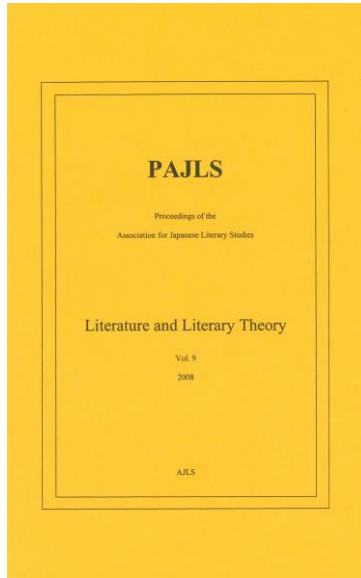


“Queer / Nation: From ‘Nihon bungaku’ to  
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## Queer/Nation: From “Nihon bungaku” to “Nihongo bungaku”

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From the late 1980s to the mid-1990s, as the Shōwa period (1926-1989) was ending in Japan and the Cold War was crumbling in Europe, a series of works appeared in Japanese that radically questioned the foundations and boundaries of Japanese literature. These included: Levy Hideo's *Seijōki no kikoenahei* (Andō's Room, 1987-1991), Yi Yang-ji's *Yuhi* (Yu-hui, 1988), Shimada Masahiko's *Higan sensei* (Sensei on the Other Shore, 1992), Tawada Yōko's *Inu mukoiri* (Married to a Mutt, 1993), and Mizumura Minae's *Shishōsetsu: from left to right* (The I-novel: From Left to Right, 1995).<sup>1</sup> In retrospect, these works were labeled “Nihongo bungaku” (literature in Japanese), a term used by scholars such as Komori Yōichi and Numano Mitsuyoshi to denationalize and denaturalize the category “Nihon bungaku” (Japanese literature).<sup>2</sup> In his 1998 study “*Yuragi*” no *Nihon bungaku* (Japanese Literature in “Flux”), Komori critiques what he calls the “holy trinity” (*yommi ittai*)<sup>3</sup> of Japan, the Japanese people, the Japanese language, and Japanese culture, arguing that this equation must be unlearned and rethought:

It is important to re-recognize that, once the linkage of “Japan”-“the Japanese people”-“the Japanese language”-“Japanese culture” appears as an axiomatic whole and one's own existence is perceived as a constitutive part of that whole, this mentality becomes a mechanism that produces extremely discriminatory and exclusionary concepts and discourses.<sup>4</sup>

Here, Komori is referring to concepts such as “national language” (*kokugo*) and “national literature” (*kokubungaku*) as well as discourses such as the “myth of the homogeneous nation” (*tan'itsu minzoku shinwa*) and “theories of the Japanese people” (*Nihonjinron*). To this list, I would add heteronormativity and homophobia, for these ideologies are deeply entrenched and mutually imbricated in the others. In this paper, I will argue that “Nihongo bungaku” uncovers not only the ethnocentric and monolingual formation of Japanese-ness, but also its heteronormative and homophobic underpinnings.

The title of my paper, “Queer/Nation,” denotes this tension or friction between queer bodies and national borders. “Queer/Nation” also gestures to the activist organization Queer Nation from the early 1990s, when the terms “Nihongo bungaku” and “queer” were both being

<sup>1</sup> See Levy Hideo, *Seijōki no kikoenahei* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992); Yi Yang-ji, “Yuhi,” in *Yi Yang-ji zenshū* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993); Shimada Masahiko, *Higan sensei* (Tokyo: Fukutake shoten, 1992); Tawada Yōko, *Inu mukoiri* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1993); and Mizumura Minae, *Shishōsetsu: from left to right* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1995). Some of these works are available in English. My translation of *Seijōki no kikoenahei* is forthcoming. Portions of “Yuhi” and *Higan sensei* have been translated into English. See Yang-ji Lee, “Yu-Hee,” Constance Prener trans. in Helen Mitsios, ed., *New Japanese Voices* (Atlantic Monthly Press, 1991) and Shimada Masahiko, “Stalled at a Kiss (from *Master and Disciple*),” Kenneth L. Richard trans. *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 22, no. 2 (Summer 2002). “*Inu mukoiri*” has been translated into English as “The Bridegroom Was a Dog.” See Tawada Yōko, *The Bridegroom Was a Dog*, Margaret Mitsutani trans. (New York: Kōdansha International, 1998).

