“Sympathy for an Invert: The Translation and Reception of Mishima Yukio’s *Kamen no kokuhaku* (Confessions of a Mask) in English”

Patrick Carland-Echavarria

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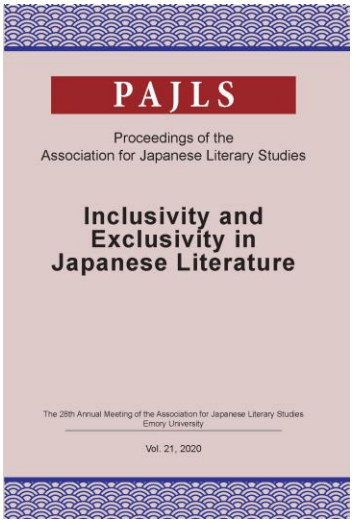

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SYMPATHY FOR AN INVERT: THE TRANSLATION AND RECEPTION OF MISHIMA YUKIO'S *KAMEN NO KOKUHAKU* (CONFESSIONS OF A MASK) IN ENGLISH

Patrick Carland-Echavarria[1]
University of Pennsylvania

INTRODUCTION

The novel *Kamen no kokuhaku*, written by Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) and first published in Japan in 1949, was one of the author's first major literary successes. A semi-autobiographical novel detailing the upbringing and 'perverse' desires of a young man named Kochan from a first-person perspective, the work made the 24-year-old Mishima an overnight sensation in the Japanese literary world. Not only was it a bestseller, but in the words of the scholar Donald Keene, it "established Mishima's reputation and continued to be rated at or near the top of his entire oeuvre" for the rest of his life.[2] Nine years after it was first published, *Kamen no kokuhaku* was published in the United States in 1958 as *Confessions of a Mask*. Translated by Meredith Weatherby and published by New Directions, the work was only Mishima's second full-length novel to be translated into English. Despite initial hesitation on the part of some publishers towards the book over its sexual content, *Confessions* was a success in the United States and was crucial in securing Mishima's influence abroad.

To a significant degree, however, this success was predicated on presenting the novel as a confessional and autobiographical account of the author's homosexuality. This reading was supported both by advertisements for the novel as well as by decisions made in the translation of the novel itself. In its selective presentation of the sexual elements of the text via terms indexed to midcentury Western conceptions of homosexuality, the English translation of Mishima's novel ironically ensured the author's success in the West by linking his oeuvre and public persona to essentializing notions of sexual deviance that continue to influence readings of his works today. At the same time, given the taboos surrounding depictions of homosexuality in 1950s anglophone cultures, the novel's success suggests that its ostensible foreignness allowed it to

[1] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6220-7654
[2] Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 1183.

voice ideas considered unacceptable in mainstream English-language literature of the mid-20th century.

How did *Confessions* come to be critically well-regarded and linked to Mishima's literary persona by mid-20th century anglophone readers and critics at a time of unprecedented sensitivity to even the slightest hint of homoeroticism in much of the West? This paper tries to answer this question by examining both the historical context of *Confessions'* publication into English and the translation by Meredith Weatherby itself. It begins with an examination of the novel's reception by Japanese and English-language critics, highlighting discrepancies that point to larger differences in sexuality in Japanese and anglophone cultures. It then discusses the circumstances under which the novel was translated and published in English, and then turns to an analysis of the translation itself. By analyzing the translation decisions Weatherby makes to render sexual elements of the text legible to English language readers, I argue that the translation is both constrained by and quietly subverts dominant ideas of sexual identity and deviance found in midcentury English-speaking cultures.

