REIMAGINING MALE-MALE SEXUALITY:
REPRESENTATIONS IN JAPANESE MODERN LITERATURE AND GAY MANGA

by

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B.A., The University of British Columbia, 2003

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

(Asian Studies)

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

April 2006

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the representation of male-desiring males in modern 
Japanese literature and comics for gay men, and shows how such representations have 
been used to various ends by heterosexual authors, as well as by same-sex desiring and 
openly gay authors.

Chapter One provides an overview of representations of male-male eroticism in 
Japanese literature from the 700s AD, and of the changing attitudes towards male-male 
sexuality, from the celebrated, paederastic nanshoku tradition of the Edo era (1600-1867) 
to the medicalized approach to “same-sex love” in the Meiji period (1867-1912), and the 
emergence of a modern gay identity in the 1980s and 1990s.

Chapter Two examines representations of homosexual males in the writings of 
modern canonical authors Ōe Kenzaburō, Shiba Ryōtarō and Mishima Yukio, and 
examines the motivations of each author in writing a same-sex-desiring male character, 
which include the expression of national abjection, and the reflection of new thinking that 
pathologized male-male desire.

Chapter Three focuses on manga produced by and for gay men, and examines 
contemporary examples of such productions by Hirosegawa Yui, Nohara Kuro, and 
Masatake from three gay monthly magazines. This chapter explores how such manga are 
used both to produce and inform gay life in modern Japan.
Finally, the Conclusion examines the differences in depictions of male-desiring males in works by writers of mainstream literature and writers of manga for gay men, arguing that while both use homosexual male characters to political ends, the former use such characters for destructive reasons (to express national abjection, for example), while the latter use them for constructive and instructive reasons—as a positive exploration of gay life, and as a blueprint for Japanese gay men to follow.
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GLOSSARY

Boku (僕) A soft, yet still masculine first-person pronoun often used by boys and young men. See also: ore.

Dōjo A studio designed for practicing martial arts.

Dōseiai (同性愛) Literally “same-sex-love.” An idea and a word influenced by—and translated into Chinese characters from—the European medical and legal concept of “homosexuality.”

Kabuki A type of theatre in which all roles are played by males. Female roles are played by specialists known as onnagata. See also: Takarazuka Revue.

Manga (漫画) Comics, or comic books. See also: yaoi manga.

Nanshoku (男色) Literally “man-colour,” the term refers to the paederastic tradition of male-male eroticism that had its heyday in the Edo period (1600-1868). See also: shudō.

Ore (俺) A rough, masculine first-person pronoun used by boys and men. See also: boku.

Queer “Queer” may refer to gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, transgender people, or indeed any person who does not generally identify as heterosexual or whose gender identity challenges the male/female binary. While the word is seen by some as more inclusive—and therefore more appropriate—than “gay” (which is often used, as it is in Japan, only to indicate same-sex-desiring males), others see it as problematic due to its negative connotations and history of use as an epithet.

Shudō (衆道) The “way of youth(s).” See nanshoku, wakashu.

Takarazuka Revue A theatre troupe in which all roles are played by females. Each Takarazuka actor specializes in playing either female or male roles.

Wakashu (若衆) Literally, “youth(s).” The younger, receptive partners in shudō relationships.

Yaoi manga A genre of comics, mostly written by and for women, concerning emotional and sexual relationships between males. Also known as bishōnen or bishōnen-ai manga. See also: manga.
I cannot claim that this thesis is the solely the result of my own effort; rather, it represents the result of a group effort on my behalf: without the assistance, encouragement and (perhaps above all) patience of the following people, it could not have been written.

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Sharalyn Orbaugh, for her encouragement, enthusiasm, and thoughtful advice, all of which she always found the time to provide despite her busy schedule. I am grateful as well to Joshua Mostow and Tineke Hellwig for agreeing to be on my thesis committee, and for their helpful suggestions.

I owe a tremendous debt to my mother, Judith Hall, for the many efforts she made over the years to ensure the furthering of my education, for her financial assistance, and for the many sacrifices she has made on my behalf.

I am also deeply grateful to my partner, Michael Tripp, for his patience and for the sacrifices he, too, has made for my benefit. I could not have returned to and been successful at school without his hard work and support.

Finally, thank you to the friends who have offered support and encouragement over the years, especially to Sarah McPherson (who always knows what to say), for the lattes and sympathy.
For Michael
and for my mother, Judith
Chapter One: Introduction and Overview

Depictions of male-male eroticism have featured in Japanese literary and cultural productions from the earliest times, and continue to be a part of mainstream writing today. Such depictions have been deployed by different writers in different media and in different periods for various reasons: for humorous effect; as an expression of cultural refinement or instruction; to express national abjection or misogyny; as a form of confession; and, most recently of all, to reflect, explore and validate gay culture and the lives of gay men.

According to Gary Leupp, the first Japanese references to sex between males date to the late tenth century, although he adds that some scholars have claimed that there are allusions to male-male eroticism in two of the oldest Japanese texts: in the Nihongi (The Chronicles of Japan), which dates to about 720 A.D., and in the Man’yōshū, a collection of poetry dating to circa 750.¹

By the Heian period (794-1185), allusions to male-male homosexuality had begun to appear in courtly writing. According to Paul Gordon Shalow, Murasaki Shikibu’s Genji monogatari (The Tale of Genji) contains “no obvious depictions of same-sex love, but male friendships are repeatedly eroticized through competition for women.”² However, an early scene in the story, when the hero is rejected by a beautiful woman, seems strongly suggestive of same-sex eroticism. Disappointed by the woman’s rejection,


Genji asks her younger brother, who has been running back and forth delivering messages between the two, to stay with him instead:

‘Well, you at least must not abandon me.’ Genji pulled the boy down beside him.

The boy was delighted, such were Genji’s youthful charms. Genji, for his part, or so one is informed, found the boy more attractive than his chilly sister.³

According to Leupp, court diaries from the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries by Fujiwara Sukefusa, Oe Tadafusa, Fujiwara Yorinaga and Fujiwara Kanezane contain “fairly clear allusions” to male-male erotic relationships, including accounts of sexual encounters between the authors and other males.⁴ Other very early texts which depict male-male sexuality include Nyake kanjinchō (subscription book on behalf of Nyake), a text written entirely in Chinese characters that dates from 1482 and whose intended readership was probably Buddhist clergy, as well as a variety of hand-copied texts and hand-illustrated emaki picture scrolls.⁵

Whilst allusions in earlier literature are often oblique, by the Edo period (1600-1868) male-male eroticism was being written about and depicted explicitly in mainstream literary and popular productions, and “featur[ed] prominently in the titles of many works that . . . extolled its pursuit,” including the writings of well-known authors such as Ihara


⁴ Leupp 25.

Saikaku, as well as in poetry, song, dance, drama and woodblock prints. This increase in the production and availability of such materials was facilitated by new technology, which eliminated the need for painstaking hand-copying of texts; the rapid growth of the publishing industry; increasing literacy even among the commoner classes; and, to some extent, the increasing wealth of the merchant class. According to Leupp, there was a "virtual outpouring" of erotic material—both literary and artistic—on male-male themes in the early Edo period. Popular titles included Mokuzu monogatari (Tale of seaweed, 1640), a true love-suicide story involving three youths; Kitamura Kigin's Iwatsutsuji (Rock-azaleas), a compilation of male-male erotica; Shin'yūki (1643, reissued in 1661 as Shudō monogatari, or tales of shudō); and Ihara Saikaku's Nanshoku ōkagami (the great mirror of male love, 1687). Male-male eroticism was also a "staple theme" in kabuki drama and the noh theatre.

Attraction between males was now being expressed as shudō (衆道, meaning the way of youths) or nanshoku (男色, male eroticism). This "way" of youths was

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6 Pflugfelder 26.
7 Pflugfelder 47.
8 Leupp 80.
9 Leupp 82. Kitamura was the mentor of renowned poet Matsuo Bashō. Paul Gordon Schalow describes Iwatsutsuji as a collection of "thirty-four homoerotic love poems and prose passages from sixteen classical works of literature [gathered together] in order to show how men of the past—primarily monks and priests—expressed their love for youths [and to] provide a model of behavior for men and youths of [Kigin’s] day" ("Introduction: The Invention of a Literary Tradition of Male Love," 97).
10 Pflugfelder 46.
11 Pflugfelder 113.
positioned and described in contemporary texts as “a discipline leading to various pleasures and rewards” in much the same manner as such disciplines as sadō (茶道, “the way of tea”) and bushidō (武士道, the “way of the warrior”), the character 道 endowing the term with “a certain spiritual or ethical nuance.” In fact, so much was shudō revered in the society of the time, according to Pflugfelder, that in “popular discourse of the Edo period, the conjugal and reproductive aspects of male-female sexuality were evidently too pedestrian to deserve the status of a ‘way,’ while the intricacy of the ‘way of youths’ was virtually axiomatic.”

The shudō / nanshoku tradition was paederastic, similar to traditions in ancient Greece and other pre-modern societies. That is, the expression of male–male sexual and romantic attraction occurred along a vertical line, with older “adult” males—whose higher status also afforded them the privilege of sexually penetrating their younger partners—pursuing younger “youths.” The importance of status in sexual relationships applied to all sexual relationships. As Mark McLelland puts it, “[t]he partner who penetrated the body of his lover was invariably the elder partner in an intergenerational relationship or the male partner in . . . relationships with women.” Indeed, nanshoku texts invariably depicted only the adult partner as experiencing pleasure from anal penetration (which was also the quintessential sexual act of nanshoku); the receptive

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12 Pflugfelder 28, 97.
13 Pflugfelder 27.
14 Pflugfelder 42.
15 Mark McLelland, Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age (New York, New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005) 17.
youth submitted "only out of duty, affection, coercion, or the prospect of material reward."\textsuperscript{16}

By the latter part of the Edo era, however, the \textit{shudō} tradition was experiencing a downturn in popular discourse, and by the last decades of the period "many authorities had come to view male-male sexual practices as more typical of an earlier era in their country's history than their own."\textsuperscript{17} With the Meiji period (1868-1912) came a "profound reformulation" of official discourse surrounding male-male sexuality. Officially monogamous, state-sanctioned marriage became the centre of a new "civilized morality."\textsuperscript{18}

This period also coincided with the opening of Japan to the West, increasing overseas travel by Japanese intellectuals (often for the purposes of study), and the development of sexological discourses in Europe.\textsuperscript{19} The old traditions of male love, with their Buddhist and samurai influences, and their link to the kabuki theatre, "virtually disappeared from literature . . . under the influence of Western legal and medical discourses."\textsuperscript{20} In 1882, a new law effectively legalized consensual anal intercourse between adult males, but now redefined it as an "obscene act," a class that included all sex acts besides vaginal penetration. Male-male sexuality, which had in Edo times been

\textsuperscript{16} Pflugfelder 42.
\textsuperscript{17} Pflugfelder 95.
\textsuperscript{18} Pflugfelder 149.
\textsuperscript{19} McLelland, \textit{Queer Japan} 18.
\textsuperscript{20} Shalow, "Introduction" 16.
both respectable and celebrated, became "barbarous, immoral or simply unspeakable."  

