast with traditional *nanshoku*, which was tolerated and even celebrated in pre-modern Japan, "I" considers his same sex desires sinful and shameful. His notions about his sexuality are influenced by Western prejudices about male love seen in discourses on homosexuality in the West. At the same time, he has a strong sense of subjectivity that makes him capable of expressing and confessing his own sexual desires. With "I"'s confession, a modern subjectivity and sexual identity emerges, and in this sense, he can be called a "homosexual", in the same sense as, for example, the male protagonist Billy in John Fox's *Boys on the Rock* (1984), a representative work of American gay fiction. By comparing "I" with Billy, I will point out modernized and Westernized aspects of the narrator's sexuality, and conclude that the character "I" represents the mixed characteristics of indigenous and exogenous elements of male love in modernized Japan.

Key words: MISHIMA YUKIO, CONFESSIONS OF A MASK, NANSHOKU, DANSHOKU, HOMOSEXUALITY, GAY, PEDERASTY, CHIGO, IDENTITY, JOHN FOX, THE BOYS ON THE ROCK, SODOMY, HAGAKURE, MALE-LOVE, NYOSHOKU.

Mishima Yukio's *Confessions of a Mask* (1949) might be considered a piece of Japanese gay literature in that the male protagonist "I" confesses his secret homosexual life. However, it is not strictly appropriate to apply the term "homosexual" to him, because it imposes the modern Western concept of male homosexuality upon Japanese traditional male-love; *nanshoku* (男色), and thus prevents us from understanding the true nature of his sexuality. In this essay, I would like to discuss how the love of "I" in *Confessions of a Mask* differs from homosexuality in the modern Western sense and then, by comparing the work with John Fox's *Boys on the Rock* (1984), a representative work of American gay fiction, would like to show how his love also shows tendencies of transforming into homosexuality in the modern, Western-influenced sense.

Omi's Fascination with "I"

First, I would like to examine the characteristics of the narrator's feeling towards Omi, the first person with whom "I" ever falls in love.¹ Having failed to be promoted two or three times, Omi

is several years older than “I” and his classmates. As a matter of course, Omi has a more mature body than the other classmates, and it is this mature, masculine body that attracts “I” to Omi. “I” usually watches the strong muscles of his shoulders and chest with great admiration, especially when he performs on the horizontal bar in gymnastics class:

As he began the pull-up, the muscles of his arms bulged out hard, and his shoulders swelled like summer clouds....

Life-force — it was the sheer extravagant abundance of life-force that overpowered the boys. They were overwhelmed by the feeling he gave of having too much life, by the feeling of purposeless violence that can be explained only as life existing for its own sake,... (CM78, 218-9)

Not only “I” but all other boys in the class are greatly moved at the sight of Omi’s beautiful muscles, because they show them what they still do not possess. For the teenage boys on the brink of puberty, who still have skinny “feminine” bodies, Omi’s body is what they hope their bodies to be in the future. His muscles are the model of the ideal male body for the younger boys.

Furthermore, the adoration of Omi’s body by the other boys not only comes from the beauty of the muscles of the male body, but also from what “I” calls “life-force”. “Life-force” is the very thing that “I” desperately wants to gain. Due to his weak constitution, the narrator is told by one of his classmates “You’ll surely die before you’re twenty.” (CM82, 221). “I” himself is continuously expressing his dissatisfaction about his poor health and frail constitution.

I turned pale. In the pallid goose-flesh that suddenly covered me I was experiencing a form of regret like some piercing cold. I stared vacantly into the air, scratching the ugly vaccination scars on my thin arms. My name was called. The scales looked exactly like a scaffold proclaiming the hour of my execution.

“Eighty-eight,” the assistant barked to the school doctor...

As the doctor entered the figure on my card, he was mumbling to himself:

“Wish he’d get to ninety pounds at least.”

I had become used to undergoing this treatment at every physical examination.

(CM 74, 215)²

Having had a strong inferiority complex about his physical condition, “I” finds that Omi has what “I” really needs.

In a phrase, what I did derive from him was a precise definition of the perfection of life and manhood, personified in his eyebrows, his forehead, his eyes, his nose, his ears, his cheeks, his cheekbones, his lips, his jaws, the nape of his neck, his throat, his complexion, the colour of his skin, his strength, his chest, his hands, and countless other of his attributes. (CM64, 208)

It is Omi, or more precisely, Omi’s body that demonstrates the meaning of “life-force” to the narrator, who is always plagued by his lack of masculine strength. Physical weakness was disgusting, not only to “I”, but also to the other boys, for it was considered “feminine” by them

who were expected to grow up to be “masculine”. Especially in the case of “I”, who continuously suffered from his frail constitution, the longing for a perfect “masculinity” becomes so great that it leads “I” to a strong love for Omi.