<sup>2</sup> See Komori Yōichi, <*Yuragi*> no *Nihon bungaku* (Tokyo: Nihon hōsō shuppan kyōkai, 1998); and Numano Mitsuyoshi, *W bungaku no seiki e* (Tokyo: Goryū shoin, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> Komori, <*Yuragi*> no *Nihon bungaku*, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Komori, <*Yuragi*> no *Nihon bungaku*, 7.

reclaimed as alternatives to national identity, albeit in different ways.<sup>5</sup> The potential for cross-fertilization between these two terms first occurred to me during a discussion with Mizumura Minae in 1998. Discussing the work of Ian Hideo Levy, Mizumura described Levy's decision to write in Japanese as "perverse" (she used the English term).<sup>6</sup> Of course, she meant "perverse" in the sense of "counter-intuitive" or "unusual," since Levy could have chosen to write in English, but the word has stuck with me. This paper, then, is an attempt to reconsider the perverse possibilities of Levy's work, particularly his debut novel *Seijōki no kikoena heya* (hereafter *Seijōki*). Instead of perverse, I prefer to think of Levy's literature as queer. By "queer," I mean that it is strategically strange or non-normative, not only in how it undermines the "holy quadrinity" Komori identifies, but also in how it troubles the line between heterosexuality and homosexuality. In fact, all of the works of "Nihongo bungaku" mentioned earlier blur this line in one way or another. As I will argue, the protagonist of Levy's *Seijōki* struggles with his sexuality. The Korean narrator of Yi's *Yuhi* is haunted by her inchoate desire for the female protagonist Yu-hui.<sup>7</sup> Shimada's *Higan sensei* plays off the homosociality and homoeroticism found in much of Natsume Sōseki's literature, especially *Kokoro*. The canine husband in Tawada's *Inu mukoiri* turns out to have sex with both men and women.<sup>8</sup> Finally, Mizumura's own "I-novel" might be called a "bi-novel" because of its bilingual style and the intimate bond between the narrator and her sister.<sup>9</sup> Why do depictions or suggestions of same-sex desire appear in each of these works? How might the sense of dislocation or estrangement in these works be linked to queerness? What is the relationship between home and homosexuality in these texts? Despite the amount of critical attention paid to "Nihongo bungaku" in recent years, few scholars have thought to pose these kinds of questions.<sup>10</sup> By re-reading *Seijōki* as a queer

<sup>5</sup> For more on the history and politics of the activist organization Queer Nation, see Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality," in Michael Warner, ed., *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>6</sup> Mizumura Minae, personal interview, Stanford University, March 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Norma Field's comments on *Yuhi* in this regard are very insightful: "Now, there are too many hints of a charged relationship between the mature woman narrator and the young Yuhi to be ignored. Rather than briskly labeling it lesbian, however, I would place this ethnically eroticized sisterhood on Adrienne Rich's memorably delineated lesbian continuum." Norma Field, "Beyond Envy, Boredom and Suffering: Toward an Emancipatory Politics for Resident Koreans and Other Japanese," *positions: east asia cultures critique*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1993), 653. I would describe this "ethnically eroticized sisterhood" as queer. For other readings of *Yuhi*, not necessarily queer, see Carol Hayes, "Cultural Identity in the Work of Yi Yang-ji," in Sonia Ryang, ed., *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin* (New York: Routledge, 2000); Catherine Ryu, "Beyond Language: Embracing the Figure of 'the Other' in Yi Yang-ji's *Yuhi*," in Rachael Hutchinson and Mark Williams, eds., *Representing the Other in Modern Japanese Literature: A Critical Approach* (New York: Routledge, 2007); and Ueda Atsuko, "'Mojji' to iu 'kotoba'—Yi Yang-ji 'Yuhi' o megutte," *Nihon kindai bungaku*, no. 62 (May 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Keith Vincent reconsiders Tawada as a queer writer in Keith Vincent, "Kuia sakka toshite no Tawada Yōko," *Yurika*, vol. 36, no. 14 (December 2004).