'*CONFESSIONS*' AND JAPANESE LITERARY TRANSLATION IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In the 19th and early 20th centuries, just as Japan opened to economic and artistic exchange with Europe and the United States, the simultaneous rise of sexology in the West produced an increased pathologizing and stigmatization of non-normative sexualities, particularly homosexuality. In contrast, prior to the Meiji Period (1868–1912) Japan placed no strict prohibitions on same-sex sexual activities and in fact had a long artistic and literary history celebrating male-male love. Although the Meiji Government briefly banned sodomy in 1873, this prohibition was repealed by 1882, and no notable efforts were made to re-introduce it.[3] Subsequently, from the late 19th century many non-heterosexual Western artists and activists extolled the "comradely love" of the Samurai and found in Japan an escape from the heteronormative strictures of their own cultures.[4] According to the art historian Christopher Reed, Japanese culture offered these Westerners "an escape from modern urban life—and

[3] Furukawa Makoto, "'Sei' bōryoku sōchi toshite no iseiai shakai: Nihon kindai no dōseiai o megutte" ['Sex' as a mechanism of violence in heterosexual society: on homosexuality in modern Japan], *Hō shakaigaku* [The Sociology of Law] 54 (2001): 80–93, 83–85.

[4] Edward Carpenter, *Intermediate Types Among Primitive Folk: A Study in Social Evolution* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1914), 142.

from embodied heterosexuality."[5] As the rise of the *japonisme* art movement in the 19th century across Western countries reflected, Japanese culture "functioned as a form of excessive, passionate, irrational investment antagonistic to bourgeois norms—prime among them heterosexuality," and allowed Western artists "to express fantasies of fitting in elsewhere at the same time that it cast dissent from social norms not as deviant, but as extra ordinary."[6]

Similarly, John Walter de Gruchy argues that Japan was "especially desirable to an oppressed Western gay subculture," of the early 20th century that was "ever on the lookout for 'coded types of discourse."[7] In his study of the British translator Arthur Waley, de Gruchy traces how Waley emphasized homoerotic aspects of Japanese literature in his translations and argues that he and other Western intellectuals conceived of Japan as "not so much a place as a *state of mind*, a deliberate, self-conscious creation… a site of resistance to all forms of established authority, including heterosexuality."[8] Their readings of Japan's premodern sexual cultures were frequently anachronistic, and motivated by what Fransesca Orsini calls a "prurient ethno-eroticism," that "responded to the curiosity and thirst of colonial literati for literary repertoires outside the west."[9] At the same time, however, the interest and efforts of these artists and writers "changed the art of orientalism by challenging European assumptions of racial and cultural superiority, and made popular and important in the West the literatures of China and Japan."[10]

Bearing this historical context in mind is important for considering Mishima's work. *Confessions* was Mishima's first postwar literary success after a long period of financial difficulty for the author in the aftermath of World War II. It follows the story of a protagonist named Kochan, whose upbringing and family structure strongly resemble Mishima's own. The novel narrates Kochan's sexual development from his youth to young adulthood, emphasizing his attraction to other men and his various sexual

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[5] Christopher Reed, *Bachelor Japanists: Japanese Aesthetics and Western Masculinities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 49.
[6] Ibid., 83; 116.
[7] John Walter de Gruchy, *Orienting Arthur Waley: Japonism, Orientalism, and the Creation of Japanese Literature in English* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2003), 49.
[8] Ibid., 47.
[9] Francesca Orsini, "From Eastern Love to Eastern Song: Re-translating Asian Poetry," *Comparative Critical Studies* 17.2 (2020): 183–203, 186.
[10] Walter de Gruchy, *Orienting Arthur Waley*, 63.

paraphilias. According to John Nathan, Mishima called the book a "therapeutic effort," which he "felt certain he must write in order, quite literally, to survive."[11] When it was initially published in Japan, it sold over 20,000 copies and was included in the *Yomiuri Shinbun'*s 1949 Best Sellers list, with endorsements from leading writers including Kawabata Yasunari, Hirano Ken, and Fukuda Tsuneari.[12] In subsequent decades, the novel became something of a touchstone for same-sex attracted men in Japan; according to the historian Fushimi Noriaki, the novel was frequently referenced in interviews with prominent members of Japan's gay community in the 1990s, with "annoying frequency."[13]