Although the narrator’s love for Omi does not advance to a physical one, the relationship between them reminds us of military *nanshoku* among samurai in early modern Japan. In the *nanshoku* relationship, the *nenja* (the adult male, 念者) was usually expected to provide a model of manliness for the *wakashu* (the younger boy, 若衆), and in exchange, the *wakashu* had to apply himself to learning what the samurai ideal of manhood was.³ This educational function of *nanshoku* was considered effective in raising strong military males.⁴ Although the military skill of the samurai class, which justified the *nanshoku* relationship among them, had almost disappeared in reality by the Kanei Era (1789-1800),⁵ the ideal of masculinity as physical and mental strength still survived among Meiji school boys (*shosei*),⁶ and was revived in Mishima’s writings.

Like the Meiji students, “I” tries to practice masculine behavior in his school days by beginning to speak “crudely like the other boys,” although he was still using “the polite, feminine forms of speech at home” (CM49, 197). His single motto “Be Strong!” (CM80, 220) clearly tells us of his efforts to grow up to be strong adult male, and his erotic interests towards soldiers in general⁷ as well as Omi, suggests that his yearning for masculine strength is of the pre-modern warrior aesthetic.

The military male-love described above was often accompanied by a strong misogyny, for “femininity,” or more precisely, the characteristics that men identified with femininity, such as physical weakness and fear of death, were considered threatening to masculine strength. *Hagakure* (1716), the Bible of male-love and the samurai ethic and one of Mishima’s favorite books, rarely refers to women except for a few discriminatory comments against them.⁸ For fear of weakening the male-to-male bond indispensable to warriors, the samurai ethic tries to exclude women from the sphere of their official duties. To attain masculine strength and to reinforce the male-to-male bond within the military, the samurai boy was required to escape from his ties from the women surrounding him, such as his mother or his sisters, and expected to enter into an exclusively male group in the official sphere.⁹ Inspired by the samurai ethic in *Hagakure*, Mishima’s “I” tries to escape from his grandmother and wishes to be connected to male comrades to grow up to be a strong adult male.¹⁰

The Fascination of “The Other”

In spite of all his efforts to attain the masculine strength evinced by Omi, “I” is forced to admit that a strong masculine body is perhaps the most difficult thing to attain for one like himself, plagued by physical weakness. Looking closely into the mirror, “I” dreams of having “a chest like Omi’s, shoulders like Omi’s” (CM83, 222). But at the same time, “I” has to convince himself that “Never in this world can you resemble Omi” (CM83). As a result, Omi becomes a sacred idol beyond his reach, who must be awed or worshiped. He confesses that:

I fashioned a perfect, flawless illusion of him. Hence it is that I can not discover a single flaw in the image that remains imprinted on my memory. In a piece of writing such as this, a character should be brought to life by describing some essential idiosyncrasy,

some lovable fault, but from my memory of Omi I can extract not a single such imperfection. (CM63-4, 208)

By recreating Omi as an illusory figure without any human imperfection, and by worshipping him like a god, "I" finds a way of escaping from his own miserable reality. Because there is no way for "I" to resemble Omi in this world, he can be the sacred icon that "I" can eternally long for. The motivation of his love of Omi is this longing for the perfect masculine beauty which transcends reality. Thus, Omi becomes the embodiment of the ideal world for "I". In other words, Omi is "the other" for him, and it is this "otherness" that makes him love Omi.

Looking at this love from Omi's point of view, it seems that Omi does not have any interest in "I" as his love object. Omi always treats "I" "as a snot-nosed child, beneath contempt" (CM59, 205), and even when he "welcomed" "I" when he was in the snowy school yard, he soon returns to his usual scornful attitude toward "I".¹¹ One might argue that Omi does love "I", because of the fact that he helps "I" when "I" falls down from the swinging-log on the playground. Yet, there is no concrete evidence proving Omi's love of "I", for they do not express their affections through means such as dating or exchanging letters. The relationship of "I" with Omi is completely one-sided, a fact of which "I" himself is fully conscious, and truly satisfied by.

...while at school, particularly during a boring class, I could not take my eyes off Omi's profile. What more could I have done when I did not know that to love is both to seek and to be sought? ...As for my spirit of adoration, I never even imagined it to be a thing that required some sort of answer. (CM72-3, 214)

As his above confession indicates, "I" expects no answer from Omi, and that is enough for him. Adorer and adoree are thus completely separated, and "I" himself is keenly conscious of this and of the nature of his feelings toward Omi, admitting that this kind of relationship is not worth being called "love" in its true sense. We should be aware of the fact that the expression used in the Japanese original for the "first love" (CM61, 206) (CM72, 214) "I" feels for Omi is invariably *koi* (恋), not *ai* (愛), the translation of the English word "love" introduced in the Meiji Period. In Mishima's text, *koi*, the traditional Japanese word, whose major nuance implies a one-sided longing for someone, is carefully differentiated from *ai*, the more mutual exchange of the affections of the two individuals. The English word "love", which is used for the translation of Mishima's work, can not clearly distinguish between these two different types of human feeling. Mishima's "I" seems to believe that the true "love" presupposes a more reciprocal relationship than one-way adoration, which could be seen as the result of the modernization of the ideal of love during the Meiji Reformation.¹²

The one-sidedness which distinguishes the narrator's relationship with Omi from the modern ideal of love mainly comes from the age difference between the two, which, as I wrote above, is a typical aspect of traditional *nanshoku* couples. As Gary Leupp has discussed in *Male Colors* (1995), the Japanese *nanshoku* relationship reflects the emphasis upon hierarchy in Japanese society, influenced by Confucian notions of precedence based upon age. (Leupp 1995: 171). For this reason, he categorizes Japanese *nanshoku* as age-structured, in which the passive role is usually assigned to the younger partner, while the adult male plays the active role. (ibid.: 55).