Male-male sexuality continued to be associated with adolescents, but the "desiring male," who had previously been assumed to be an adult, now began to be described as youthful as well. New terms like "roughneck" and "smoothie" (kōha and nanpa), taken from Mori Ōgai's 1909 autobiographical novel Wita sekusuarisu (Vita sexualis), were used in discussions of student sexuality, but did not indicate a permanent "sexual orientation." Sensationalist stories in the newspapers fuelled a "moral panic" surrounding male-male sexual practices among students.

Male-male attractions became "refigured" as dōsei (同性愛, literally same-sex-love), a word influenced by—and translated into Chinese characters from—the European medical and legal concept of "homosexuality." While "sodomy"—proof of the "diabolical character of the local religion and of the heathen's need for conversion"—had been one of the "central preoccupations" of Christian missionaries in Japan in the sixteenth century, this concern had been largely ignored by the Japanese themselves. Now, however, there was no longer a place, in a Japan determined to be seen as "civilized" by the Western world, for depictions of homosexuality; same-sex eroticism became unmentionable.

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21 Pflugfelder 168-193.

22 Pflugfelder 211.

23 Pflugfelder 226.

24 Pflugfelder 65.

25 Shalow, "Introduction" 16.
This new concept of “same-sex love” suggested a similarity between male-male and female-female sexualities that had not existed before, as well as a permanent sexual psychology, and an exclusivity of desire; “same-sex love” became a deviant “other” to “cross-sex love,” which now represented the norm. Japanese popular sexologists drew from the work of Ulrichs, Karl Westphal and Krafft-Ebing. Male-male sexuality became conflated with feminine gender identity and transvestism. “Dōseiai” was seen as “deeply rooted within the psychology and physiology of the individual,” and soon the “homosexual” (dōseiaisha) came into being.

The new thinking on same-sex desire represented a radical departure from shudō, in which, whereas the younger partner (the wakashu) had been the insertee, he was understood to be the same as other young males—that is, any youth could become a partner in shudō, but not all did. Furthermore, these young men were portrayed as reluctant to engage in anal penetration, which they did not enjoy and had to be coerced to do. Their own desires were not depicted as being part of the sexual act, and being the youthful partner in shudō did not preclude sex with females. In the era of “same-sex love,” in contrast, the insertee was portrayed as desiring penetration, particularly by a “masculine” man (counterpart to his own assumed “femininity”), and as actively enticing other males instead of merely being enticed. Similarly, in shudō any adult man could play the role of the adult, insertive partner, though not all did. The “active” male

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26 Pflugfelder 252.

27 Pflugfelder 255-261.

28 Pflugfelder 263.
dōseiaisha, on the other hand, was seen as distinct from other males (as was the male “passive”): both were assumed, unlike their predecessors, to be exclusively attracted to members of their own sex.\textsuperscript{29} The shudō model “implied a harmony between masculine gender identity and male-male sexual practices”; this was firmly “disavowed” by the dōseiai model, and “same-sex love” was reimagined as a “disease of civilization.”\textsuperscript{30}

With the adoption of Western-influenced models of sexuality, in the Shōwa period (1926-1989) depictions of male-male eroticism in literary productions evolved from expressions of a celebrated cultural discipline with links to the manly culture of the samurai to a device for the expression of national abjection (in works by Ōe Kenzaburō) and misogyny (in works by Mishima Yukio).

The 1920s saw the development of journals dedicated to the discussion of sexualities, including “perverse sexuality,” as well as the rise of new experts in sexuality. These sexological journals also gave the “perverse” a voice for the first time, since readers could write in and solicit the advice of the experts.\textsuperscript{31} The emergence, in the 1930s, of the concept of ryōki (meaning “hunting [for the] strange”) also contributed to the creation of “perverse” sexualities. According to Jeffrey Angles, “ryōki involved a scopophilic desire to uncover strange and bizarre ‘curiosities,’ especially ones having to do with the erotic, so that the onlooker might experience a degree of precarious excitement and even titillation.”\textsuperscript{32} Ryōki was closely linked to the concept of perversive

\textsuperscript{29} Pflugfelder 266-267.

\textsuperscript{30} Pflugfelder 279-295.

\textsuperscript{31} McLelland, Queer Japan 23.
sexual desire that had arisen from the work of popular sexologists in the sexological journals:

By designating certain sexual practices as perverse or deviant, the notion of perversive sexual desire excluded them from the realm of the normal and civilized. Ironically, by condemning these forms of desire, sexologists put in place boundaries of propriety that thrill-seeking curiosity seekers might purposefully transgress. By labelling certain sexual acts and forms of sexual desire as strange, medical psychology and sexology helped turn them into the kinds of 'curiosities' that curiosity-hunters might seek out. In this regard, the sexual dimension of ryōki is intimately related to the categorizing function of sexological discourse.\textsuperscript{33}

According to Pflugfelder, there was such a proliferation of writing about perverse sexualities in this period that "perversion" not only seemed ubiquitous, but "the connotations of the term were not entirely negative." As "perversion" became a common term in popular discourse, it "came to figure . . . as an object of consumption and celebration, and . . . as a subject that could speak for itself."\textsuperscript{34}

With increasing imperialist ambitions and militarization, however, came increasing control over discourses on sexuality, and both the press and the film industry came under state supervision. Writing on sexual topics, which might transgress "public


\textsuperscript{33} Angles 184.

\textsuperscript{34} Pflugfelder 287-288.
morals” (fūzoku), became increasingly difficult, and the scarcity and high cost (and, indeed, rationing) of paper during wartime meant that writers had to focus their energies on products that were supportive of the war effort if they hoped to be published at all. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, publications of a “sexual and frivolous nature” were suspended altogether, “[o]pen discussion of sexuality . . . largely ceased,” and sexuality became “increasingly heteronormative” for both men and women.  

In the post-war years there was again a proliferation of writing on sexual themes, but with a “loosening of traditional sex and gender ideologies . . . and a less judgmental attitude in the popular press towards homosexuality and other nonprocreative acts.”

Although from the 1950s the so-called “perverse press” which grew out of these first post-war publications started using the term gei (gay) in their reports on the new phenomena of the gei bā (gay bar) and the gei bōi (gay boy), the association of the term “gay” with transgender practices and prostitution meant it was not widely used by male-desiring males themselves. According to McLelland,

It was not until the mid-1980s that a new generation of ‘gay’ men emerged and began to employ modes of organization and activism similar to those that had been pioneered by gay and lesbian organizations in the west, and that the mainstream media began to deal with gay and lesbian issues outside of the entertainment paradigm that had dominated the discussion.

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35 McLelland, Queer Japan 31-37.

36 McLelland, Queer Japan 65.]

37 McLelland, Queer Japan 77-78. Gei bōi were young, effeminate, semi-cross-dressed male hosts who served drinks and made conversation with customers at gay bars, and who were often available for sexual services after work hours.
in the postwar period.\textsuperscript{38}

Japanese sexualities, especially those of same-sex-desiring males in the modern period, remain virtually unstudied, in part because sexuality has been seen as inappropriate for scholarly attention and for public discussion. According to Leupp, "although an increasing number of scholars have addressed questions of gender and sexuality in Japanese history, few have seriously studied the homosexual tradition."\textsuperscript{39}

While in recent years interest in such issues has increased, still, according to Pflugfelder, In Japanese academic circles, as in Western ones, the idea that sexuality has a history—much less one that historians may respectably talk about—is a recent, and for some an unsettling, proposition . . . the polite fiction that [sexuality and conjugal life] are one and the same has historical roots in Japan dating back at least as far as the late nineteenth century, when a code of ‘civilized morality’ bestowed legitimacy upon the view that sexual behavior outside the bounds of male-female marriage should be dealt with in silence or euphemism rather than with public acknowledgement.\textsuperscript{40}

Jeffrey Dobbins says that “[d]espite a long history of literature and art depicting love and sexual acts between men, the predominant attitude toward homosexuality in Japan is [still] negative.”\textsuperscript{41} For example, Barbara Summerhawk, editor of \textit{Queer Japan}:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{38} McLelland, \textit{Queer Japan} 161.

\textsuperscript{39} Leupp 2.

\textsuperscript{40} Pflugfelder 7-8.

Personal Stories of Japanese Lesbians, Gays, Bisexuals and Transsexuals, the first English-language book to feature first-hand accounts of the lives of LGBT Japanese people, says that despite the near-total lack of sexual content in the book, the Japanese university where she worked rejected the book outright for a publication grant. The official reason was that the book was not academic enough, but Summerhawk says that she was told privately that “some people were freaked out and didn’t know what to do with the material.”

While little work has been done on modern male-male sexualities, several scholars have undertaken extensive studies of historical male-male eroticism in Japan, particularly of the Edo period. In 1995, for example, Gary Leupp published his Male Colors: The Construction of Homosexuality in Tokugawa Japan, which focuses on the period between 1603 and 1868. In this book, Leupp examines references in art and literature, through which he attempts to reveal Tokugawa-era attitudes towards and experiences of male-male sexuality. According to Leupp, it is the “first in-depth examination of male homosexuality in the Tokugawa period in any language.”

Although the work has been praised for its examination of the shudō tradition, Male Colors has been criticized, among other things, for its use of the term “homosexual.”

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42 LGBT is an abbreviation commonly used in Western gay communities and in Queer Studies which stands for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual” (the first two words are sometimes reversed to produce GLBT). Recently, the abbreviation GLBTTQ (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transsexual, Transgender and Queer) has gained some currency among queer groups.


44 Leupp 3.
which several reviewers see as anachronistic and inappropriate when used to describe seventeenth century sexuality in Japan. It has also been criticized for “segregating” nanshoku from the rest of Tokugawa sexuality and, according to one reviewer, for treating heterosexuality as “mere fact” and “homosexual traditions” as exceptional.45 In addition, treating fictional representations as historical fact is potentially problematic in itself, since it necessarily requires subjective interpretation. Joshua Mostow, for example, has pointed out, in a 2003 study of the 1675 ehon (picture-book) Wakashu-asobi kyara no makura (Aloeswood incense pillow of youngman-play), that the currently accepted “trinity of sex, gender, and sexuality” may be insufficient for a thorough understanding of Tokugawa-era genders and sexualities, proposing that instead of two, we “must think of at least four genders.”46

Gregory Pflugfelder also tackles historical male-male eroticism in his 1999 book Cartographies of Desire: Male-Male Sexuality in Japanese Discourse, 1600-1950, a study of 350 years of Japanese discourse on and changing attitudes towards sex and eroticism between men. Pflugfelder traces the changing attitudes towards male-male eroticism from the heyday of Edo-period shudō traditions, which celebrated such relationships, to changing attitudes in the late Edo and early Meiji periods, to the post-war importation of the English word “gay,” and the adoption of and identification with that term by same-sex desiring males. While he, too, uses literary and artistic productions to support his


claims, Pflugfelder also makes substantial use of medical and legal texts and even newspaper accounts. Pflugfelder's work is remarkable in its scope and detail, but his focus is mostly on the Edo and Meiji eras: while he does some exploration of changes in the early Shōwa period, he chooses to end his study in the immediate post-war years. Also, although Pflugfelder uses literary works as part of his investigation, his focus is on historical explication rather than literary analysis.