At the time of *Confessions*' publication, Japan was still under occupation by the United States. According to Mark McLelland, "while the immediate postwar years were in many ways a progressive period in Japan, noticeably so for women and sexual minorities," it was also "one of the most regressive eras in the history of Gay Americans… as it was for sexual minorities throughout the English-speaking world."[14] The year before *Confessions* was published in Japan, a novel with striking similarities, Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948), was published in the United States. Semi-autobiographical and focused on the same-sex desires of its protagonist, Vidal's novel triggered a vicious backlash in the American literary world, forcing the then 23-year-old to write under pseudonyms for years afterward.[15]

It was in this context that the English-language translator of *Confessions*, Meredith Weatherby, encountered Mishima's text in the early 1950s.[16] He first met Mishima personally around 1950, at a gay bar in Tokyo.[17] Originally stationed at an American consulate in Japan when the war broke out and later serving as an intelligence officer with the Allied

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[11] John Nathan, *Mishima: A Biography* (Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown & Company, 1974), 90.
[12] Ibid., 100–1; see also Inose Naoki, *Perusona: Mishima Yukio den* [Persona: The Legend of Mishima Yukio] (Tokyo: Bungeishunjū, 1999), 220.
[13] Fushimi Noriaki, *Gei to iu keiken zōhoban* [The experience of 'Gay' expanded edition] (Tokyo: Potto Shuppan, 2004), 355; cited in Keith Vincent, *Two-Timing Modernity Homosocial Narrative in Modern Japanese Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012).
[14] Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 65–6.
[15] Gore Vidal, *The City and the Pillar and Seven Early Stories* (New York: Random House, 1995), xiii.
[16] Naoki Inose and Hiroaki Sato, *Persona: A Biography of Yukio Mishima* (Berkeley CA: Stone Bridge Press, 2012), 227.
[17] Nathan, *Mishima*, 132.

Occupation, Weatherby was a same-sex attracted American man in Japan at a time when, as one Japanese writer put it, "Japan was heaven for American homosexuals."[18] He took an early interest in Mishima's work, particularly *Confessions*, and worked directly with Mishima to produce the translation, apparently finishing a draft by 1954.[19]

When Weatherby approached the publisher Alfred A. Knopf, which had begun promoting Japanese literature in English in the mid-1950s, about publishing his translation, they demurred, apparently reluctant to introduce Mishima to the West with a homosexual novel and "brand" him in the eyes of American readers.[20] While the work was approached by many with reticence, its supporters included the scholar Donald Keene, who published excerpts of Weatherby's translation in a journal of Japanese literature that he edited.[21] In 1958, the translation was finally published as *Confessions of a Mask* by the publisher New Directions at the recommendation of Gertrude Huston Laughlin, an illustrator at the company and later the wife of company president James Laughlin.[22] In a letter, Mishima reflected on his difficulties publishing in English, stating that the novel, "though read in Japan with equanimity, [was] regarded as a terrifying book of moral turpitude in the United States."[23] He also suggested in his letter that Laughlin's gender may have made her more sympathetic to the work, writing that "I think it was the greatest of luck for my book to have a woman reader like Mrs. Laughlin, who should wipe out prejudices to this kind of book."[24]

The initial U.S. publication of *Confessions* took pains to avoid describing the novel's sexual content; when New Directions' Spring 1958 catalog appeared in *Publisher's Weekly*, its description of *Confessions* was brief and ambiguous, describing it as "an extraordinary, and sometimes shocking, novel of the growing awareness of a young man in Japan, or anywhere."[25] The first edition of *Confessions* included no information

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[18] Oka Masahirō, "Ryōsei dōbutsu: danshoku yobanashi," [Amphibious animals: night talks about male homosexuality], *Kitan kurabu* 7:11 (Nov. 1953): 100–2, 100. For information on Weatherby's relationship with photographer and bodybuilder Tamotsu Yato in the 1950s and 60s, see Richard Hawkins's essays on the subject, "Tamotsu Yatō," July, 2001 https://web.archive.org/web/20100902005349/http://hawkinsology.org/ty/bio.html accessed Nov 21, 2021.
[19] Nathan, *Mishima*, 132; Inose and Sato, 227.
[20] Keene, *Dawn*, 1184.
[21] Inose and Sato, *Persona*, 276.
[22] Ibid., 277.
[23] Ibid., 276.
[24] Ibid., 277.
[25] *Publisher's Weekly*, January 27, 1958, 95.