The clear distinction between the active role of the older man and the passive role of the

younger one is true in the case of couples in the tradition of *chigo* (稚児) *nanshoku*, the pederasty which was practiced in medieval Buddhist temples. Such medieval monastic *nanshoku* couples consisted of an older monk and a younger servant boy, who usually played the “passive” role for his elder partner. Interestingly enough, however, in spite of the age precedence, it is the younger boy who is adored as an incarnation of *Bosatsu* or *Kannon* in this world, in contrast to the case of “I” and Omi, where the adored is the older of the pair. However, the nature of one-sidedness and the source of fascination for the love object are similar, in that the *chigo* was considered sacred by the monk as the representative of the ideal world, as Omi is by “I”.¹³ In both cases, the love object is someone who can transcend the earthly world, something beyond reality. As a result, the adorer can enjoy the freedom from earthly bonds through love for his *nanshoku* partner.¹⁴

This aspect of *nanshoku* as the longing for another world was developed in Mishima’s later work *Eirei no Koe* (*The Voices of the Spirits of Kamikaze*, 1966) as worship of the emperor Hirohito. In the text, young Kamikaze pilots express their fidelity to the Emperor as the “love (*koi* in the original) for the Emperor at the risk of our lives”. (Mishima 1973b: 243, my translation). What makes them devote themselves completely to the Emperor is his absolute divinity. Hence, they repeatedly grieve, “Why has our Emperor reduced himself to a human being?” (*ibid.*: 245). Once the Emperor became no more than an ordinary person, they lost their reason for loving him. They were attracted to “the otherness” of the Emperor.

In the sense of its concern with the “otherness” of the love object, *nanshoku* cannot be called “homosexuality”, as “homo” means “the same”. Rather, it is close to “heterosexual” eroticism, which is also derived from the fascination of “the other”. This could be assumed as one of the reasons why *nanshoku* has traditionally been considered as the counterpart of *nyoshoku* or *joshoku* (女色), the love of women. No matter whether the sex of the love object is biologically male or female, *nanshoku* and *nyoshoku* are both motivated by the erotic fascination of “the other” for men. Therefore, *nanshoku* and *nyoshoku* do not necessarily exclude each other, but sometimes coexist harmoniously within one person like Yonosuke in Ihara Saikaku’s *Koshoku-ichidai Otoko* (1682), who is said to have had, by the age of fifty-four, affairs with 3,742 women and 725 boys. The sexuality of Yonosuke, which is representative of the sexuality of early modern Japanese commoners, might be categorized as bisexual, but such an understanding is no more than the modern distortion of the sexual behaviour at that time, the imposing of a modern categorization of human sexuality.¹⁵ Because the concept of sexuality itself had not emerged in early modern Japan, we could only say that both the love of boys and the love of women were simply regarded as equally acceptable ways of attaining sexual pleasure.¹⁶

It might be seen that this approximately “bisexual” attitude of the Edo commoners contradicts the misogyny in samurai *nanshoku*. However, military misogyny does not necessarily mean the rejection of sexual intercourse with women. Samurai used marriage to women for preserving the family lineage, while also enjoying affairs with beautiful boys. They kept themselves apart from women in the space of their official duties for the purpose of preventing themselves from being polluted by “femininity”, identified with physical and mental weakness. As I have already argued in the first section, Mishima’s “I” also carries on the tradition of this aspect of hatred and fear of “feminine” weakness.¹⁷

Comparison of "I" with Billy in *Boys on the Rock*

The fundamental difference between *nanshoku* and modern Western homosexuality is more clearly observed when we compare Mishima's work with Western gay literature. In John Fox's *Boys on the Rock* (1984), a representative work of American gay fiction, the male protagonist Billy, a high school boy, falls in love with the older college student Al. Billy and Al's relationship seems similar to that of a Japanese *nanshoku* couple in terms of their age difference. However, disparity between the older man and the younger boy is not so strong in *Boys on the Rock* as in *Confessions of a Mask*. In contrast with "I", whose love has an asymmetrical nature, Billy claims equality with Al despite their age difference. His conception of human equality in general is completely opposed to the *nanshoku* ideal based on age hierarchy. He maintains:

Well, see, I don't believe in any of that Respect-Your-Elders crap....And if you ask me, telling someone to respect your elders is the same exact thing as telling a black person to respect a white person, for instance. People's age doesn't have anything to do with it and most kids take too much shit from adults just because they're adults.¹⁸

As one would expect from such a view of human equality, he denies any disparity in his relationship with his lover, even in bed, by rejecting the passive role in love making:

After a while he wanted to fuck me...and I said No if I couldn't fuck him, then he couldn't fuck me...I felt like he was treating me like a girl in a way since only he could do the fucking. So I wouldn't let him, even though I know I would have liked it.