A work that spans both the historical and modern periods is Partings at Dawn: An Anthology of Japanese Gay Literature. Edited by Stephen D. Miller, this book brings together English translations of homoerotic literatures from the twelfth to the twentieth centuries, including various genres such as poetry and personal letters, along with brief introductions to each piece. There has been some debate about the appropriateness of the word "gay," a quite recent concept, when used for a collection of works that goes back to the Heian era and has little by way of a common thread besides the homoerotic content of the stories—indeed, Schalow himself questions the "very notion of a Japanese 'gay and lesbian literary tradition.'" The book may be the first English-language anthology of Japanese homoerotic writings; as an anthology, however, it offers little in the way of literary analysis, aside from the brief introduction of each work by its translator.

Mark McLelland has done various work on Japanese sexualities, including his 2005 book Queer Japan from the Pacific War to the Internet Age, which examines the evolution of non-heterosexual ("queer") Japanese identities and desires in the modern period, and is in part intended as a contribution to the study of the history of sexuality.48

47 Schalow, "Introduction" 11.
In the book, McLelland examines postwar “perverse magazines” and traces the evolution of attitudes towards and expressions of male-male desire from the compulsory heterosexuality of war times, to the conflation of male homosexuality and feminization in the 1950s and 1960s, to the eventual emergence of a modern gay identity. While in *Queer Japan* McLelland’s focus is not literature, he has also written several articles in which he examines the representation of ostensibly “gay males” in *yaoi* manga (erotic manga for women) and in other women’s media.

Keith Vincent’s 2000 Ph.D. thesis “Writing Sexuality: Heteronormativity, Homophobia and the Homosocial Subject in Modern Japan” charts the emergence of homophobia and heteronormativity in Japan in the changing use of language, in literary and other texts, and in the Japanese response to AIDS in the 1980s. Vincent’s focus here is on homophobia and heteronormativity, and on Japanese discourses of homosexuality, rather than on literary analysis. In his 1999 study of gay males in Japan in the 1980s and 1990s, “Invisible People: An Ethnography of Same-Sexuality in Contemporary Japan,” Joseph Hawkins examines media representations of GLBT people and the evolution of the gay media, as well as “gendered identities, political movements, the AIDS pandemic and socially compulsory heterophile marriages.”

While Hawkins does examine some gay fiction and manga, his focus is on gay media as a gay space within the larger (non-gay) world.

While some scholars (including Leupp, Pflugfelder, and Mostow) have examined

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male-male eroticism in literature, the focus has been mostly on classical and early modern literatures, and often with the aim of historical explication. There has been some recent work done on homosexual characters and themes in modern literature, however. Jeffrey Angles and Keith Vincent have both examined such representations: Angles in the work of Edogawa Ranpo and Murayama Kaita, and Vincent in the work of Ōe Kenzaburō and Mishima Yukio, authors whose work I also address here. Indeed, several writers have examined the works of Mishima, including Joseph Hawkins. While Keith Vincent has studied Ōe and Mishima, his focus has been on the association of fascism and homosexuality in Ōe’s works and in Mishima as a person: “If Ōe’s work can be read as critique of the sexualization and aestheticization of politics called fascism, then Mishima’s life is here read as an enactment of and a signifier of the same.”

In this thesis, I examine representations of gay men in contemporary mainstream literary works, as well as in contemporary manga fiction by gay men found in gay men’s monthly magazines. As has been discussed, contemporary same-sex-themed literature has been little studied compared to early modern literature, particularly of the Edo period. In Chapter One I examine literary representations of same-sex desiring males in works by mainstream Japanese authors Mishima Yukio, Shibay Kōtarō and Ōe Kenzaburō. I examine how male homosexual characters have been deployed both to political and misogynist ends, as well as an expression of Western-influenced thinking on, and pathologization of, homosexuality by heterosexual and closeted writers at various periods in the modern era.

In contemporary Japan, the most frequent mainstream depictions of male-male erotic and romantic relationships occur in a genre of manga known as *yaoi* (ヤオイ), an anagram of the phrase *yama nashi, ochi nashi, imi nashi*, meaning “no climax, no point, no meaning,” which are characterized by homosexual romances between male characters.\textsuperscript{51} The genre includes a “large number of comic books, novels, and monthly (and weekly) magazines [occupying] a large sector of the Japanese book market, with many manga artists consistently attaining the bestseller list.”\textsuperscript{52}

Much work has been done on *yaoi* manga. Nagaike Kazumi, for example, has examined *yaoi* as “female fantasies about idealized male homosexual relationships,”\textsuperscript{53} and says that in the genre “any reflection of the practical realities of male homosexuality is discarded.”\textsuperscript{54} Nagaike’s work has focused on *yaoi* as a site for the exploration and expression of heterosexual female sexuality, arguing that the manga provide a psychologically safe way for heterosexual women to consume pornography.\textsuperscript{55}

Though the magazines feature male-male sexual relationships, however, few


\textsuperscript{53} Nagaike 76.

\textsuperscript{54} Nagaike 92.

\textsuperscript{55} Nagaike 85-92.
Japanese gay men are regular readers of yaoi and bishōnen manga. Rather, for most gay men, the manga printed in the gay monthly magazines, and in separate collections of gay manga published by the magazines, are probably the major source of narrative depictions of gay men. With the exception of Hawkins, however, who examines two short stories from the gay magazines Adon and Bâdi, contemporary gay men’s fiction and manga remain virtually unstudied.

In Chapter Two I focus on modern gay men’s media, in particular manga narratives produced by gay men and specifically for a gay audience. Such narratives differ from other contemporary narratives about gay men such as yaoi fiction. Although yaoi depict sexual and emotional relationships between males, they are largely written by women and intended for a female audience. While it may not be correct to state that women do not (or cannot) know enough about what it is like to be a gay man in today’s Japan to be able to accurately depict gay male lives and relationships—writers, after all, frequently create characters whose lives are vastly different from their own—several scholars (such as Nagaike and Vincent) have argued that the characters in yaoi manga do not reflect the reality of gay men’s lives. As narratives created by and for gay males, the fiction in the gay monthly magazines provides a unique opportunity for literary analysis. I examine the role that manga stories play in both informing and creating contemporary gay culture: as an outlet providing gay male readers and writers a site for the expression

56 As McLelland points out in “Virtual Ethnography: Using the Internet to Study Gay Culture in Japan,” the extent to which Japanese gay culture has spread on to the internet is “remarkable.” However, it is cruising culture, rather than literary or artistic culture, that is spreading online, since it is often easier and quicker to meet like-minded people online than in a bar. While online sites dedicated to manga do exist, they often require payment or registration, necessitating the provision of personal information, while purchasing a magazine at a bookshop is quick, easy and cheap, and requires no identification.
of same-sex desires, fears and realities; as a fantasy space; and as a means of validation in an often homophobic larger culture.

In the Conclusion, I discuss the differences in depictions of male-desiring males and of gay life in Japan between writers of mainstream literature such as Shiba and Òe, and writers of manga for gay men. I argue that, while both mainstream writers and the creators of gay manga use homosexual male characters to political ends, the former use homosexual characters as an embodiment of problems affecting the nation as a whole, their characters' own lives and experiences being unimportant except as a reflection of the breakdown of society. Conversely, gay manga writers use homosexual characters as a mirror for the smaller Japanese gay world, and as an example for gay Japanese males to follow: the characters in the comics they create are gay because the stories are about the lives and experiences of gay men.
Chapter Two: Literary Depictions of Gay Men

2.1 Introduction

According to Leupp, Japanese "[c]ontemporary popular literature, from comic books to novels, reflects the assumption that role-structured homosexual activity is a common male experience." The example Leupp gives occurs in a scene in Ōe Kenzaburō’s 1964 novel Kojinteki na taiken (published in English in 1969 as A Personal Matter), in which the two main characters, Bird and Himiko, are about to have sex for the first time in many years. Bird, whose wife has just given birth to their baby, a child born with a grotesquely disfigured head, finds that the idea of vaginal sex is terrifying, and is unable to perform. Himiko says, "I always think of you as the type younger men tend to idolize. Haven’t you ever been to bed with one of those younger brothers?"

According to Leupp, Himiko’s “matter-of-fact and tolerant attitude towards the possibility of [her] lover’s past homosexual experience is not uncommon in today’s Japan.” However, Himiko suggests anal sex not because she wants to do it and wonders whether Bird has ever tried it before (as Leupp suggests), but rather to help Bird overcome his fear and to comfort him. In fact, Ōe goes to great lengths to depict Himiko as unlike other Japanese people (in both appearance and behaviour), as mysterious, as outside normal society, and generally as weird, and when she and Bird do have anal sex there are strong suggestions that, for Himiko, the experience is far from enjoyable.

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57 Leupp 201.


59 Leupp 202.
Indeed, a tolerant and matter-of-fact attitude towards the past homosexual experience of a lover seems likely to be the exception rather than the rule in a society where homosexuality was officially considered pathological until the mid-1990s,\(^\text{60}\) where many gays and lesbians remain isolated and closeted and where AIDS is still often considered a “gay disease”; and where discrimination is practiced so openly that a major chain of hotels can advertise on its website that “at the Toyoko Inn, two male guests may not share a bed” (東横インでは男性お二人様のダブルルームご利用はお断りしております).\(^\text{61}\)

If contemporary literature in Japan depicts male homosexual activity as a common experience, then one must wonder with what aims it does so. For example, yaoi manga, it has been argued, uses ostensibly male main characters and places them in emotional and sexual relationships which actually have nothing to do with male homosexuality, but rather serve to safely and comfortably express female sexual desires.\(^\text{62}\) Mizoguchi Akiko has argued that yaoi uses several tropes (rape as an expression of love; the protagonists insisting that they are straight despite their

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\(^\text{62}\) Nagaike 92.
homosexual behaviour; sex always involving anal intercourse; the inserter and insertee roles in anal sex corresponding to the masculine or feminine appearance of the characters; and the roles never changing) “in order to achieve ‘heterosexual romance’ narratives for heterosexual female readers across the bodies of two male (same-sex) protagonists.”

 Until the later years of the Edo era, as has been described above, male-male sexuality had indeed been a common feature of mainstream writing, from the courtly diaries of the Heian era to the shudō texts of the Edo period. According to Pflugfelder, shudō represented an elaborate code of conduct and etiquette surrounding male-male sexuality, the production and distribution of which served as one of the chief functions of the shudō text. Familiarity with this code had by the eighteenth century become a form of marketable knowledge, an expertise the possession of which justified a certain outlay of money, and ignorance of which might diminish one’s stature in the eyes of peers. The secrets of the ‘way’ took the form of a tangible commodity, no longer confined to a closed circle of initiates but available on the open market.

 Shudō writings also functioned as a site for the creation of shudō knowledge, often taking the form of didactic texts, provided erotic stimulation, and served as a guide. It has


 64 Pflugfelder 45.

 65 Pflugfelder 49-57.
been suggested that some yaoi manga are used in similar ways: according to Dobbins, “[m]any of the magazines have fetishized the gay world, and strive to give an impression of intimate knowledge of it.”

The shudō tradition was associated with samurai culture in Edo times, and therefore with the tradition of “hypermasculinity” which formed the core of the bushidō aesthetic. Although the nanshoku tradition had declined by the end of the Edo era, stories of male-male love, often semi-autobiographical and set in boys’ schools, were being portrayed from a first-person perspective into the Meiji (1868-1912) and Taishō (1912-1926) periods. The life history of Kanai in Mori Ōgai’s Vita Sexualis, for example, “bears a striking resemblance” to Mori’s life, and in his Shōnen (Boy), Kawabata Yasunari created a novel out of actual diary entries, letters, and other compositions recording his love for a fellow schoolboy. Among other authors who published stories, often semi-autobiographical, on male-male eroticism are Edogawa Ranpo and Hamao Shirō.