<sup>9</sup> I borrow the term "bi-novel" from Levy, who uses the term "bi-" (*bai*) in reference to bisexuality and bilingualism in Shimada Masahiko's 1989 novel *Yumetsukai* (Dream Messenger). See Levy Hideo, "'Zai' to 'bai' to, katagiri no me," *Nihongo no shōri* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Of the Japanese critics who have written on Levy's work, only Aoyanagi Etsuko and Yoshihara Mari explicitly address the role of gender and sexuality in his work, but neither undertakes a specifically queer reading. See Aoyanagi Etsuko, "Fukusūsei to bungaku: ishokugata <kyōkaiji> Levy Hideo to Mizumura Minae ni miru bungaku no katsubō," *Gengo bunka ronshū*, vol. 56 (Tsukuba: Tsukuba daigaku, 2001) and Mari Yoshihara, "Home is Where the Tongue Is: Levy Hideo to Mizumura Minae no ekkyō to gengo," *Amerika kenkyū: The America Review*, vol. 34 (2000). In her essay on Levy in English, Reiko Tachibana glosses over

text, this paper aims to begin the important work of queering “Nihongo bungaku,” not just “Nihon bungaku.”<sup>11</sup>

In the field of queer theory, the work of queering (and querying) the nation has been underway for quite some time. One such area of inquiry is queer diaspora, which asks how queer bodies cross national, racial, ethnic, linguistic, and cultural borders.<sup>12</sup> Queer diaspora refers to the condition of never being fully “at home,” both in one’s body and in one’s (borrowed) homeland. For many queer diasporic subjects, home and homosexuality are mutually incompatible and unattainable spaces. As David Eng notes: “. . . to ‘come out’ is precisely and finally never to be ‘out’—a never-ending process of constrained avowal, a perpetually deferred state of achievement, an uninhabitable domain. Suspended between an ‘in’ and an ‘out’ of the closet—between origin and destination and private and public space—queer entitlements to home and nation-state remain doubtful as well.”<sup>13</sup> The act of “going home” is just as complicated, if not impossible, as the process of “coming out.” In her study *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, Gayatri Gopinath elaborates on this idea: “Rather than evoking an imaginary homeland frozen in an idyllic moment outside history, what is remembered through queer diasporic desire and the queer diasporic body is a past time and place riven with contradictions and the violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles.”<sup>14</sup> Diaspora uproots the nation in much the same way that queerness destabilizes heterosexuality. Or, as Gopinath explains, “The concept of a queer diaspora enables a simultaneous critique of heterosexuality and the nation form while exploding the binary oppositions between nation and diaspora, heterosexuality and homosexuality, original and copy.”<sup>15</sup> In other words, queer diaspora unravels the binaries of native/non-native, normal/abnormal, and authentic/inauthentic. For this reason, it is especially useful for understanding *Seijōki*, to which I now turn.

Levy’s novel, actually three interconnected short stories, originally appeared in the literary journal *Gunzō* between 1987 and 1991.<sup>16</sup> As the first work of fiction written in Japanese

the issue of queerness or same-sex desire, although she cites many of the same examples from the text as I do. See Reiko Tachibana, “Beyond East and West: Tawada Yōko and Hideo Levy,” *PAJLS: Proceedings of the Association for Japanese Literary Studies*, vol. 3 (Summer 2002).