(BR135-6)

Billy's refusal of the feminization of his body makes a sharp contrast with the *nanshoku* relationship in which quasi male-female love-making is mainly performed through fixing the passive and active role to the younger man and older one respectively. As there was traditionally no conception of social equality in pre-modern Japan, the basis for both *nanshoku* and *nyoshoku* lay in the inherent inequality of the couple.¹⁹ Therefore, "I", as a modern successor of the *nanshoku* tradition, is quite satisfied with his asymmetrical relationship, contrary to Billy in *Boys on the Rock*.

The fact that "I"'s love objects change from older boys to younger ones when "I" grows older indicates that the *nanshoku* characteristic of inequality between the partners is maintained into adulthood.

During this time the attraction I had formerly felt only toward older youths had little by little been extended to include younger boys as well...this transference of my love to persons in a different age group was also related to a more fundamental change in the nature of my love....Along with my natural growth there was developing in me something like a guardian's love, something akin to boy-love. (CM123, 251-2)

Protector and protectee are strictly distinguished from each other according to the narrator's idea of male love, just as in the samurai tradition. The change in role from protectee to protector

with the advance of the age is also seen in samurai *nanshoku* tradition. In the case of military *nanshoku*, the *wakashu* becomes a *nenja*, the protector of the younger boy, when he grows up. This change in role according to age suggests the fact that the stigmatization of the passive role in male-male sexual activity is not so severe in Japan as in the West, as suggested by Billy's hatred of sexual passivity.²⁰

Focusing on the role of the older man towards the younger boy, on the other hand, we can find a similarity between Billy and "I". In both cases, the older man plays the role of the catalyst for the younger boy to find his sexual identity at puberty. For both teenage boys, sexual awakening comes with their first encounter with a same-sex love object, and thus helps them to identify the nature of their own sexuality. In contrast to the *nanshoku* tradition, in the case of both "I" and Billy, desire for the same sex simultaneously means loss of interest in the opposite sex. For them, love of men or women have become mutually exclusive, and within them has emerged a new sense of identity based upon their erotic inclinations.

The form taken by the narrative of both works reflects this emergence of the modern erotic self. Both works take the form of "confession" of the sexual experiences of the narrator in which the male protagonist is keenly conscious of his "self" ("I") as capable of confessing and expressing his sexual inclinations.²¹ Especially in the case of "I", *nanshoku*, which was a matter of taste, has now transformed into homosexuality, which is a matter of identity. The process of attaining one's own identity as an adult male, the journey of finding out what "I" am, overlaps with the path of discovering one's own sexuality. This process shows us the emergence of the concept of sexuality itself in the modern regime, as Foucault argued in the case of Europe (Foucault, 1978). Within this regime, in which sexual identity is presumed to adhere to each individual inherently, Mishima's young "I" comes to be able to confess his sexuality, while a younger boy's sexual subjectivity was completely out of question in the pre-modern *nanshoku* era.²²

The struggle against the modern heterosexual dominant society is also shared by "I" and Billy. To adapt to the social standard of "normal" love of contemporary society, both boys make painful efforts to love women, which turn out in vain.

I covered her lips with mine. A second passed. There is not the slightest sensation of pleasure. Two seconds. It is just the same. Three seconds...I understood everything.

I drew away from her and stood for an instant regarding her with sad eyes. ...I must flee, I kept telling myself. Without a moment's delay I must flee. (CM197, 306)

We can see the desperate attempt to love woman when "I" tries to kiss his girl friend Sonoko. The miserable feeling "I" gets at that time is exactly the same as what Billy does when he kisses his girl friend and realizes that he cannot get any sensual pleasure at all from her.

She moved closer to me. I lifted my arm. I put it behind her and touched and held on to her shoulder while I kept my eyes glued to a crack in one of the cement steps. My hand was wet and it was ejector button time. I turned my head and faced her and her lips parted and her eyes sort of half closed and I kissed her on the lips and I didn't feel anything. I didn't like the taste. Or her smell. Or anything. I removed my arm, stood up and said, "Well, I have to go, I guess." (BR65)

Living in dominantly heterosexual societies, both boys stigmatize their failure in sexual contact with females, and try to force themselves to learn to love women, a love which is natural for most other boys.

I devised a pathetic secret exercise. It consisted of testing my desire by staring fixedly at pictures of naked women...As may be easily imagined, my desire answered neither yes or no. Upon indulging in that bad habit of mine, I would try to discipline my desire, first by refraining from my usual daydreams, and later by forcibly calling up mental images of women in the most obscene poses. At times it seemed my efforts were successful. But there was a falseness about this success that seemed to grind my heart into powder. (CM223, 326)²³

This passage also reminds us of Billy's self-exercise of loving girls, which ends up with failure just as the case of "I".