Another example of the boy-love stories of the period is Hori Tatsuo’s 1932 “Moyuru hoho” (burning cheeks), which was intended, like Mori’s Vita Sexualis, to be a “frank account of sexual attitudes and experiences.” The story is about a boy who

66 Dobbins 19.


68 Pflugfelder, 304-305.

develops a close relationship with another student at his all-boys’ boarding school. While there are no explicit depictions of sex, there is a scene that strongly suggests that Saigusa, the narrator’s friend, is having sex with another student, and another scene suggests similar physical intimacy between Saigusa and the narrator.

Even by the time this story was written, however, the idea that homosexuality was a “perversion” and a “gender disorder”—a “failure to attain masculine heterosexual normality” and a symptom of the decline of civil society, was increasingly replacing traditional views, and writers began using male homosexual characters in ways that expressed these new ideas. Writing on sexual topics in general declined during the war years, and by the 1950s, “the idea of (male) homosexuality as a kind of comprehensive perversion that encompassed pathologies including passivity, narcissism, sadomasochism, effeminacy, paranoia, and the death drive, had acquired impressive clinical authority both in Japan and in the West.”

Ōe and Mishima are two postwar authors “whose works contain a rich store of both homoerotic and homophobic energies, and who both exhibit a strong interest in the relations between male sexuality and politics.” In the following sections, I examine two examples of these authors’ writings (analysis of these works, and of the short story by Shiba, will be taken up in Section 2.5 of this chapter).

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70 Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 139.

71 Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 143-144.

2.2. Mishima Yukio’s Confessions of a Mask

Mishima Yukio, born Hiraoka Kimitake, is known both for his prolific writing and for his sensational ritual suicide in 1970. His novel *Kamen no kokuhaku* (1948, published in English in 1958 as *Confessions of a Mask*) is an account, usually considered at least semi-autobiographical, of a man’s gradual discovery of, and lifelong struggle to come to terms with, his homosexuality. The story, which closely mirrors actual events in Mishima’s life, starts with the narrator’s birth two years after the Great Earthquake (1923) at the end of the Taishō era.

A frail boy, given to mysterious health problems, the narrator’s first memory, at the age of about four, is of being captivated by the sight of a young man, a night-soil carrier:

The scrutiny I gave the youth was unusually close for a child of four. Although I did not clearly perceive it at the time, for me he represented my first revelation of a certain power, my first summons by a certain strange and secret voice . . . I had a presentiment then that there is in this world a kind of desire like stinging pain. Looking up at that dirty youth, I was choked by desire, thinking, ‘I want to change into him,’ thinking, ‘I want to be him.’

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Soon, other labourers, such as the operators of *hana-densha* (a type of street car decorated with flowers and lights, used in festivals), and subway ticket-punchers, also become the objects of the narrator’s desires.

At the age of five, the narrator discovers and becomes fascinated by a picture in a book, at which he spends entire afternoons gazing, only to guiltily slam the book shut when interrupted. The picture is of a beautiful knight in silver armour, sword drawn, mounted on a powerful white horse. His fantasy, however, is ruined when he learns that his beautiful knight is actually Joan of Arc; so great is the boy’s shock and dismay that he never even picks up the book again, and the narrator says that “even today” he feels a “deep rooted and hard to explain” repugnance for women in male attire.75

Other memories include the odour of male sweat, particularly that of the soldiers he sees one day on parade, “an odor that drove me onward, awakened my longings, overpowered me....”76 The narrator, at this time still a young boy, does not yet associate this odour with sex, but again associates it with a “sensuous craving” for the tragic nature of the soldiers’ occupation.77

Soon after, enchanted by the image of a famous actress, the narrator develops a passion for dressing up: “What was I hoping for from this feminine attire? It was not until much later that I discovered hopes the same as mine in Heliogabalus, emperor of Rome in its period of decay, that destroyer of Rome’s ancient gods, that decadent, bestial

75 Mishima, *Confessions* 12; 三島, 婚面の告白 171.

76 Mishima, *Confessions* 12; 三島, 婚面の告白 169.

77 Mishima, *Confessions* 14; 三島, 婚面の告白 170.
monarch.”

The narrator does not feel like a boy: “But things were different when I went visiting at the homes of my cousins. Then even I was called upon to be a boy, a male.”

Although he experiences more freedom there than at home, under the watchful eye of his grandmother,

in this house it was tacitly required that I act like a boy. The reluctant masquerade had begun. At about this time I was beginning to understand that what people regarded as a pose on my part was actually an expression of my need to assert my true nature, and that it was precisely what people regarded as my true self which was a masquerade.

Gradually, the narrator’s fascinations become entwined with images of pain and death. When he discovers masturbation, the narrator also realizes that he is aroused by “the naked bodies of young men . . . the swarthy young man a cousin of mine married,

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78 Mishima, Confessions 20; 三島, 暮面の告白 177. Heliogabalus, who is associated with the worship of the sun, was the first Roman emperor of Asiatic extraction. His reign was, according to James Crawford Ledlie, marked by “oriental effeminacy and despotism” (16-17). According to J. Stuart Hay, Heliogabalus (also known as Elagabalus) “made depravity a pursuit” (227). He “loved to dress himself in the clothes of women, even in the customary undress uniform of the courtesan, adopting the positions, voice, and manner of the most expert”; it was claimed that he wanted to be a woman (127). According to Hay, “The boy was . . . if not entirely homosexual, at least heterosexual with a strong homosexual instinct [which his various wives must have known] since he was perfectly frank” about having married his chariot driver Hierocles, “calling himself wife and Empress,” and since he was “not attached to this man alone but to many others” (126). In fact, says Milton Klonsky, Heliogabalus also married another male favourite, Zoticus, an athlete from Smyrna (39). Known for his extravagance and decadence, Heliogabalus is known to have tortured and sacrificed human victims, and several of his biographers suggest that he was obsessed with sex, with a reputation for frequently sending out agents to “search for those who had particularly large organs and bring them to the palace in order that he might enjoy their vigour” (“Elagabalus” 41).

79 Mishima, Confessions 25; 三島, 暮面の告白 181.

80 Mishima, Confessions 27; 三島, 暮面の告白 182.
and the valiant heroes" of adventure stories. This list of turn-ons is immediately linked with—and even supplanted by—images of "death and pools of blood and muscular flesh . . . Gory dueling scenes . . . young samurai cutting open their bellies, or of soldiers struck by bullets, clenching their teeth and dripping blood." Indeed, the gory images seem much more important and sexually stimulating even than the naked young men first described. Thus, the narrator says, "one of the determinants of my life had come into operation. And because of my struggles against it, from the very beginning my every fantasy was tinged with despair . . . resembling passionate desire." The narrator’s first ejaculation comes with his discovery of a reproduction of Guido Reni’s "St. Sebastian," which depicts the young saint bound to a tree and pierced by arrows. Soon, the narrator has fallen in love with an older boy at school; his ever-increasing awareness that he is different from other people convinces him that he must hide his true identity.

At the age of twenty, the narrator makes a conscious decision to fall in love with a woman, Sonoko, the sister of a friend. While he is initially elated, the narrator soon realizes that his feelings for Sonoko are false, and he is tortured by thoughts of his abnormality: "How would I feel if I were a normal person? These questions obsessed me. They tortured me, instantly and utterly destroying even the one splinter of happiness I had thought I possessed for sure." Still, when Sonoko’s family relocates to a village because of the danger of air raids in Tokyo, she and the narrator begin to exchange increasingly love-struck letters, and he tries to convince himself that Sonoko will make

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81 Mishima, Confessions 35; 三島, 境面の告白 187-188.

82 Mishima, Confessions 15; 三島, 境面の告白 174.

83 Mishima, Confessions 152; 三島, 境面の告白 273.
him “normal.” Nevertheless, when her family makes enquiries about a possible marriage, the narrator hurriedly backs out, and Sonoko marries another man.

On his twenty-second birthday, at the urging of a friend, the narrator visits a prostitute with a friend from his university, but is unable to perform. Some time after this, the narrator happens to meet Sonoko on the street; the two begin a pattern of meeting casually over the next year. Meanwhile, the narrator begins reading the work of Magnus Hirshfield, and starts to see his attraction to other males (his “inversion”) as a simply biological fact. Soon, Sonoko begins to worry that their meetings, however innocent, will lead to troubles, and she says that they must stop meeting. At the end of their last rendezvous, Sonoko reluctantly agrees to accompany the narrator to a dance hall; there, forgetting Sonoko, he becomes entranced by a young man who has removed his shirt, until he is shocked out of his reverie by Sonoko speaking to him. In that instant, at the book’s end, the narrator finally fully acknowledges his own desires: “At this instant something inside of me was torn in two with brutal force. It was as though a thunderbolt had fallen and cleaved asunder a living tree. I heard the structure, which I had been building piece by piece with all my might up to now, collapse miserably to the ground.”

Confessions of a Mask is both a novel, and, as its title suggests, a deeply personal examination of Mishima’s own life in which, according to John Nathan, Mishima discovered his own homosexuality: “reliving his life in Confessions of a Mask through his first-person hero, Mishima drove himself remorselessly to the recognition that he was a latent homosexual and, worse, a man incapable of feeling passion or even alive except

84 Mishima, Confessions 253; 三島, 嘲面の告白 350.
in sado-masochistic fantasies which reeked of blood and death.\textsuperscript{85}

While Mishima’s narrator faces a personal struggle with his homosexuality, Ōe Kenzaburō’s hero Natsuo’s struggle with his homosexuality reveals a political motive on the part of the author.

2.3. Ōe Kenzaburō’s “Kassai”

Ōe Kenzaburō is a Nobel laureate and a major figure in modern Japanese literature. His short story “Kassai” (喝采, “acclamation”), written in 1958, charts a young man’s changing feelings towards his sexuality.

The story opens with the protagonist, Natsuo, walking past the literature department of a university when he is hailed by another man. Natsuo begins walking with the man, who asks whether Natsuo can help him to acquire a student uniform. Natsuo tells the man that there are uniform shops nearby, and offers to show him the way. It is a hot, humid day; the men are sweating. The two walk in a companionable silence, which is “nice, in a manly way” (男らしい好ましい感じだった).\textsuperscript{86} At the shop, the man selects a uniform and undresses to try it on, revealing his dirty skin and weak physique. With the uniform on, he looks like a handyman or a train station attendant. Leaving the shop, Natsuo and the man walk towards the station, the man commenting that uniforms make even one’s ass sweaty. The man tells Natsuo that he will tell his woman that this is why he did not buy a uniform, thanks him, and goes down to the


subway station, leaving Natsuo shaking with laughter, gasping in the heat. The scene ends with Natsuo gazing at the sky, hoping for a cool breeze.

Natsuo, we learn, is the type who wishes for nothing more than small things like this. He lives with Lucien, a forty year-old “foreign homosexualist” (外国人の男色家); because of this it is not easy for Natsuo to imagine any other future, or even to think of wishing for one.