about the plot, and conspicuously mentions Mishima's recent marriage in a biographical blurb on the back. Early reviewers, however, were quick to interpret the novel as a confessional work centered around homosexuality. In a 1958 review in the *New York Times*, Ben Ray Redman described the protagonist as "a homosexual who is determined to conceal his nature from the world," and the book as "an almost clinical account of congenital sexual inversion."[26] In a review for *The Journal of Asian Studies* in February 1959, Charles Hamilton dismissed the novel out of hand for its homosexuality, writing that it ordinarily takes "a dishonest or naïf writer," to write a "homosexual novel."[27] The reception of *Confessions* as a gay novel was soon embraced in subsequent reprintings of the work. The inner flap of the 1960 British edition of the book, for example, states that the protagonist must "hide" his homosexuality to survive, while the 1971 Charles E. Tuttle edition describes the work as "the story of a boy's development towards homosexuality… which has its parallel in every civilized country."[28] In later editions, the publisher New Directions added a blurb for the book noting that its "publication in English—praised by Gore Vidal, James Baldwin, and Christopher Isherwood—propelled the young Yukio Mishima to international fame," invoking three well-known non-heterosexual writers in the West.[29] This canonization of *Confessions* can be seen in its inclusion in Robert Drake's 1998 *The Gay Canon*, which lists the novel amongst "works every gay man should read."[30]

The Japanese reception of the novel, however, differed from English language critics' emphasis on the work as a "homosexual" text. The claim made in the 1971 Tuttle edition of Weatherby's translation that the story had a "parallel in every civilized country," was not true of Japan in the late 1940s, when Mishima wrote the work. Yet as Itō Ujitaka notes, Mishima was far from the first modern Japanese author to address same-sex themes in semi-autobiographical terms. Semi-autobiographical descriptions of same-sex attraction can be found in the works of a wide variety of twentieth century authors including Mori Ōgai, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Shiga

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[26] Ben Ray Redman, "What He Had to Hide; CONFESSIONS OF A MASK. By Yukio Mishima," *The New York Times*, September 21, 1958.
[27] Charles E. Hamilton, Rev. of *Confessions of a Mask*, by Yukio Mishima and Meredith Weatherby, *The Journal of Asian Studies* 18: 2 (Feb. 1959): 294–295, 294.
[28] Mishima Yukio, *Confessions of a Mask*, trans. Meredith Weatherby, 2nd ed. (North Clarendon, VT: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1971), Inner flap.
[29] "Confessions of a Mask." *New Directions Publishing Online*, https://www.ndbooks.com/book/confessions-of-a-mask/ Accessed December 18, 2019.
[30] See Robert Drake, *The Gay Canon: Great Books Every Man Should Read* (New York: Anchor Books, 1998), 300–307.

Naoya, and Kawabata Yasunari among other authors.[31] Mishima was also influenced in his writing of *Confessions* by the novel *Moyuru Hō* (Burning Cheeks, 1932) by Hori Tatsuo, a semi-autobiographical work that also centered on a protagonist grappling with his same-sex romantic feelings.[32] Yet amongst these authors, only Mishima became well known both in Japan and internationally as an author of "homosexual" literature following the publication of *Confessions*. Itō argues that this can be attributed to the novel's conception of homosexuality in congenital and pathological terms that more closely resemble precedents found in the Western literary canon than those found hitherto in modern Japanese literature. In its presentation of the protagonists' homosexuality as a fixed, innate condition central to his identity (*jiga*), Mishima's text stands in marked contrast to contemporaneous literary depictions of same-sex sexuality as a developmental and transient phenomenon.[33]