When I first started jerking off, I knew I was supposed to be thinking about girls and cunts and stuff like that, which is what the other guys in the seventh grade were all going apeshit over. But whenever I did it, like in the bathtub mostly, and thought about girls, I wouldn't get a boner,..(BR24)

The struggle of "I" with his own "perverse" sexual desire, in common with that of Billy, proves the decline of the *nanshoku* tradition in modern Japan under the influence of the Western intolerance of male-love.²⁴ The introduction of the ideal of heterosexual love from the West during the Meiji Enlightenment (Saeki 1996), followed by the spread of Western medical science and sexology in the Taisho Era, caused the waning of *nanshoku* in Japanese society,²⁵ and makes "I" think of himself as "abnormal" and "perverse".²⁶

My ignorance had been enlightened by reading the theories of Hirschfeld, who explains inversion as a perfectly simple biological phenomenon.... It is said that the same impulse as this I was feeling is not uncommon among Germans. The diary of Count von Platen provides a most representative example. Winckelmann also was the same. And, turning to Renaissance Italy, it is clear that Michelangelo was the possessor of impulses in the same category as mine. (CM 240-1, 340)

The very fact that "I" seeks his comrades in Western cultures and refers to Western scholarship to learn about his sexuality, ironically turns out to be the source of his discovery of "inversion", for his information comes from the context of Western intolerance of male homosexuality.

Suffering from the social prejudice against male love, "I" and Billy both feel isolated from the rest of the society. However, this feeling of isolation is not a completely negative one, but gives them a positive force as well to live on, providing them a sort of narcissistic pleasure. "I" enjoys a somewhat heroic solitude when he imagines Omi on a rock at the seashore.

Suddenly I realized that I had been left alone on the rock...From the offing the waves

began and came sliding in over the surface of the sea in the form of restless green swells. Groups of low rocks extended out into the sea, where their resistance to the waves sent splashes high into the air, like white hands begging for help.... All at once my feeling of solitude became mixed with memories of Omi. It was like this: My long-felt attraction toward the loneliness that filled Omi's life — loneliness born of the fact that life had enslaved him — had first made me want to possess the same quality; and now that I was experiencing, in this feeling of emptiness before the sea's repletion, a loneliness that outwardly resembled his, I wanted to savor it completely, through his very eyes. I would enact the double role of both Omi and myself. (CM85-8, 224-5)

In this passage, which is one of the most romantic scenes in the work, the image of Omi, the narrator's beloved, overlaps with that of the ocean, and finally merges with that of "I" himself. Left alone on the rock, he enjoys the feeling of the self-fulfillment inspired by the majestic view of the sea and the rocks, which could be interpreted as representative of the beauty of masculinity.

The image of the narrator's beloved is also merged with that of the ocean in *Boys on the Rock*.

I had a dream of Al at a beach coming out of the water dripping wet and taking a black Ace comb out of a bag and standing there, water tricking down his thighs with some honey-brown voluptuous sultry female laying on a blanket leaning on an elbow tossing him a hip taking him in with a sad smile on her face while he's gazing out at the ocean, regarding it, dripping, combing his hair sort of broodily. Then she says, "Darling, I am with child." (BR136)

Here, the meaning of the ocean as the symbol of masculinity is more clearly observed, competing with the reproductive power of the female. The title of the work, *Boys on the Rock*, literally recalls another boy on the rock, in *Confessions of a Mask*, sharing the same likening of masculine beauty to the view of the ocean. Near the end of *Boys on the Rock*, we can find another notable depiction of the ocean and a rock that suggests the intimacy of male beauty to that of the sea.

Evan and Kevin and Al were down here at the shore for a weekend. It was pouring raining and thundering and the four of us swam out to this big rock that's out in the water. We were just standing on it in our swimsuits as gray black clouds swirled with a rumble and roared, crashing right overhead and parted partially. The sky right above us became grayish gold and the rain was still pouring, quite hard, harder than before.

We heard a motorboat approach from the gloom. You couldn't see the shore now and waves were breaking over the rock, covering it at times up to our knees but with no effect on us. (BR143)

While it is sunny in the scenery of the sea shore in *Confessions of a Mask*, the weather is stormy above. However, the dynamic movements of the waves against the rock seem to symbolize powerful masculine strength, just as in *Confessions of a Mask*. The final scene of *Boys on the Rock* also ends with an impressive depiction of the sea.