Natsuo goes to the Ginza district to meet Lucien. Lucien’s car is parked on the street outside a foreign goods shop, but Lucien is still inside. Natsuo watches the prostitutes while he waits. Watching the women eagerly chasing customers, Natsuo feels that their zeal for their profession is “heroic” (かいがいしい), though he himself has never bought a prostitute.\(^87\)

At length, Lucien emerges from the shop with a woman of about thirty years old. Lucien waves her into the front passenger seat, telling Natsuo that since they have no woman in their house, he is inviting her to live with them. In French, Natsuo protests to Lucien that the woman, Sadako, is a prostitute, to which Sadako responds—in perfect French—that he can call her a “chick” (poule). Surprised and embarrassed, Natsuo stammers an apology, saying that he did not know that Sadako spoke French. Lucien embarrasses him further by saying that he should not be rude to a lady (失礼なことを御婦人にむかっていってはいけないね).\(^88\) Sadako remarks that Natsuo clearly lacks judgement since he is young; she begins to tease him, calling him a “boy.”

\(^87\) Ōe, "喝采” 55.

\(^88\) Ōe, “喝采” 57.
Lucien remarks that a student of French literature from Natsuo’s university visited him that day. The student wanted to know why France had not abandoned its colonies; chuckling, Lucien says he told the student that if France did not have its existing colonies it might have to take the Japanese island of Shikoku instead. Although Natsuo is furious, he laughs as well. Lucien wonders aloud what the French government—or, indeed, Lucien himself—has to do with that “small, yellow man” (あの黄いろの小男). Lucien proclaims that “dirty students, Japanese students can kiss my ass.”

Sadako resumes her teasing, telling Natsuo that he will regret it if he does not treat his friends well. We learn, via Natsuo’s thoughts, that he sits at the very back of the classroom and pretends to be asleep while his classmates gossip about him. They say that he is being “kept” and that “the old man” even pays to treat the haemorrhoids that Natsuo must suffer as a result of having sex with Lucien. The other students agree that the situation is disgusting; they speculate that Natsuo does it because he wants to learn “real” French, which he must be learning via his anus. Rigid with anger, and thoroughly humiliated, Natsuo always pretends to be asleep until the rest of his classmates leave the room. Sensing Natsuo’s discomfort at Sadako’s teasing, Lucien says that Natsuo treats him well: “I’m his friend.” Sadako wonders whether a French person can be a friend (フランス人なんかが友達なものか), again telling Natsuo that he will regret it if he loses his friends at university.

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89 Ōe, “喝采” 58.

90 Ōe, “喝采” 59.
At dinner, Natsuo tells the other two about the strange man he met earlier that day, provoking much laughter. In a strange and lengthy scene, Sadako reveals her cruelty when she rips the pincers off the mouths of beetles while the three drink wine after their meal, remarking that the beetles' screams cannot be heard by human ears.

Later in the evening, Sadako invites Lucien to sleep with her; Lucien responds that he “cannot.” (それはだめだ。それはできない). Natsuo and Lucien go to bed. Lucien’s powerful body odour fills the room as he undresses; when Natsuo feels Lucien’s damp chest hair against his back, he stiffens his legs, holding them closed to prevent Lucien from penetrating him. When Lucien asks him what is wrong, Natsuo, still focusing on keeping his legs closed, can only say “I don’t know.”

The following evening, as they drink sake after their meal at a restaurant, a black man approaches their table. The man begins persistently talking to Lucien (who is still upset about the previous night) in English; Lucien remains quiet, but the man continues to talk to him. Losing his temper, Natsuo tells the man to leave, and eventually the man returns to his own table. Soon, Lucien must leave, but he has made arrangements to send his car back to collect Sadako and Natsuo. As soon as Lucien leaves, the black man begins shouting insults, demanding that the “faggot” (Natsuo) be removed from the restaurant. Now that Lucien is gone, the other customers are openly...

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91 Ōe, “喝采” 62.

92 The man uses the word okama (literally, a pot), meaning, roughly, “faggot.” Dobbins calls the word a “vulgar and derogatory reference which likens anal sex between men to digging or scraping the rice out from the bottom of a pot.” See “Becoming Imaginable: Japanese Gay Male Identity as Mediated through Popular Culture” (diss. McGill U, 2000) 64.
contemptuous of Sadako and Natsuo; even the waiter pointedly looks away as the man attacks Natsuo so brutally that he loses consciousness.\textsuperscript{93}

When he comes to, Natsuo is in Lucien’s car, being cradled by Sadako while she fusses over his injuries. Natsuo becomes very aware of Sadako’s damp body pressed against his and begins to feel embarrassed, but she is holding him tightly, and he is too weak to struggle. With Sadako’s help, Natsuo climbs the stairs to his and Lucien’s bedroom; as he thinks of the attack, Natsuo thinks “I really am a faggot” (まったくおかまやろうだ).\textsuperscript{94} Natsuo asks her to leave, but Sadako instead helps him undress and then gets into bed with him. Natsuo is shaking with fear as Sadako asks him what is wrong: “I can’t do it... I can’t sleep with a woman... I’m a homosexual. Like that guy said, I’m a faggot,’ he said, panting from the chest-tightening sorrow” (「おれにはできない...おれは女と寝ることができない...おれは男色だ、いつのいったというおり、おかまやろうだ」とかれは胸をしめつける哀しみにあえぎながらいった).\textsuperscript{95}

Sadako tells Natsuo to be brave like he was when he stood up to the man in the restaurant; he succumbs to Sadako’s pressure (and to her apparent strength), and they have sex. Delighted, Sadako says, “You did it, kid! See, you just had to be brave!” Suddenly, Natsuo is seized with a “triumphant pleasure” and a “fierce happiness”: he has “loved a woman like a man” (おれが女を男らしく愛すことができたのだ). Natsuo

\textsuperscript{93} Here, in his own thoughts, Natsuo refers to himself as ore for the first time.

\textsuperscript{94} Ōe, “へきか” 65.

\textsuperscript{95} Ōe, “へきか” 67.
begins to weep for joy, feeling that he has recovered from the “chronic disease” which he has been afflicted for three years, that he has been liberated from this terrible “complex” and is now a man.96

The next morning, Sadako reveals that she became a prostitute at the age of eighteen, her first client a French sailor. Sadako was soon having sex with up to eighteen foreign men a night, when the ships came in. Natsuo is deeply moved by her story, and feels that she is a hero. He says that he would like his classmates to meet her, to which she responds that she has already spoken with some female university students, and that all they were interested in was what foreigners are like in bed. Natsuo muses that although Sadako’s naked body is not beautiful, it is “human” (人間的). On the other hand, Lucien’s body is beautiful, but inhuman (人間的でない).

Natsuo arranges to meet Lucien at a café. Lucien excitedly tells him that the pyjamas he has ordered specially for Natsuo are ready, but Natsuo says he no longer wants them. Natsuo tells him that he can no longer stand the disgrace of being loved by a French man. When Lucien responds with disbelief, Natsuo says that since Lucien thinks his friends (仲間) are “dirty, yellow-skinned Japanese,” he must think the same of Natsuo. Lucien responds that he loves Natsuo, and that he considers them to be engaged.97

As the two are leaving the café, Natsuo reveals that he is in love with Sadako and wants to marry her. Lucien begins to laugh. Telling Natsuo that he wants him to meet someone, he takes him to a bar, where the proprietor reveals that Sadako has slept with

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96 Ōe, “喝采” 67-68.

97 Ōe, “喝采” 71. Here, Lucien uses the French word engager.
many young men like Natsuo. She does not like to sleep with “rough, manly” men because she was beaten when she was young. A feminine young man who is wearing makeup reveals that he, too, has slept with Sadako.

Upset, Natsuo leaves. He goes to Ginza, where he hires a prostitute, but is unable to have sex with her. Humiliated, he goes back to Lucien. In a tender scene, the two embrace; after Natsuo washes his hands, Lucien tells him to dry them on his pyjama sleeve. They kiss, and Natsuo rests his head on Lucien’s chest. Lucien gently undresses Natsuo and helps him to put on the new pyjamas. At the end of the story Natsuo has realized that he is indeed a faggot:

While he moved his chin up to help Lucien as he carefully buttoned Natsuo’s pyjama top, Natsuo thought, me the faggot. It’s an acclamation for me. And tears spilled down both his cheeks.

Like the narrator in the previous story, Natsuo has tried in vain to deny his homosexuality, and in the end the façade crumbles. In each of these stories, the hero is metaphorically destroyed by the unavoidable realisation of his homosexuality; in the following story, Shiba Ryōtarō’s hero Sōzaburō’s homosexuality literally destroys him.

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98 Ōe, “喝采” 79.
2.4. Shiba Ryōtarō’s “Maegami no Sōzaburō”

Shiba Ryōtarō, born Fukuda Tei’ichi, was a prolific writer who often set his stories in the Edo and Meiji periods. “Maegami no Sōzaburō” (Sōzaburō of the forelock) is a short story that takes place in a Shinsengumi camp in the late Edo period.

The Shinsengumi (新撰組) were “a sort of militia composed of samurai” created in 1853 by the Edo shogunate as a police force and to protect the shogun in Kyoto. They were led by Kondō Isami (1834-1868, named commandant of the force in 1864) and Hijikata Toshizō (1835-1869, vice-commander).

The Shinsengumi’s standard uniform consisted of kimono, hakama and haori, typical wear for samurai males of the period. The uniform was exceptional (and immediately recognizable), however, for the striking pattern of the haori, which were bright blue with a mountain peak design around the sleeves and waist. The squad followed a strict code of conduct, and grew to be widely feared. Among its rules were prohibitions against deviating from the samurai code and engaging in private fights; the penalty for breaking Shinsengumi rules was ritual suicide (seppuku).


102 “Shinsengumi,” in Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia, January 22, 2006 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shinsengumi>. Wikipedia is an online project that anyone can edit (a “wiki”), a feature that sometimes results in its articles containing errors. Studies, such as a comparative investigation by Nature: International Weekly Journal of Science, have shown, however, that vandalism is usually reversed quickly by the site’s administrators and volunteer contributors, and that the number of errors in the encyclopedia’s articles compares favourably with the number of errors in other encyclopaedias, such as Encyclopaedia Britannica (see Giles,
The Shinsengumi has long been a popular theme for literature and manga. Most recently a television series titled Shinsengumi! starring Katori Shingo (of the pop idol group SMAP) debuted on NHK in 2004. The Shinsengumi has also been depicted in various popular samurai dramas, **anime** and manga as well. 1999 saw the release of the film Gohatto (taboo), based in part on the following story by Shiba Ryōtarō. 103

In Shiba’s “Maegami no Sōzaburō,” a young man, Kanō Sōzaburō, joins the Shinsengumi as an assistant fencing instructor. The other members of the camp are immediately captivated by Sōzaburō, who is both a skilled swordsman and extraordinarily beautiful. Soon, he is being pursued by several of the men, resulting in rivalries, a rape, and deaths.

Throughout the story, Sōzaburō’s physical appearance and dress are described in loving detail. He first appears in the opening scene, where his striking beauty is immediately noticed by the others:

The rear of his fencing mask was covered in rare blue lacquer, his chest in splendid black; he wore a family crest—an oak tree—struck from gold. He was not only wearing training gear: his white hakama were well creased and hung smoothly from his slender frame. Since he was wearing a mask his face was not visible, but from his actions and behaviour he was a man so beautiful you could.

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103 "Shinsengumi."
smell it.  