Keith Vincent argues that the rising influence of sexological discourses in Japan from the Meiji Period onward fundamentally reshaped social and cultural perceptions of same-sex sexuality towards a "dominant homosocial narrative according to which same-sex desire is understood as a transient developmental stage that will eventually yield to a normative, 'adult' heterosexuality."[34] This conception of homosexuality as a transient and developmental phenomenon coincided with the emergence of what Takeuchi Mizuho describes as a binary of 'healthy' and 'perverse' sexualities in popular discourse with the rise in circulation of *hentai zasshi*, pulp magazines that mixed pop sexology with salacious stories on sexual scandals, from the 1900s on.[35] According to Ishida Hitoshi and Murakami Takanori, the concept of *hentai* was later expanded to include a spectrum of non-heterosexual and non-normative sexual practices, branding them as deviant and marginal in the process. Thus while the term *hentai* included homosexuality, it did so as only one of a number of overlapping sexual binaries that included male submission/female domination, sadism/masochism, and young/old, all of which were classed as equally 'perverse'

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[31] Itō Ujitaka, *Dōseiai bungaku no keifu: Nihon gendai bungaku ni okeru LGBT izen/igo* [The Lineage of Homosexual Literature: Modern Japanese Literature Before and After LGBT] (Tokyo: Bensei Shuppan, 2020), 71–2.
[32] Ibid., 77.
[33] Ibid., 75.
[34] Vincent, *Two-Timing*, 182.
[35] Takeuchi Mizuho, *'Hentai' to iu bunka: kindai Nihon no 'chiisana kakumei'* [The culture called 'hentai': Modern Japan's 'small revolution'] (Tokyo: Hitsuji Shobō, 2014).

on the basis of their difference from normative sexual practices.[36] Furthermore, the term registered titillation more than condemnation; as Gregory Pflugfelder notes, the readers of *hentai zasshi* were "clearly more attracted than repelled by the 'perverse' nature of their contents."[37]

These conceptions of homosexuality as developmentally transient and part of a loose network of "perverse" sexual practices in mid-20th century Japanese discourse stood in contrast to conceptions of homosexuality found in *Confessions.* The novelty of Mishima's conception of congenital homosexuality is reflected by contemporary Japanese-language reception of the text. Takeuchi Kayo argues that many Japanese reviewers in the late 1940s initially took the sexual elements of the text as reflective of a juvenile, undeveloped sexuality rather than representative of a pathological notion of homosexuality.[38] The prevalence of early conceptions of homosexuality as a developmental and transient phenomenon can be seen in a review by critic Ara Masahito in 1949 which argues the protagonist merely has a perverted mind "like anyone else's," and that he is only unique insofar as he had retained his perversions into adulthood.[39] Another anonymous reviewer in the *Tosho Shinbun* newspaper in 1949 went as far as calling the sexuality of the protagonist a "healthy" expression of youthful virility.[40] At the same time, the novel's conception of homosexuality as congenital and fixed may also have unnerved some critics; Ogura Chikako, for instance, has speculated that male critics of the novel were afraid of being perceived as interested in homosexuality themselves.[41]

The English-language reception of *Confessions*, informed by a strict delineation of heterosexual and homosexual identities, framed the novel as

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[36] Ishida Hitoshi, Murakami Takanori, "Sengo Nihon no zasshi media ni okeru 'otoko o aisuru otoko' to 'joseika shita otoko' no hyōshō shi" [The history of representations of "men who like men," and "men who become women," in postwar Japanese magazines], *Sengo Nihon josō/dōseiai kenkyū* [Studies on postwar Japanese homosexuality/crossdressing] (Tokyo: Chūō Daigaku Shuppanbu, 2006): 519–557, 527.

[37] Gregory Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600–1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 287.

[38] Takeuchi Kayo, "Mishima Yukio 'Kamen no kokuhaku' to iu hyōshō o megutte: 1950 nen zengo no dansei dōseiai hyōshō ni kansuru kōsatsu," [Reconsidering Mishima Yukio's *Confessions of a Mask* as Representation: A Study of Representations of Homosexuality from 1949 to 1954] *F-Gens Jānaru* 9 (Sept. 2007): 111–17, 114.