The sun is at five o'clock, the time of day when if you're facing the water with the sun behind you, beach colors flare and the sky is clear, washed bright blue gray like Kevin's eyes. The tide is flowing out. He just moved the green striped orange umbrella from dry to wet sand, nearer the receding surf where the latest shell wreck has just touched down, where every now and then a limp wave will make a last-gasp lame effort to reach his legs. Clouds are sailing in an arc down the the sky and up the shore a trawler is headed north, toward the mouth of the Hudson I guess, to Manhattan maybe. (BR146)

This time, the image of the ocean overlaps with that of the narrator's favorite boy Kevin, one of the twin brothers in his high school. Just before the scene above, the narrator tells us of the death of Kevin's twin brother Evan. Although Billy and Kevin mourn his death, the author depicts it not tragically so much as romanticizing it with the beautiful image of the ocean view. This reminds us of the idealization of the death of the beautiful boy, a popular motif in Japanese *nanshoku* literature (Saeki 1992a). There exists the same aesthetic of the heroic death of the young boy both in American gay fiction and Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask*, which is greatly influenced by the *nanshoku* ideal. The fact that Billy dreams of Evan being shot on the rock in the sea corresponds to the narrator's favorite visions of dying boys in *Confessions of a Mask*. Young death, unless the result of physical weakness or sickness, is an ideal thing according to the classical aesthetic of male-love, for it is considered the culmination of heroic masculinity (Saeki 1992b).

The motif of the twin is also worth noticing, because of its close relationship with narcissism (Lash 1993). By mirroring themselves, "T" and Billy similarly recognize that their love of the same sex partly derives from a narcissistic motivation.

It got so that whenever I took a bath I would stand before the mirror a long time (CM83, 222)

I do like to look at myself in full-length mirrors,...especially when I'm wearing my team swimsuit,... — and if you want to know the truth, I actually get a hard-on every now and then from looking at myself in that swimsuit. (BR57)

The above citations, mirroring each other, reveal the strong narcissistic pleasure which both "T" and Billy get from looking at their self-reflection in the mirror.²⁷ They become their own narcissistic twin brother (Lash 1993) as a result of the strong sense of self-love which is sometimes considered as the general motivation for the same sex love in either males or females. (Akiyama 1987).

According to psychoanalysis, the mirroring stage also has an important meaning in the process of finding out one's own identity. (Lacan 1966). The emergence of the erotic self that I delineated in the beginning of this section is thus confirmed by the male protagonist's attachment to mirroring.

Influence of the Western Dichotomy of Mind and Soul

In addition to the matter of identity, we find another Westernized element in *Confessions of a Mask*, the split between mind and soul.

Japanese *iro*, which corresponds to the *shoku* of *nanshoku* and *nyoshoku*, did not distinguish between physical and mental love, whereas the new Meiji concept of *ai*, the Japanese translation of the English word “love,” began the tendency to praise spiritual love and disparage traditional *iro* as savage and vulgar in terms of its physical element (Saeki 1996). Inheriting the ideal of “Platonic love” which was encouraged by Meiji intellectuals, “I” idealizes the spiritual love which was embodied by his relationship with Sonoko.

...my soul still belonged to Sonoko...in me there was a cleavage, pure and simple, between spirit and flesh. To me Sonoko appeared the incarnation of my love of normality itself, my love of things of the spirit, my love of everlasting things. (CM241, 340-1)

In this passage, all of the original words for “love” are *ai*, indicating that “I”’s concept of “love,” which identifies spiritual love with the love of eternity, has its source in the Western dichotomy of mind and body which was introduced to Japan mainly by Christian intellectuals during the Meiji modernization. Inheriting the idealism of Meiji intellectuals, Mishima’s obsession with spiritual love shows the influence of Christianity as well, when he quotes the following passage from Dostoevski’s *The Brothers Karamazov* using Christian vocabulary.

I cannot bear the thought that a man of noble heart and lofty mind sets out with the ideal of the Madonna and ends with the ideal of Sodom. (CM i , 162) (original italics)

In this passage, the introduction to his work, Mishima intends to suggest that the spiritual love of “I” is the “the ideal of Madonna”, while his desire for the same sex is the sin of “Sodom”, as is mentioned in the Bible.²⁸ The author also uses the word “sodomite” in the conversation between “I” and his friend concerning male-love.

“...Proust was a *sodomite*” — he used the foreign word.²⁹

“What’s a sodomite?” ...

“A sodomite’s a sodomite. Didn’t you know? It’s a *danshokuka*” (CM227, 330)

(original italics)

Using the Biblical word for male homosexuality, Mishima shows the Westernized and modernized attitude toward *nanshoku*, suggesting the sinful and shameful feeling of “I” toward male-love,³⁰ which was never known to men within the *nanshoku* tradition. Just as in the case of Billy in *Boys on the Rock*, “I” feels it necessary to keep his love secret,³¹ and this becomes the very source of his desire for the confession, the desire for the narrative itself.

Conclusion

The sexual inclination of the male protagonist “I” in Mishima Yukio’s *Confessions of a Mask* mixes the characteristics of the *nanshoku* tradition and of the modern concept of homosexuality. While the fundamental asymmetry of the erotic relationship maintains *nanshoku* characteristics, the self-consciousness of sexual identity, as well as the dichotomy of mind and flesh, shows a modernized and Westernized attitude, which could be called homosexual. “I”’s confession thus

provides a representative depiction of the transformation of the Japanese concept of male-love from traditional *nanshoku* to modern homosexuality. We should bear in mind that it is necessary to be aware of the difference between *nanshoku* and homosexuality not only in analysing Mishima's work, but also in considering other aspects of Japanese male-to-male relationships.