<sup>11</sup> The work of queering “Japanese literature” and Japanese culture is well underway, as seen in such groundbreaking studies as Mark McLelland, *Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2005); Gregory M. Pflugfelder, *Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Jim Reichert, *In the Company of Men: Representations of Male-Male Sexuality in Meiji Literature* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); and James Keith Vincent, “Writing Sexuality: Heteronormativity, Homophobia, and the Homosocial Subject in Modern Japan” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> See, for example: David L. Eng, Judith Halberstam, and José Esteban Muñoz, eds., *What’s Queer About Queer Studies Now*, a special issue of *Social Text*, vol. 23, nos. 84-85 (Fall-Winter 2005); Gayatri Gopinath, *Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Eithne Luibheid and Lionel Cantú Jr., eds., *Queer Migrations: Sexuality, U.S. Citizenship, and Border Crossings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Cindy Patton and Benigno Sánchez-Eppler, eds., *Queer Diasporas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

<sup>13</sup> David L. Eng, *Racial Castration: Managing Masculinity in Asian America* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 205. Original emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> Gopinath, *Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Gopinath, *Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> The three stories are: “Seijōki no kikoena heya” (Andō’s Room), published in 1987; “Nobenbā” (November), originally published as “Shin sekai e” (Toward a New World) in 1989; and “Nakama”

by a white American author, it attracted widespread attention and won the Noma Literary Award for New Writers in 1992. What is so interesting yet problematic about Levy's writing is how it both deconstructs and reinscribes the binaries listed above. Technically, Levy is a non-native speaker of Japanese (he began learning it at the age of seventeen), but he writes in a style that mimics and thereby subverts so-called "native" Japanese proficiency. As I noted earlier, his choice to write in Japanese can be seen as "perverse" or abnormal, although Levy himself claims that he had no choice but to write in Japanese, since much of what he writes about he first experienced in Japan in Japanese.<sup>17</sup> Finally, *Seijōki* plays with the notion of authenticity by masquerading as an "I-novel" (*shi-shōsetsu* or *watakushi shōsetsu*), one of the most canonical forms of modern Japanese literature, even though the story itself is more about the loss or confusion of identity than the discovery or revelation of it. Set mostly in Japan in November 1967, the story follows a white Jewish-American boy named Ben Isaac who runs away from his father's home, the American consulate in Yokohama, to the Tokyo apartment of his Japanese friend Andō Yoshiharu. Andō shows Ben the way to Shinjuku, which, as its name implies, symbolizes a "new home" for Ben, who ends up working there in a café and trying to fit in with his Japanese coworkers. Through a variety of experiences in Shinjuku, ranging from a tense encounter with two racist old men who yell, "Go home, white boy!" ("*Gaijin . . . ō kaere kaere*"),<sup>18</sup> to the climactic scene where his coworkers dare him to eat a raw egg, Ben realizes that he does not fit in and that he never will, in Japan or in America. He is, as Levy writes, "a Yankee with no 'home' to go home to."<sup>19</sup>

Read as a story about the son of the American consul general in Japan trying to forget English or find a "room of his own" in Japan, *Seijōki* is clearly an orientalist text. In her incisive reading of Levy's work, Sakakibara Richi critiques the novel's "glorification" (*bika*) of the Japanese language.<sup>20</sup> She also problematizes Levy's identification with *zainichi* Koreans, stressing the important differences and asymmetries between the two.<sup>21</sup> While I agree with Sakakibara, I also think there is more to this text than mere orientalism. As the preceding outline suggests, the story is less about "becoming Japanese" than it is about the dilemmas of being an outsider (i.e., non-Japanese) and not being able to look, sound, or act like a Japanese person. In this regard, *Seijōki* condemns Japanese racism and ethnocentrism far more than one might expect from a text supposedly enamored of all things Japanese. It is also highly critical of postwar American power and privilege in Japan and other countries in Asia. The title, which literally means "A Room Far From the Star-Spangled Banner," signifies an attempt to escape or resist American nationalism and neo-imperialism. Indeed, the narrative unfolds against a backdrop of the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (*Anpo*) riots of the 1960s, the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy, and the Vietnam War. The story also moves back and forth between multiple settings,

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(Comrades), published in 1991. They were republished together in the collection *Seijōki no kikoena heyā*. More recently, they have been reissued in paperback form; see Levy Hideo, *Seijōki no kikoena heyā* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> See Levy Hideo, "Naze Nihongo de kaku no ka," *Nihongo no shōri* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heyā*, 84. All references to this text are from the 1992 version.