[39] Ibid., 112.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ueno Chizuko, Ogura Chikako, Tomioka Taeko, *Danryū bungaku ron* [On Men's Literature] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 2004): 354.

primarily focused on homosexuality, emphasizing this in universalizing terms that presumed sexuality to be fixed and innate. In contrast, Japanese-language reception emphasized the gap between the novel's pathological conception of homosexuality and earlier conceptions of same-sex sexuality as transient and part of a larger constellation of 'deviant' sexual practices. The disparity between Japanese and American readers' conceptions of sexuality at the time of the novel's publication helps to explain these discrepancies, and points to the need to further examine Weatherby's translation and the decisions he made in localizing the source text.

TRANSLATING *CONFESSIONS OF A MASK*

As Keith Vincent notes, *Confessions* rarely singles out the protagonist's homosexuality per se; instead, "the novel treats the young narrator's desire for other boys as one of several forms of sexual fantasy and behavior that constitute his sexual life, together with sadomasochism, masturbation, and cross-dressing. None of these is markedly privileged over any other."[42] It is notable in Japanese reviews of the work that the word "homosexuality" is rarely used; instead, the term 'perversion' alternatively 'inversion' (*tōsaku*) is used with far greater frequency. As the previous section has shown, however, the reception *Confessions* received by English-language critics elided these differences, instead taking the novel as a relatively straightforward account of homosexuality. This reception was informed both by differences in understanding of sexuality between English and Japanese language critics as well as by decisions Weatherby made while translating the novel, many of which tended to contain and simplify the sexual elements of the text.

In key moments, Weatherby's translation simplifies the complex sexual paradigms operant in the novel by flattening differences between semantically related but distinct terms. One example of this can be seen in how Weatherby's translation largely elides the differences between the usage of the Chinese characters *koi* and *ai* in the source text. While both characters form part of the Sino-Japanese compound term *ren'ai* (love), *koi* became semantically associated with carnal sexuality by the late Meiji Period, while *ai* was linked to notions of chaste, innocent love influenced by Western, Christian concepts of romantic love.[43] In the context of

[42] Vincent, *Two-Timing*, 179.

[43] The distinction between *koi* and *ai* was first articulated at length by Mishima's contemporary, the novelist Itō Sei, in his essay *Kindai Nihon ni okeru 'Ai' no kyogi* [The falsehood of 'Ai' in Modern Japan], *Shisō* 409 (July 1958).

Confessions, the more frequent use of the former is significant insofar as it presents Kochan's sexuality in negative, congenital terms. Yet this nuance is elided in Weatherby's translation, where both are most often rendered simply as 'love.'

This can be seen in chapter 2, when the protagonist Kochan enters middle school and becomes infatuated with an older boy named Omi, whom he admires for his physical strength and beauty. In these passages, the protagonist almost exclusively uses the Japanese word *koi* rather than *ai* to describe his feelings towards Omi. For example, after Omi invites the protagonist to walk with him one morning, the protagonist states that "from that time on I was in love with Omi" (*CM*, 61). While Weatherby uses the term *love*, the source text describes the narrator's feelings using given as '*koi*' (*KK*, 30).[44] Junko Saeki argues that the elision of the difference between *koi* and *ai* in Weatherby's translation obscures key elements of the source text, as the word *koi*'s "major nuance implies a one sided longing for someone," and "is carefully differentiated from *ai*, the more mutual exchange of affections."[45] In contrast to his feelings towards Omi, when the protagonist reflects on his desire to love a woman in chapter 3, he states that he "decided to love a girl without feeling any desire whatsoever," (*nanra no yokkyū mo motazu ni onna o aiseru mono to watashi wa omotteita*) (*CM* 131, *KK*, 271), where the use of the term *ai* supports Saeki's argument; in this case, it is clear from the preceding passage that while the protagonist is not sexually attracted to women, he still desires *romantic* love with them, clearly delineating between the two.

Kochan's relationship with Omi is again construed in terms of romantic love by Weatherby later in chapter 3. In a section wherein the protagonist reflects on his growing attraction to boys younger than himself (having only been attracted to older ones before) he compares those boys to his own age when he knew Omi. Weatherby translates this section as follows:

> During this time the attraction I had formerly felt towards older youths had little by little been extended to include younger boys as well. This was only natural as by this time even these younger boys **were the same age Omi had been when I was in love with**

[44] *CM = Confessions of a Mask, KK = Kamen no kokuhaku.* This paper refers to the 1971 Charles E. Tuttle edition of *Confessions of a Mask* (Rutland VT: Charles E. Tuttle, 1971) for English language quotes, and to the *Mishima Yukio Zenshū (Ketteiban) Chōhen shōsetsu 1* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 2000) for Japanese.