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Notes

1. "...I was in love with Omi. For me this was the first love in my life." (Mishima 1970: 61, orig. 206). Citations from *Confessions of a Mask* will be abbreviated by CM in the following. The page number of the original follows that of the translation.
2. Similar examples of his inferiority complex over his poor physical constitution are expressed in the following passages.
Despite the warmth of the day, I had a cold, and my bronchial tubes were irritated. (CM75, 216)
During my fourth year at middle school I developed anemia. I became even more pallid than usual, so much so that my hands were the color of dead grass. (CM91, 228)
3. Schalow 1989: 123. For detailed discussion on *nanshoku* and samurai ethics, see Saeki 1992b.
4. The popularity of male-love among the military is a universal phenomenon, e.g. ancient Greece, and the Western tradition of chivalry (Girouard 1981, Nakazawa 1991).
5. Timon Screech, "The Boys of Kansei," paper presentation at the 48th Annual Meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, April 11th, 1996.
6. Male-love among Meiji *shosei* is famously depicted in Mori Ogai's *Vita Sexualis* (1909). See Ujiie 1995: 75-77, and Komori 1995.
7. The soldier's odor of sweat — that odor like a sea breeze, like the air, burned to gold, above the seashore — struck my nostrils and intoxicated me. This was probably my earliest memory of odors. Needless to say, the odor could not, at that time, have had any direct relationship with sexual sensations, but it did gradually and tenaciously arouse within me a sensuous craving for such things as the destiny of soldiers, the tragic nature of their calling, the distant countries they would see, the ways they would die....(CM14, 172-3)
8. Mishima points out that *Hagakure* "expresses very few opinions on the subject of women" (Mishima 1978: 52, orig. 81), and that its discriminatory view on women reminds us of that of ancient Greece. For further discussion on *Hagakure's* view of women, see Saeki 1992a.
9. The exclusion of the female from the male for raising ideal adult males is also observed, for example, in the initiation ceremony among the Sambia of Melanesia (Herdt 1981). After being separated from the females, all the boys in Sambia are required to fellate the older males during the initiation ceremony. This is for the purpose of attaining masculinity through ingesting semen from adult males, according to the belief that semen is the essence of masculinity. This male-to-male sexual behavior, not being equivalent to modern homosexuality, is compatible with Japanese military *nanshoku* and the same sex love of "I" in *Confessions of a Mask*, in that it is regarded as a necessary step in the process of boys growing up to be ideal adult males. In *Confessions of a Mask*, semen also seems the essence of masculinity when "I" masturbates at the seashore and distributes his sperm into the sea. (CM89, 226). I will later argue the symbolic connection between the ocean and masculinity.
10. In *Confessions of a Mask*, the grandmother of "I" takes over the role of his real mother in his childhood. She treats "I" just like "a true-love sweetheart" (CM37, 189).
11. Omi finally teases "I" like a child saying "Humph! I hate wearing children's gloves" (CM61, 206), when he sees "I"'s gloves.
12. For a more detailed discussion of the modernization and Westernization of Japanese love, see Saeki 1996.
13. The sexual passivity of the boys did not prevent monks from worshiping them, because of the tolerance of male sexual passivity in the *nanshoku* tradition, which Leupp counts as one of the three important features of *nanshoku*. (Leupp 1995: 172). Margaret Childs points out that "Homosexual relationships were common and conventional in medieval Japan" and "It was ...no more immoral for a priest than heterosexual relations, and certainly not a moral issue for a layman" (Childs 1987: 128, 127) in her study on medieval *chigo monogatari* (a literary genre of stories of love between *chigo* and monks). For a brief discussion on

chigo monogatari, see Saeki 1991.

14. Childs maintains that "The Buddhist aim of release from attachments to this world is hardly furthered by sexual desire" and "Priests struggled with the conflict between worldly desires represented by *chigo* and religious aspirations" (Childs 1987: 128). However, the *chigo* was a divine idol rather than a representative of worldly desires, for the concept of sexual intercourse itself as sacred in Japanese religious tradition had a certain influence on medieval Buddhism (Saeki 1987). It was believed that intercourse with the *chigo* was a way to merge with the sacred. (Saeki 1991)
15. In the case of ancient Greece as well, "homosexuals", "heterosexuals", and "bisexuals" in the modern sense did not exist. (Padgug 1989: 59). "'Homosexual' and 'heterosexual' behavior may be universal; homosexual and heterosexual identity and consciousness are modern realities. These identities are not inherent in the individual." (original italics, *ibid.*: 60).
16. Paul Schalow distinguishes *onna-girai* ("woman haters") from "misogyny or hatred of women in the normal sense" and maintains that "'woman-hater' ethos suggests that an exclusively homosexual social role and identity existed in early modern Japan" (Schalow op.cit., 120). However, it is not until the Taisho Era that the identity of *doseai* (同性愛) emerged in Japan. It should be preceded by the "discovery" of sexuality itself in late Meiji (Oda 1996).
17. The fear of femininity in Mishima's characters comes not only from the hatred of their physical weakness, but also from their reproductive power. For further discussion on this point, see Saeki 1989.
18. Fox 1985: 28. Following citations from *Boys on the Rock* will be abbreviated by BR, followed by the number of the page.
19. The concept of love based upon human equality was introduced to Japan under the Western influence during the Meiji Reformation (Saeki 1996).
20. Leupp, op.cit. p. 172. Al also avoids the passive role as indicated in the following passage: "...he (Billy) said that he used to fuck that guy's ass all the time. But he himself never got fucked and didn't want to" (BR135). Joseph Pleck introduces how homosexuality was understood as "a disturbance of sex role identity" especially the case with the "passive male homosexual" (Pleck 1987: 21)
21. The form of "confession" as the expression of the modern sexuality is discussed in Karatani 1982. See also Oda 1996: 50. Although Billy himself hates the word "homosexual" (BR92), he can be called homosexual in terms of identity and subjectivity.
22. Owing to Gregory Pflugfelder's commentary on my paper at the above conference.
23. The same kind of effort to train himself to love women is depicted in the following;