面銅の裏にめずらしく青漆をぬり、髷はみごとな黒うるしで、違極の定紋を金で打ち、稽古衣だけでなく、袴も白、それが折り目もくずれずにすらりと穿いている。面をかぶっているために顔はみえないが、挙措動作、勾うようにみごとな男だった。

Sōzaburō still wears his forelocks unshaven in the manner of a youth; in the tradition of shudō, this symbol of “youth” made him eligible for the erotic attention of adult men. He has pale skin, and his lips are beautiful; he is eighteen years old.

When Sōzaburō is selected to wield a sword to perform an execution, his appearance is again lovingly described:

He fastened a headband below his forelocks, and wore a short-sleeved black silk kimono bearing his family crest. Around his waist he tied a formal sash, into which he thrust a red-lacquered scabbard. He looked as though he had escaped from a woodblock print.

(前髪のひたいに鉢巻締め、黒羽二重の小袖紋付、献上博多の帯を締め、細身白ツカ朱絞の大小を帯びた姿は、一枚絵からぬけだしたようであった)。

After an incident in which Tashiro suddenly attacks and overpowers him during fencing practice, it becomes known that Tashiro and Sōzaburō are lovers. But fellow

104 Shiba Ryōtarō, “前髪の惣三郎” (Sōzaburō of the Forelock), in 書物の王国 10：同性愛, (Tokyo: 国書刊行会, 1999) 175.

105 Shiba 178.
soldier Yuzawa is also in love with Sōzaburō, and determines to steal him from Tashiro. He invites Sōzaburō to Gion, where he rapes him in a private room in a restaurant.\textsuperscript{106}

Attempts to steer Sōzaburō to "normal" love fail. Finally, his presence is deemed too disruptive; Sōzaburō is ordered to kill his former lover, another Shinsengumi member who, thinking the camp's inspector is trying to steal Sōzaburō from him, has attacked the inspector. Ultimately, it is revealed that Sōzaburō himself has betrayed his former lover by setting him up, and the lover and Sōzaburō kill each other in a dramatic scene at the end of the story.

2.5. Analysis and Conclusion

Each of the three stories summarized above concerns the struggle of a male character, or of the people around him, to deal with his sexuality, or of the negative results of a male character's desire for other males. Yet each story has particular motives in presenting such characters.

There has been much debate about Mishima Yukio's intentions in writing Confessions of a Mask. According to Nathan, Mishima informed his editor, in 1948, that Confessions "will be my first 'autobiographical novel' . . . I will turn upon myself the scalpel of psychological analysis I have sharpened on fictional characters. I will attempt to dissect myself alive."\textsuperscript{107} Nevertheless, the work is still a novel; while Mishima (or his narrator) discovers his homosexuality (an "abnormality") in its pages, his intention also

\textsuperscript{106} The narrator first uses "rape" (手難め), and then qualifies it by saying that Sōzaburō "resisted a little."

seems to be to place this homosexuality in the context of the current medical and psychological thinking on sexuality, much of which saw homosexuality as a biological fact.

For example, throughout Confessions of a Mask, Mishima’s narrator emphasizes the innateness of his attraction to other males; this reflects the changing views on same-sex attractions of the time, and the concept of dōsei, or homosexuality. As Nathan points out, in the text “no less an authority” than Hirschfeld explains the narrator’s fantasies as “merely the sadomasochism frequently encountered in ‘inverts.’” The narrator also identifies with female figures, as well as with the cross-dressing (and perhaps transsexual) Heliogabalus, at one point describing himself as behaving “exactly as though I were a young girl.” Even as an older boy, this identification with females continues, again suggesting that his attraction to other boys is innate. Indeed, immediately following the passage which describes the narrator’s first ejaculation, there is a long parenthetical reference to the work of Magnus Hirschfield.

At the same time that it makes efforts to place the narrator’s homosexuality in a modern context, the text also suggests identification with the past. As well as the identification with a Roman emperor, there are some echoes of shudō, a tradition that viewed romantic and erotic attraction between males as manly, spiritual, and normative. When he discovers masturbation, for example, the narrator realizes that what he had thought of as a “poetic” attraction, a “system of esthetics,” was actually sexual

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108 Nathan 96.
109 Mishima, Confessions 81; 三島, 暮面の告白 220.
attraction. The association with shudō is strengthened later in the narrative, when, realizing he has also begun to be attracted to younger males, the narrator says: "there was developing in me . . . something akin to boy-love." There are also echoes of shudo in the misogyny evident when the narrator discovers that the knight in a cherished illustration is really Joan of Arc: "The person I had thought was a he was a she. If this beautiful knight was a woman and not a man, what was there left?" According to Pflugfelder, "The obverse of warrior homosociality and androcentrism was . . . a profound misogyny. It is no coincidence that many of the ‘woman-haters’ portrayed in the shudō texts are warriors, their abhorrence for the female sex at times assuming hyperbolic proportions." “Boy-love,” too, has its rough equivalent in the Edo-period term wakashudō, but the narrator instead uses Magnus Hirschfeld’s Greek-derived term ephebophil. This seems to reflect a simultaneous orientation towards Japan’s past and an identification with the new thinking on sexuality—particularly of the type based in Western medicine and psychology—that was supplanting traditional Japanese concepts.

At the same time that he sees himself in new definitions of “inversion” and “same-sex love,” the narrator is distressed by his feelings, and he attempts various methods to change his attractions. Though he eventually acknowledges that he has no desire for women, and by the end of the novel he has acknowledged his desire for males, ultimately he still rejects Hirschfeld’s “inversion” theory; he writes: “my soul still

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110 Mishima, Confessions 35; 三島, 暮面の告白 187.

111 Mishima, Confessions 123; 三島, 暮面の告白 252.

112 Mishima, Confessions 12; 三島, 暮面の告白 171.

113 Pflugfelder 72.
belonged to Sonoko . . . To me Sonoko appeared the incarnation of my love of normality itself.”

While the narrator’s attraction to sado-masochistic images can be read as Mishima’s own oft-cited real-life attraction to such images, these fantasies can equally be read as a manifestation of the narrator’s rejection of his homosexuality. Beginning with his poetic feelings of “tragedy” for the lives of the men by whom he is fascinated as a child, the clarity and awfulness of these images increases along with the narrator’s growing realization of his differentness and his desperate attempts to rid himself of his attraction for males. Part of his attraction to the image of Joan of Arc, for instance, is the fantasy that “he” is about to be killed. His fascination for soldiers is similarly conflated with a “sensuous” fascination for the “tragic” and fatal nature of their calling. It is significant that the narrator’s pleasure is described as coming not from having sex with the males around whom he builds his fantasies, but from their imaginary torture and death: in the story, the narrator never so much as kisses another male.

The narrator’s identification with females similarly reveals this resistance. When he says “In wishing to become [the actress] Tenkatsu I did not have to taste that bitter mixture of longing and shame,” he seems to be suggesting that identifying with a female figure meant that he could experience his feelings for other males as “normal.”

Convincing himself that he has fallen in love with his friend’s sister Sonoko is another part of this pattern. Indeed, clinging to the very idea of Sonoko, even at the end of the

114 Mishima, Confessions 241; 三島, 仮面の告白 192.
115 Mishima, Confessions 14; 三島, 仮面の告白 15.
116 Mishima, Confessions 17; 三島, 仮面の告白 17.
novel when he has admitted to himself his sexual feelings for men, represents a hope he never really overcomes, that being with a woman will somehow awaken his dormant "normal" feelings. As he says after kissing Sonoko: "Self-deception was now my last ray of hope." According to Nathan, "Mishima’s intent in Confessions of a Mask is not to confess to sexual perversion but to verify it. What he wants, requires, is a definition, a diagnosis however hopeless, so that he will be able, in the most literal sense, to live with himself." 

While in Confessions Mishima’s focus is on the narrator’s personal struggle with his sexuality, in Ōe Kenzaburō’s short story “Kassai” the sexual becomes political. According to Vincent, in the 1960s “most of Ōe’s work focused explicitly, if not reductively, on the relationship between the sexual and the political.” “Kassai,” published in 1958, is an early example of this focus. Published two years before the signing of the Security Treaty between Japan and the United States, the story uses the figure of a male homosexual character to express post-war Japan’s national abjection and feminization.

This abjection and feminization is apparent in the notable lack and unimportance of Japanese people in the story, particularly men. Indeed, besides the main character Natsuo, the only identifiably Japanese male character is the ridiculous figure who appears only at the beginning of the story. This man, who is not a student of French literature (as Natsuo is) but who wants to look like one, is described as both dirty and weak. When he

117 Mishima, Confessions 201; 三島, 仮面の告白 159.
118 Nathan 99.
119 Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 150.
tries on a uniform, he looks not like a strong, intelligent youth, but rather like a kind of ridiculous servant, a train station attendant or a handyman (小使い).

Natsuo himself, of course, is both wretched and feminine. A young man and a university student, a future leader of the country, and, given the lack of other Japanese males in the story, implicitly the “Japanese everyman,” Natsuo suffers unbearable humiliation at every turn. Powerless and pathetic, he pretends to be asleep while his fellow students gossip openly and savagely about his “disgusting” sex life: Natsuo, they say, is so eager to learn about, be accepted by, and subject himself to foreigners that he submits to dirty, dangerous and abnormal sex. The students also express their disgust at Natsuo’s relationship with Lucien, a man who, in one scene in the story, describes another Japanese male student as “dirty” and as a “small, yellow man.” At one point even Natsuo himself describes Lucien’s love as disgraceful. Natsuo is powerless also (both figuratively and literally) against Sadako, a woman who seems to delight in insulting him from the beginning, although she is in fact a paid servant in Natsuo’s home. Perhaps most importantly, Natsuo is also powerless against foreign men, even “homosexualists.”

In contrast, all the other male characters in the story seem to be both powerful and non-Japanese. Unlike the pathetic Japanese men described above, Natsuo’s lover Lucien, for example, a Frenchman associated with his country’s embassy, is strong and

120 Since (according to Natsuo’s classmates) Lucien also pays the inevitable doctor’s bills that result from this sex, Natsuo is here likened to a prostitute.

121 While Lucien’s powerful body odour might be seen as dirtiness, it seems more likely to be a characteristic of his “foreignness”: Japanese males are dirty because they are powerless and dishonoured; Lucien stinks because he is non-Japanese.
clearly occupies a position of power. Similarly, the man who beats Natsuo in the restaurant—who is black, therefore a foreigner—is obviously more powerful, not only physically but also in terms of the position he occupies: the other guests at the restaurant eye Natsuo and Sadako with open contempt, and not even the waiter (who, if he is Japanese, is both in a position of servitude and equally contemptuous of Natsuo) makes any attempt to prevent the man from attacking Natsuo. The only other male character of any significance who might be Japanese—although it is never stated explicitly—is the effeminate, makeup-wearing young man in the bar. This young man is probably an employee of the bar whose job is to entertain, and perhaps even have sex with, foreign homosexuals—in other words, a prostitute.

Similarly, the women in the story, all of whom are Japanese, occupy equally abject positions: the English woman who owns the house where Lucien and Natsuo live has already gone on holiday with her daughter when the story begins; while the two foreign women can afford both the luxury of an extended overseas holiday and the expense of owning a house in Tokyo, every Japanese female character in the story who is described in any detail is a poor prostitute. When Natsuo goes to meet Lucien in Ginza the street is full of women eagerly seeking customers; since they are in an area that is home to foreign shops, the suggestion is that their (hoped-for) customers are also foreign.