<sup>19</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heyā*, 76.

<sup>20</sup> Sakakibara Richi, "Naze Nihongo de kaku no ka: Levy Hideo," *Chikuma gendai bun gakashū shidō no kenkyū*, a supplement to *Chikuma gendai bun* (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobō, 1998), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Sakakibara, "Naze Nihongo de kaku no ka," 12-13. So-called "zainichi Koreans" (*zainichi Chōsenjin Kankokujin*) are Korean residents of Japan. For an overview of *zainichi* Korean issues, see Sonia Ryang, "Introduction: Resident Koreans in Japan," in Sonia Ryang, ed., *Koreans in Japan: Critical Voices from the Margin* (New York: Routledge 2000).

not just the American consulate in Yokohama and Andō's room near Shinjuku. It retraces Ben's life growing up in places like Phnom Penh, Cambodia; Taichung, Taiwan; and Arlington, Virginia. As such, *Seijōki* uncovers the "violences of multiple uprootings, displacements, and exiles" that Gopinath sees in the queer diasporic subject.

Not only is Ben unsure about where he is from or where he belongs in the world, he also is confused about his own sexuality. In fact, his sexual *dis*orientation is what leads him to Shinjuku in the first place. Shinjuku, it should be noted, is Japan's queer capital (Shinjuku 2-chōme, to be precise). Ben's father seems to know this, because he warns Ben to come straight home after Japanese class and not to make any detours, "*especially not to places like Shinjuku.*"<sup>22</sup> Ben's father is not only afraid that Ben will stop by Shinjuku and somehow become gay, he is also worried that Ben is becoming effeminate by studying Japanese. In a later flashback to Taiwan, Ben remembers finding a Japanese book left behind from the colonial period.<sup>23</sup> Ben is transfixed, not by the angular kanji characters but by the rounded hiragana character "no" interspersed among them. When he asks his father what this is, his father overreacts:

To his father's eyes, the character for "no" must have appeared as something *suspicious* (*ayashii*) and *womanly* (*memeshii*), unlike the *kanji* that expressed the world of reason. No doubt his father's attitude was something like: *that*, my boy, is the mark of a culture that brushes aside the symmetry of reason and is drowning in desires (*kannō*). You're far better off studying Chinese than studying *that*.<sup>24</sup>

In typical orientalist fashion, Ben's father associates Japan and the Japanese language with queerness and effeminacy (i.e., "something *suspicious* and *womanly*"). Compared to the supposedly rational and masculine world of *kanji*, *hiragana* here becomes a sign of perversion and weakness (i.e., "drowning in desires"). By fleeing to Shinjuku, which is first represented in *hiragana* in the text, Ben is not only running away from home, he is also running away from his father's homophobia and his own anxieties about acting "straight" and manly like his father.

Throughout *Seijōki*, queerness signifies effeminacy. In the scene following the flashback to Taiwan, Ben is studying Japanese with Andō in a coffee shop near school. When Ben admits that he has trouble remembering the hiragana for "nu" (ぬ), which looks vaguely like "no" (の), Andō traces it onto Ben's palm. The intense homoeroticism of the scene is broken by the laughter of some nearby boys, who snicker, "Helen Keller."<sup>25</sup> Here again, the threat of queerness (i.e., an interracial romance between Ben and Andō) leads to feminization (i.e., Ben being called Helen Keller). In this case, though, queerness is also conflated with disability.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heiya*, 32. In the original, this part is written in English, which suggests that Shinjuku has some special meaning for the father and perhaps for Ben as well. Indeed, after saying this, the father winks at his wife. To capture this linguistic coding, I have chosen to italicize the phrase in English.

<sup>23</sup> Japan ruled Taiwan from 1895 to 1945.