And yet I was still convinced that I was in love with Nukada's sister. Acting exactly like any other inexperienced higher-school student of my age, I hung about the neighborhood of her house, patiently passing long hours at a nearby bookshop, hoping for a chance of stopping her if she should pass; I hugged a cushion and imagined the feeling of embracing her, drew countless pictures of her lips, and talked to myself as though out of my mind. And what was the good of it all? Those artificial efforts only inflicted some strange, numbed tiredness upon my mind. The realistic portion of my mind sensed the artificiality in the eternal protestations with which I persuaded myself that I was in love with her, and it fought back with this spiteful fatigue. There seemed to be some terrible poison in this mental exhaustion. (CM121, 250)
24. Timon Screech argues that the decline of *nanshoku* had already begun in the middle of eighteenth century corresponding to the introduction of the Western intolerance of male-love through *rangaku* (Dutch studies) in his "Boys in Kansei," paper presentation at the conference cited above. See also Screech 1996 :114-120.
25. *Doseai* identity emerged along with the birth of the word *hentai* (sexual perversion, 変態) around the 1920's under the influence of Western sexology. (Oda 1996 :54-67).
26. "I" expresses his sexuality as "inherent perversity", and "abnormal desires" (CM230, 332).
27. Although "I" in *Confessions of a Mask* is always disappointed with his frail constitution as reflected in the mirror, he does love looking at the mirror while dreaming of his ideal body.
28. Sonoko's belief in Christianity ("...Every night I pray to the Lord Jesus for you,..." CM204, 162) also indicates the Christian influence upon Mishima's world.
29. The expression "he used the foreign word" is not in the Japanese original.
30. "Feigning ignorance" of the word sodomite, "I" tries to hide these feelings inside himself.
31. Billy "comes out" only before his teacher Mr. Bieniowicz, whose reaction deeply disappoints him. He and Al pretend to be "normal" (BR138) except before Billy's aunt, who is the only one sympathetic to them.

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—— 男色から同性愛へ——三島由紀夫『仮面の告白』の比較研究——

佐伯順子

要旨：本稿は、三島由紀夫の『仮面の告白』(1949年)を、その主人公「私」のセクシュアリテイに着目して分析するものである。「私」は同性への性的欲望を表明しているが、それを「同性愛」という用語で理解するのはふさわしくない。というのも、彼の性向は、近代西洋社会における「同性愛」とは質を異にしているからである。彼が自分とは異なる年齢層の男性にひかれる事実は、年上の青年と年下の少年によって構成されていた、日本の伝統的な「男色」の特色を受け継いでいる。日本の男色は、武家社会と僧坊を背景として展開したが、武士の男色では、年上の武士が年下の少年に、武士としての模範的“男性性”を教示するという意義があり、こうした教育的側面は、『仮面の告白』の「私」にも受け継がれている。また、恋の対象を理想世界の象徴として神格化する点は、中世の僧坊における稚児男色の特質を継承している。

しかしながら、男色が基本的に性倒錯や罪の意識と結びつかず、むしろ理想化されていたのとは異なり、『仮面の告白』の「私」は、同性への欲望に罪悪感や倒錯の意識を持っている。こうした同性への恋をめぐる認識の変容は、明治期に移入された、異性愛を中心とする西洋の「恋愛」の概念や、西洋近代社会における同性愛観が影響を与えたものといえる。同時に、自らのセクシュアリティを「告白」できる「私」は、近代の性的主体として的人格を備えており、その意味で彼は、近代的「同性愛」者としての性格も有している。彼が思春期に自らのセクシュアリティを確認しつつ成長してゆく過程は、アメリカのゲイ文学の代表作のひとつ『潮騒の少年』（1984年）の主人公、ビリーの姿に重ねることができる。両作品には象徴的な共通性も認められ、ビリーとの比較を通じて、『仮面の告白』の「私」における、「男色」的要素と「同性愛」的要素の交錯する様相が明らかになると共に、日本文化における男性間の恋の、「男色」から「同性愛」への変容の過程をうかがうことができる。