122 It is never made clear in what capacity Lucien works for the French embassy, but the facts that he has a secretary (a Japanese woman), the use of a car and chauffeur, and the money to spend on luxury items (foreign goods, custom-made pyjamas, dinner at a fancy restaurant, even a housekeeper) suggest that he holds a position of at least some importance. Even if his position within the structure of the embassy is of little importance, however, Lucien certainly holds a position of power in relation to Natsuo: it is in Lucien’s home that Natsuo lives, and it is Lucien who makes all the decisions, apparently without feeling the need to consult Natsuo. Even Lucien’s physical appearance is powerful: his body hair, a symbol not only of his foreignness but also of his masculine strength, is described several times in the story.
Sadako herself has been a prostitute since the age of eighteen, and seems to have prostituted herself exclusively (and eagerly) to foreign men, to one of whom she was even married for a very short time.\footnote{If the story's timeline coincides with the date of its publication, then Sadako would have become a prostitute at the end of the war, in 1945 or 1946.} While the Japanese women cater to foreign (and therefore presumably rich and powerful) men, they themselves remain poor and powerless. Sadako, though she was married to a foreigner, is still a prostitute although she is more than thirty years old, and must take a position as a housekeeper to support herself. Similarly, the eighteen year-old prostitute whom Natsuo hires in a desperate and futile attempt to prove his heterosexuality / manliness at the end of the story has a meagre room in a dirty, ramshackle building far from the city centre. The only other women in the story are Lucien’s secretary and Natsuo’s classmates. The secretary is a Japanese woman who treats Natsuo with open contempt when he calls to see if Lucien has left a message for him, and Natsuo’s classmates, while they are not prostitutes, are obviously little better than prostitutes: according to Sadako, when she spoke with some of them all they were interested in was what foreign men are like in bed.

According to Vincent, Ōe has said that the signing of the Security Treaty with the United States in 1960 “was the final blow in the process by which the Japanese were made into sexual humans and Japan itself was rendered a ‘sexual nation.’”\footnote{Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 150-151.} This sexualization is evident in “Kassai,” where both Japanese women and men are reduced to little more than the sexual playthings of foreign men. Natsuo’s homosexuality in this story, which is described as a kind of chronic disease, is a signifier of the weakness and
abjection of Japanese men and, by extension, the Japanese nation, after the war. As Vincent has put it, “Ōe depicts the degradation of the political human into a sexual one through a metaphor of feminization understood as both political and sexual subordination.” This is made startlingly clear in “Kassai”: Natsuo’s attempt to resist being penetrated by the powerful Lucien is ultimately futile; unable to perform with a woman “as a man,” the humiliated Natsuo has no choice but to creep back to the waiting arms of Lucien.

Like Confessions of a Mask and “Kassai,” in Shiba Ryōtarō’s “Maegami no Sōzaburō” male homosexuality is again conflated with femininity. In the shudō tradition, according to Pflugfelder, youths (wakashu), though male, were not considered “men.” Pflugfelder says that youths shared certain similarities with women, and features of both youths and women were often described in similar ways. He also says, however, that while both women and wakashu were “other” to adult males, they were distinct from each other. Thus, while certain features of wakashu might be shared by women, wakashu were still male. By Shiba Ryōtarō’s time, however, male homosexuals, particularly those who took the receptive role in anal sex, were beginning to be seen as feminine and, as homosexuality became conflated with trans-gender identification, as more literally woman-like. These views are reflected in “Maegami no Sōzaburō.”

“Maegami no Sōzaburō” takes place in the third year of the Bunkyo era (1863), just before the Meiji Restoration. This was a time when the shudō tradition was in

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125 Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 151. Vincent continues, “For Ōe, Japan’s signing of the Security Treaty represented a submission to the will of the enormous American phallus.”

126 Pflugfelder 35.
decline; it would soon be rejected as an embarrassing, old-fashioned, and barbaric custom. That shudō is depicted in the story as old-fashioned, unusual, and abnormal is a reflection of this historical reality. In addition, Shiba himself was born in 1923, and grew up in a period when new approaches saw male-male erotic behaviours as pathological; these changing conceptions undoubtedly influenced the author. Thus, while in the shudō tradition wakashu were the passive partners in all respects, Sōzaburō, like the dōseiaisha of early twentieth century thought, is active in his pursuit of masculine partners.

It is significant, for example, that all of the characters who are linked sexually with Sōzaburō die by the end of the story, including Sōzaburō himself, who dies at the hand of his former lover. Even Hijikata, who only has a vague attraction to Sōzaburō, feels something inside him “die” when Sōzaburō is killed. Male-male attraction and sexuality is thus presented as having destructive power, power so strong that men of all ranks are susceptible to its charms and its dangers. Women have traditionally been thought to have similarly destructive potential, another link between Sōzaburō’s homosexuality and femininity.

Indeed, the only traditionally “masculine” aspect of Sōzaburō’s character is his skill at swordsmanship. In the story, Sōzaburō is repeatedly compared to or described as being in various ways like a woman, both in terms of his seductive charms or attractiveness, and in terms of his deviousness. For example, when Sōzaburō first joins the camp and his fame spreads among its members, he becomes “more attractive to the men than a woman of marriageable age” (年ごろの娘以上に色気があり).

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127 Shiba 179.
Sōzaburō’s appearance—both his physical appearance and clothing—is described frequently and at length. In fact, with the exception of Tashiro Hyōzō—whose unattractive features are briefly detailed in direct contrast to Sōzaburō’s beauty—Sōzaburō is the only character, male or female, whose appearance is described at all. The descriptions of Sōzaburō frequently compare his appearance to that of a woman. In one of the first scenes in which he appears, his description is clearly intended to emphasize his sexual attractiveness: “with his forelocks on his white forehead and his submissive eyes, he was even sexier than a woman” (前髪が白い額に乗れて、伏眼になると女よりも色気がすさまじい).

Gradually, the descriptions of Sōzaburō become more and more feminine. His feminine appearance eventually gives way to a literal transformation into a woman when Tashiro suddenly attacks and overpowers Sōzaburō during fencing practice, cornering him with a blade at his throat, and “Kano Sōzaburō became a woman” (加納惣三郎が、つまり女になった). The transformation is suggested again when Yuzawa rapes Sōzaburō at the restaurant in Gion.

While Sōzaburō is presented as a female-like object of the other Shinsengumi members’ desires, his own desire for men is similarly expressed as feminine. In one passage, for example, when Yuzawa has fallen in love with Sōzaburō and wants him for himself, within the devious Sōzaburō, who wants both Tashiro and Yuzawa, “was born an extremely lascivious woman” (その惣三郎のなかで、ひどく淫乱な女が生まれて

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128 Shiba 183.

129 Shiba 182.
Sōzaburō is desired by men of all ranks in the camp—even those who profess to have no interest in boys. While in the heyday of shudō this might have been depicted as an expected consequence of Sōzaburō’s youthful beauty, in the story shudō is instead characterized as unnatural, as uncommon, or as a bad habit. For example, Hijikata thinks that he cannot understand the mentality of men like Sōzaburō who are involved in such “abnormal love” (こういう異常な愛情). Similarly, the other men consider it unusual that Tashiro, who is thirty years old, is still interested in shudō, which is, they say, a “bad habit” that men usually leave behind after the age of twenty. And when Tashiro asks Sōzaburō to “form a bond” with him (儀兄弟になってくれ), we are told that shudō is uncommon in the capital (Kyoto): “Except for the prostitutes in the kagemajaya no one in the capital practices shudō. Kanō must have been surprised” (京には、玄人の陰間茶屋をのぞいて、一般には衆道の風習はないのである。加納は、驚いたろう).

Nevertheless, it is repeatedly stated that Sōzaburō is “incredibly desirable” (凄いような色気). For example, when he is presented to Chief Kondō and vice-chief Hijikata, they are both moved by his charms: “When Kondō and Hijikata saw Kanō Sōzaburō’s face again, they gulped. Could a man have such a beautiful face?” (あらためて加納懐三郎の顔をみた近藤と土方は、息をのむ思いだった。男で、これほどの美貌があ

130 Shiba 183.
131 Shiba 191.
132 Shiba 179. Kagemajaya were tea houses specializing in male prostitutes.
Although Kondō is not interested in shudō, he feels that looking at so beautiful a youth as Sōzaburō is “not such a bad thing” (これまでの美しい若者をみるのは、わるい気持ちがしない).\(^{134}\)

By setting “Maegami no Sōzaburō” in the historical past when nanshoku was considered common, Shiba, writing in a time when such behaviour was considered pathological, was able to create a story about male-male eroticism without associating himself with such practices as an author, and without having to defend his decision to write about them. As Pflugfelder explains, by presenting male-male erotic practices as part of “the cultural fabric of a bygone era,” authors could “treat them with relative openness.”\(^{135}\) The early twentieth century view of male-male eroticism as pathological is evident in Shiba’s portrayal of Sōzaburō as ultimately female-like and of shudō as an ultimately dangerous, and therefore as both an undesirable and a barbaric, practice.

Pflugfelder explains that in the Meiji period, the repudiation of male-male sexuality served to distinguish the new Japan from the old, and that writers of the time who depicted male-male sexuality did so in “in a milieu that was safely historical” because the “assumed prevalence” of nanshoku in such periods allowed authors to represent them as being in the “interest of historical accuracy” or “ambiance.”\(^{136}\) While Shiba’s aim could also have been to give his story a veneer of historical accuracy, he

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\(^{133}\) Shiba 177.

\(^{134}\) Shiba 177.

\(^{135}\) Pflugfelder 206.

\(^{136}\) Pflugfelder 204-205.
could equally have written a historically accurate story without portraying *nanshoku* at all: the destructive influence of sex and the petty jealousies and deadly machinations that it can inspire could have been embodied in a female character. Indeed, this may have been more historically accurate for the story’s time period: by 1863, when the story takes place, only five years before the Meiji Restoration, the *shūdō* tradition had already waned to a point where it was itself being seen as “historical.” As Pflugfelder points out, even by the early 1700s, writers were beginning to speak of *shūdō* as being in decline; by the last decades of the Edo period, the practice was seen as outdated, and more typical of previous eras.137

Shiba’s choice to explicitly portray male-male sexual attraction in “Maegami no Sōzaburō” is more a reflection of his own times than of the historical past he portrays. By the time Shiba was born, male-male erotic practices were no longer assumed to be confined to the past (as “barbaric”), but they were now reimagined medically (as “perverted”), with “a multiplicity, if not a cacophony, of voices,” scientific and non-scientific alike, claiming expertise in issues of sexuality.138 Male *dōsei* (“same-sex-love”) was seen as pathological and feminizing, and was also linked with criminality, both in the fictional works of such writers as Edogawa Ranpo, Hamao Shirō, and Oguri Mushitarō, and in real-life events such as a sensational murder case involving an *onnagata* (a male specialist in playing female roles in kabuki) who murdered his lover after a jealous quarrel and kept the man’s severed head in his traveling trunk.139

137 Pflugfelder 92.

138 Pflugfelder 295.
By making Sōzaburō a beautiful boy whose feminine charms cause otherwise “normal” men to fall for him, with disastrous results, Shiba invokes the historical view of shudō (that it is expected that older men will react to the beauty of youths erotically), while also applying the thinking on same-sex eroticism prevalent in his own time (that same-sex desire is dangerous and feminizing). In effect, Shiba reads early twentieth century thinking on homosexuality back into the historical past as a way to explain the shudō tradition, its dangers, and its inevitable decline.