<sup>24</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heiya*, 58. Original emphases. As one respondent pointed out, "no" (の) marks the genitive or possessive case in Japanese. Although Ben cannot read or understand Japanese at this point in the story, his fascination with the grapheme "no" symbolizes his own (failed) attempts to "fit in" or feel accepted in Japan or the Japanese language. The particle "no" thus signifies not a state of belonging or affiliation but, rather a condition of not belonging, of having "no home," so to speak. I thank Richard Calichman for encouraging me to pursue this line of thought.

<sup>25</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heiya*, 59.

<sup>26</sup> A number of recent studies have explored the connections between queerness and disability. See, for example, Robert McRuer, *Crip Theory: Cultural Signs of Queerness and Disability* (New York: New York University Press, 2006).

Like the unspoken homoeroticism between Helen Keller and her caretaker, Anne Sullivan, there is an inarticulate yet undeniable homoeroticism between Ben and Andō. Theirs is a love that literally cannot speak its name, because Ben does not know the right words in Japanese and Andō refuses to speak English with him. The queer nature of their friendship—their *okama*-raderie, so to speak—is communicated in other ways.<sup>27</sup> When Ben first visits Andō's room, he notices a photograph on the wall of "a little man, a famous author supposedly, flexing his muscles by doing push-ups."<sup>28</sup> As most readers will immediately recognize, this "little man" is the Japanese writer Mishima Yukio. What Andō admires about Mishima (i.e., his body, his literature, or his politics) is never made clear. To be more like Andō, Ben begins reading Mishima's novel *Kinkakuji* in Ivan Morris's English translation, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*.<sup>29</sup> Not surprisingly, Ben identifies most with the protagonist Mizoguchi, who suffers from a stutter. At one point, Levy writes, "The first sound is like a key . . . Mizoguchi wa saisho no oto de domoru."<sup>30</sup> By slipping or stuttering from English to Japanese in this way, the text literally blurs the lines between Mishima's original and Morris's translation.<sup>31</sup> As Gopinath reminds us, "Translation . . . cannot be seen as a mimetic reflection of a prior text but rather as a productive activity that instantiates new regimes of sexual subjectivity even as it effaces earlier erotic arrangements."<sup>32</sup> Like Mishima's own homosexuality, these reflections and echoes of Mishima function as a kind of open secret in *Seijōki*; they (re)signify queerness without saying it. They are, in other words, a key to the closet in which Ben is trapped.

Ben never comes out of the closet, as it were. Like many queer diasporic novels, from James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* to Monique Truong's *The Book of Salt*, *Seijōki* questions what it means to "come out" in another country or another language.<sup>33</sup> Ben does make it to Shinjuku, though, and there he finally realizes his queer identity. In the third story, entitled "Nakama" (Comrades), Ben is on his way to work in Shinjuku when he notices a woman, heavily made-up and wearing a satin dress, gazing at him from a nearby window. "Cold, ain't it?" the woman says, but her voice is that of a man. The "woman" turns out to be a drag queen (here Levy uses the term *okama*, which means "queen" or "fag," depending on the context). Taken aback, Ben replies in Japanese, "You can say that again." "You sure can," the drag queen laughs, referring both to the weather and to Ben's ability to speak Japanese.<sup>34</sup> Ben's reaction is telling: "It was a friendly laugh somehow. It sounded as though the man, who spent his days

<sup>27</sup> The term "okama" (originally a slang term for the anus) refers to an effeminate gay man. It has both a pejorative meaning (i.e., "fag") and a more playful or performative one (i.e., "queen"). Here, I am using it in the sense of "queer" or "homoerotic."

<sup>28</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heyā*, 17-18.

<sup>29</sup> See Mishima Yukio, *Kinkakuji* (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1956) and Mishima Yukio, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, Ivan Morris trans. (New York: Knopf, 1959).

<sup>30</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heyā*, 139. This scene appears on p. 7 in Mishima Yukio, *Kinkakuji*, and on p. 5 in the English translation, Mishima Yukio, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*.