[45] Junko Saeki, "From 'Nanshoku' to 'Homosexuality': A Comparative Study of Mishima Yukio's 'Confessions of a Mask,'" *Japan Review* 8 (1997): 127–42, 130.

him. (*CM*, 122–23)

The assertion that the protagonist was "in love" with Omi at the time in the English translation differs from the source text, where love is not mentioned at all:

> During that time, my feelings which had once been directed only towards older youths moved little by little towards younger boys. This was a natural thing, as these younger boys were already **the age of that Omi**. [Kakaru aida ni, watashi wa toshiue no seinen ni bakari kaketeita omohi o, sukoshi zutsu toshishita ni mo utsusu yau ni natteita. Tōzen no koto de, toshishita no shōnen de sura **ano Ōmi no nenrei ni natta no de aru.**] (*KK*, 265)

In the source text, the "younger boys" (*shōnen*) are described by the protagonist in the source text as being the same age as "That Omi," (*ano Ōmi*). *Ano* suggests a temporal distance between Kochan and his original relationship with Omi, reflecting the length of time elapsed in the narrative since he knew him. While this reference could be interpreted as referring implicitly to the protagonist's period of being 'in love' with Omi based on previous context, Weatherby's translation instead emphasizes the putatively romantic dimension of the protagonist and Omi's relationship, omitting the ambiguity of the source text in the process. At other moments, Weatherby's translation presents the protagonist's sexual identity in a more positive light than the source text might suggest. This can also be seen early in chapter 2, when the protagonist reaches climax for the first time after masturbating to a picture of Saint Sebastian. Afterwards, the protagonist comments that the picture in question is "in the first rank of those kinds of artworks in which the invert takes special delight" (*CM*, 41). Invert is here a translation of *tōsakusha*, which as previously noted can also mean perverted or deviant. The terms *invert* and *inversion*, however, have a long history as affirmative self-descriptions for LGBT people in the English language, including in works such as Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and the writings of early homophile advocates such as Edward Carpenter and differs from both perversion and *tōsaku* in the source text.

Weatherby's translation also obscures parts of the text where Mishima sought to emphasize the unfamiliarity of foreign terminology and discourses in the source text. In the same section of chapter 2 referenced previously where the narrator describes his first orgasm, he uses *ejaclatio*, written in Roman characters (*KK*, 204). The use of this specific term,

which resonates with earlier twentieth century sexological discourses, thematizes the degree to which the narrator fixates on his own sexuality and desires to understand it in clinical, teleological terms.[46] Yet this is elided in Weatherby's translation, where the non-italicized word 'ejaculation' is instead used (*CM*, 41). While on one level the absence of multiple scripts makes the precise effect achieved in the source text impossible in English, Weatherby's decision not to italicize the term serves to make it less visibly foreign and Occidental in the source text than his translation would otherwise suggest. This occurs elsewhere in the translation, with terms in the source text including *ephebe*, *erectio*, and *penis* either assimilated into the English with no indication of their foreign origins or omitted altogether.

Conversely, some scenes seem to focalize the differences between Western and Japanese sexual cultures from the former perspective. Late in the novel, after a failed attempt to have intercourse with a female prostitute, the protagonist meets a friend from university to discuss a book they are both reading. In the subsequent conversation, when they discuss the French novelist Marcel Proust's sexuality, Kochan's friend describes him as a sodomite as well as a '*danshokuka*':

> "… Proust was a *sodomite*"—he used the foreign word. "He had affairs with footmen." "What's a sodomite?" I asked"… "A sodomite's a sodomite. Didn't you know? It's a *danshokuka*." (*CM*, 227)

The difference in Weatherby's positioning of the term *sodomite* vs. his positioning of *danshokuka* is key. The term *sodomite* is given as *sodomu no otoko* in the source text (*KK*, 342), but there is no indication beyond its transcription in katakana that it is a foreign word as stated in the English. By contrast, Weatherby chooses to leave the word *danshokuka* untranslated, placing it in italics. This term, created in the nineteenth century to describe men who engaged in same-sex relations in premodern Japan, was one that most contemporaneous English-language audiences would have few means to verify the meaning of.[47] Given its presence in Weatherby's translation, it seems indicative of an intentional distancing of Japanese sexual paradigms that traditionally valorized male-male sexuality from Western ones which denigrated it. The decision to leave the term untranslated can be seen as an indirect critique of Western sexual

[46] Itō, *Dōseiai bungaku no keifu,* 75.
[47] Ibid., 24.

paradigms through its gesture towards alternative sexual cultures in the source text, and thereby suggests a *tactical* use of Japanese that is not dissimilar to Mishima's own use of Latin phrases to describe the protagonists' sexual acts. By choosing not to translate the term, Weatherby seems to use the ambiguity of premodern Japanese sexuality as both a cover and a framing device for the sexual elements of the text, subtly bypassing dominant English-language discourses of sexuality in the process.

CONCLUSION

Itō argues that *Confessions* fundamentally reshaped the evolution of queer literature in Japan. It was the first major novel in Japanese literature to frame same-sex attraction in terms of a "coming out narrative," structured by the protagonist's creeping awareness and ultimate acceptance of their fixed homosexual identity According to him, *Confessions*' model of sexuality set a standard replicated by nearly all subsequent Japanese authors of same-sex fiction.[48] Yet while the novel's conception of homosexuality was both paradigm-shifting and more negative than previous examples in the Japanese literary context, it was nonetheless construed as sympathetic to homosexuality and resonated with queer readers in the West, where the novel's pathological conception of sexuality was largely accepted as settled fact. Early readers including Keene and Huston Laughlin found the book compelling for the very taboos that it explored and pushed for its publication as a result. Following its publication, English language readers not only related personally to the work but also took it as evidence for the commonality of queer experiences between Japan and the West. The American novelist Christopher Isherwood, one of the most prominent literary figures of the post-1960s Gay Liberation Movement, exemplified this viewpoint, writing in a review that "Mishima is lucid in the midst of emotional confusion, funny in the midst of despair. His book has made me understand how it feels to be Japanese."[49] At the same time, it compelled some critics to expand their ideas of what Japanese literature could be: in a 1959 article on modern Japanese literature for *The Sewanee Review*, the critic James Baird stated that the novel, among other recent translations of Japanese language novels, was evidence of the need for Americans to "recognize a new Japanese art rising from a present in which the meanings formerly assigned

[48] Ibid., 82–3.
[49] Quoted in *Confessions of a Mask* 1971, inner flap.

to a Japanese human existence have perilously diminished or altogether passed from view."[50]

Regardless of the intentions behind Weatherby's translation decisions, his translation of Mishima's *Confessions* was influential and generative for queer anglophone readers and writers in ways both similar and different from earlier generations of queer Western engagement with Japan. While previous generations of Western artists and intellectuals were attracted to the differences between Japanese and Western ideas of sexuality, the reception of *Confessions* represents a different impulse. *Confessions'* translation and publication, its subsequent embrace by queer British and American writers such as James Baldwin, Isherwood, and Vidal, and its canonization as a work of gay literature in the West at a time of intense public and private homophobia suggest a political element to the text that made its very existence in English in the 1950s subversive. Mishima's novel presented homosexuality in terms both foreign and deeply familiar to Western readers. Although Weatherby's translation simplified many aspects of Mishima's original novel, it also emphasized ideas about homosexuality that would have been difficult to otherwise voice in 1950s America. Recognition of this points to the necessity and promise of further investigation into the historical, cultural, and political valences of queer translations between Japanese and anglophone literatures of the postwar period.

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[50] James Baird, "Review: Contemporary Japanese Fiction," *The Sewanee Review* 67:3 (Summer 1959): 477–496, 479.

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