<sup>31</sup> In this scene, which is clearly an homage to Mishima (and perhaps to Morris), Levy quotes directly from Mishima's text, but he misquotes the Morris' translation, which reads, "This first sound is like a key . . ." (emphasis added). Mishima Yukio, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 5. Elsewhere, Levy has written about his own experiences reading *Kinkakuji* in Japanese and the connections between Mishima and the character of Andō; see Levy, "Naze Nihongo de kaku no ka," and Levy Hideo, "Sairen no waraigoe, Mishima no koe," *Nihongo no shōri* (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 1992).

<sup>32</sup> Gopinath, *Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*, 14.

<sup>33</sup> See James Baldwin, *Giovanni's Room* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1956) and Monique Truong, *The Book of Salt* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003).

<sup>34</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoena heyā*, 137.

performing as a woman, had seen through Ben's façade and, at the same time, approved of the role that Ben was performing."<sup>35</sup> Clearly, Ben sees a reflection of himself in the drag queen. They are the real "comrades" of this story. But what exactly is the role that Ben is performing? What is the façade he is wearing? On the one hand, it is a kind of racial cross-dressing, an attempt to pass as Japanese by speaking Japanese and working with other Japanese in a café in Shinjuku. On the other hand, it is a sexual charade, an attempt to act "straight" in order to blend in to Japanese society or, as Levy puts it, "a yearning to melt into the crowd and follow them along."<sup>36</sup> In this brief but telling scene, the drag queen sees through Ben's double disguise. S/he reminds him of his own queerness, his own fakeness, and his own otherness. Moreover, s/he affirms these things. At the same time, this scene reveals the artificiality of ethnonational identities such as "Japanese" and "American" and the performativity of all gender and sexual identities.

To conclude, I would like to return to the question of what it means to choose to write in Japanese. In the conclusion of "*Yuragi*" no *Nihon bungaku*, entitled "'Nihongo bungaku' no yukue" ("The Direction of 'Nihongo bungaku'"), Komori distinguishes between those who choose to write in Japanese, such as multilingual and transnational authors such as Levy, Mizumura, and Tawada, and those who are forced to write in Japanese, such as Japanese colonial subjects and *zainichi* Korean authors. He adds: "Still, no matter how 'free' one is [to write in Japanese], that does not change the fact that one's circumstances are multiply determined in a web of global power relations such as nationality, race, ethnicity, and gender differences that one can neither choose nor do anything about as a single human being."<sup>37</sup> But what about sexual orientation? In most cases, sexual orientation is not something one can choose or change, although it certainly is shaped by one's upbringing and environment. While Ben's decision to leave home and Levy's decision to write in Japanese are no doubt choices, which are unavailable to or inescapable for many others, how might they also *not* be choices, at least in terms of sexual orientation (in Ben's case) or personal history (in Levy's case)? As I have tried to suggest, Ben must go to Shinjuku, not only to escape his racist and homophobic father but also to find new forms of affiliation not based on the reproductive and heteronormative logic of the family or the nation-state. Similarly, Levy, who grew up in the United States, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Japan, writes in a mixture of Japanese, English, and Chinese, because these are the languages that constitute his identity, even as they proclaim the contradictions or impossibility of identity itself. This is not to say that Levy's choice to write primarily in Japanese is identical—or even comparable—to that of other diasporic writers of Japanese. Indeed, it is important to recognize the different histories and hierarchies of diaspora contained within the term "Nihongo bungaku." It is also important, I would argue, to consider same-sex desire and queerness as sites where "Nihongo bungaku" questions what it means to be "at home" in any language, nation, or culture. In this regard, "Nihongo bungaku" makes us all "queer," or what Komori calls "misfits" (*kekakusha*).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>35</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoenaï heya*, 138.

<sup>36</sup> Levy, *Seijōki no kikoenaï heya*, 64.

<sup>37</sup> Komori, <*Yuragi*> no *Nihon bungaku*, 312-313.

<sup>38</sup> Komori, <*Yuragi*> no *Nihon bungaku*, 312.