Mishima, Ōe, and Shiba all use male-desiring male characters in different ways. Mishima uses his narrator to explore and come to terms with his homosexuality, and to find answers for his desires, which he does both in the traditions of the past and in the work of modern sexologists. Ōe uses the homosexuality of his character Natsuo as a metaphor for the weakness and abjection of Japan and the Japanese male during the post-war occupation. And Shiba uses Sōzaburō as an embodiment of the medical and sexological thinking in his own time, to explain the decline of the shudō tradition in a previous era.

While each of the writers has a different aim, there are certain similarities in the depictions. For example, both Mishima and Ōe describe their characters in explicitly pathological terms, the narrator’s sado-masochistic fantasies being explained as a frequent characteristic of “inverts” in Confessions of a Mask, and Natsuo describing his homosexuality as a “chronic illness” and a “complex” in “Kassai,” while Sōzaburō’s efforts to seduce other males and his “lascivious” desires are presented in a manner

139 Pflugfelder 317.
strongly suggestive of abnormality. Most notably, each writer imagines his same-sex-desiring main character as implicitly feminine, or feminized, in direct contrast to the characters created by modern writers of fiction for gay men, as will be discussed in Chapter Three.
Chapter Three: Gay Men's Manga

3.1. Introduction

According to Jeffrey Dobbins, Japanese gay men’s magazines serve to inform gay men about themselves:

Japanese gay men’s magazines shape the identities of their consumers in various ways. Though seldom gay-owned, these magazines are, in principal, gay-authored and gay-consumed and are, by far, the most influential medium for communication among gays. Gay men’s magazines have the potential to inform, educate and promote awareness. Through their manga and stories, gay men’s magazines can create gay role models (people who do not need to play the game of pretending to be heterosexual) who are happy, successful, satisfied, and respect themselves. Myths about the ‘problems’ of gay life can be challenged, and the dreary life advocated by society and its institutions can be shown to be disappointing in these magazines. These magazines encourage gay men to lead more personally-gratifying [sic] lives as individuals. They assist gay men to forge an identity of their own, one that contests the mainstream construct of gay men as ridiculous and abnormal that they are brought up to believe.140

140 Dobbins 60.
According to Orbaugh, by the 1970s manga were “firmly established as a (if not the) central medium in Japanese popular culture.” Gay men’s manga are an important site for the expression of both the fantasies and realities of Japanese gay men’s lives. While the non-gay media occasionally presents images of gay men, they are intended for the consumption, and entertainment, of a heterosexual audience. Moreover, such images are frequently presented as humorous, and they perpetuate stereotypes that define gay men as weak, effeminate and, often, cross-dressed.

Besides the mainstream media, depictions of gay men occur in the pages of women’s *yaoi* (ヤオイ) manga, which are characterized by homosexual romances between male characters. As such, *yaoi* manga could be seen as a progressive, gender-and sexuality-boundary-smashing genre that brings gay issues into the consciousness of the greater society. Indeed, as Mark McLelland points out, “Japanese women have long been avid consumers of popular entertainment that would seem to disrupt sexual and gender boundaries,” such as kabuki theatre, the all-female Takarazuka Revue, and popular television dramas and movies on gay themes, “while at the same time being committed to normative gender performances in their daily lives.”

Rather than pairings of adult men of similar age, however, *yaoi* characters are “pubescent European school-boys, or muscular young men with long hair and feminine

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142 Kinsella 14.

faces whose partners are essentially beautiful women with male genitals.” In fact, several scholars have argued that representations of gay men in bishōnen-ai manga have little to do with homosexuality. Kazumi Nagaike, for example, has argued that by viewing characters who are “biologically not ‘women,’” female readers can achieve a “safe (and comfortable) involvement with the pornographic”; indeed, as Nagaike points out, in yaoi “any reflection of the practical realities of male homosexuality is discarded.” Keith Vincent agrees, arguing that yaoi do not depict “gay reality.” Nevertheless, these manga have “served to establish a kind of precedent for the representation of gay men in popular culture, influencing writers and artists in other media such as film, animation, [and] television.”

Few Japanese gay men, however, are regular readers of yaoi and bishōnen manga. For some gay males (and females), especially those growing up in rural areas where gay magazines are not available or where being seen purchasing them might lead to the unwanted revelation of the purchaser’s homosexuality, yaoi manga (which are widely available) have offered a first taste of gay life, especially since, as Dobbins points out, in most Japanese bookshops it is permissible to stand and read manga without making a purchase. For most gay men, however, the manga printed in the three largest gay

144 Kinsella 14. The genre is also known as bishōnen-ai (美少年愛, beautiful boy love) because of the characters’ extreme, often feminine beauty and the frequently young ages of the protagonists.

145 Nagaike 85-92.


147 Dobbins 6.
monthly magazines, Bádi, G-men, and Samson, are probably the major source of narrative depictions of gay men. The long-running magazine Barazoku also carried manga stories. The magazines publish manga stories both in single episodes and in long-running serials. Some of the magazines also publish separate collections of gay manga, such as Bádi's Yarō ze! series.\textsuperscript{148}

By the early 1950s, popular sexology magazines (the "perverse press") were both publishing "upbeat and informative" articles on homosexuality and establishing social clubs for their same-sex-desiring readers.\textsuperscript{149} Japan's first magazine for same-sex desiring men was Adonis. Published by the Adonis Kai (Adonis Organization), Japan's first homosexual association, sixty-three issues of Adonis, featuring explicit photographs, fiction and non-fiction articles, were published between 1952 and 1963, and were available by mail order only to members of the Organization. Mishima Yukio was rumoured not only to have been a subscriber, but also to have authored some of the magazine's erotic fiction, and artist Mishima Gō (whose name is a homage to Mishima Yukio, and who is still well-known for his drawings of hairy, masculine men) is known to have contributed drawings.\textsuperscript{150}

Adonis was followed by another magazine called Bara (Rose), which was also subscription-only. In 1971, publisher Itō Bungaku (himself heterosexual) launched Barazoku (薔薇族, rose tribe), which was both Japan's first commercial gay magazine

\textsuperscript{148} Yarō ze! is written with the characters 野郎, meaning guy, fellow, rascal. Ze is a masculine emphatic particle. The title is homophonous with the phrase "let's do it!"

\textsuperscript{149} McLelland, Queer Japan 127.

\textsuperscript{150} McLelland, Queer Japan 141-142.
Barazoku was a trailblazer regarded as “a leader of Japanese homosexual culture” throughout the thirty-three years of its existence. The magazine attracted a varied readership, including “luminaries” such as Miwa Akihiro, a drag queen and rumoured lover of Mishima Yukio, as well as, it is also rumoured, anonymous submissions from well-known writers. While the magazine also featured erotic photographs and gay-themed manga featuring young, fit and masculine men (censored in accordance with Japanese law), Barazoku focused on news articles and short stories. Interestingly, some of the artists who drew for the magazine, such as Takemoto Shōtarō (who now draws for G-men), started as artists for shōnen (boys’) manga.

The success of Barazoku led to the publishing of other gay magazines including Adonis bōi (Adonis boy, 1972, whose name was later shortened to Adon), MLMW (an acronym for My Life My Way), Sabu and others. Today there is a variety of

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151 McLelland, Queer Japan 128. According to McLelland, although Barazoku is known as Japan’s first “gay” magazine, the word gei was initially avoided in the magazine itself, because of its association with transgenders and prostitutes. The term homo—which, in spite of the negative connotations it has today was also widely used by gay men themselves in the 1960s and 1970s—was used instead.


153 The term “barazoku” is understood (at least within the gay community) to be synonymous with “gay,” and resembles the English term “friend of Dorothy.” According to Daniel Long, the term is also associated with, and probably originates from, a collection of erotic photographs of Mishima Yukio published in 1963 and called Barakei (the English title is Ordeal by Roses) (221).


155 Mark McLelland, Queer Japan 151-152.
magazines catering to particular interests, two of the most popular being Bádi and G-men.

} Both G-men and Bádi also maintain successful websites, Bádi’s in particular with a focus on deai, or personals, and both magazines now regularly include a free DVD in each issue, containing additional photographs and interviews with the models in the magazine, previews of pornographic movies, video footage of gay events, and other special features.

Each of these magazines usually features from three to five manga stories in each issue, along with erotic photographs and drawings, short fiction, and news, entertainment, and other articles. Each manga is the creation of a different artist, and has “its own thematic [sic], style, and audience.” Themes often include the “yearning of one man for another,” high school romances, “sado-masochistic fantasies and stories of self-discovery, innocence and loss” as well as a variety of other “imaginative topics.”\footnote{Hawkins 462-467.}

In this chapter, I examine three gay manga stories, one each from Barazoku, G-
men, and Bádi. Although all the stories have at least some erotic content, I have chosen examples that, though they contain sex scenes, seem to be concerned with more than just depictions of sex. A brief synopsis of each story follows; analysis will be taken up in section 3.5.

3.2. Nohara Kuro’s “Boys’ School Story: When my Boyfriend wears his Gi”

In Nohara Kuro’s “Boys’ School Story: When my Boyfriend wears his Gi” (from the January 2004 edition of Barazoku), a schoolboy recalls starting at a boys-only high school, and thinking that it would be a “paradise.” The story combines dialogue between characters taking place in the story’s present, with comments by the main character, Keita, which resemble diary entries. Keita’s thoughts are also available to the reader.

Despite Keita’s expectations, school turns out to be far from paradise. To Keita’s dismay, soon after the term begins Keita’s friend, a boy on whom he has had a crush since middle school, starts dating a girl. Keita seems comfortable with, if not open about, his homosexuality, but nevertheless does not enjoy the rough, masculine atmosphere at school. While his classmates (who all seem older, larger, and rougher than Keita) clown around in class, Keita sits bemused, thinking it must all be a dream:

For me, a boy who likes guys but doesn’t like the smell of sweat and the sweltering heat and the roughness and the stuffiness it was hardly paradise.....

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159 Nohara Kuro, “男子校物語：彼氏が道着に着替えたら” (Boys’ School Story: When my Boyfriend wears his Gi), in 蔷薇族 (January, 2004): 122-123.
One day, a classmate asks a favour of Keita. He has a date with a girl, and needs to return a judo uniform (gi) to another classmate. Keita trudges to the dojō, thinking how sad it is that he does not have a close friend. He enters the changing room and sees the tall, handsome and muscular Ryōhei, who is stripped to the waist. The way Ryōhei is drawn invites a sexual gaze: his body fills and extends beyond the borders of the frame, his nudity in frank contrast to the heavy military-style school uniforms worn by the students in the adjacent frames. Keita hands him the gi and awkwardly leaves, wondering how anyone can stand the sweaty smell. As he walks to the bus stop after school, Keita is greeted by Ryōhei, who invites him for something to eat; the boys soon become friends.

Some time later, Keita has been invited to Ryōhei’s house. They talk and drink beer together, and Ryōhei falls asleep. As Keita thinks how nice it is to have a male friend, Ryōhei’s shorts fall open to reveal his erect penis. Keita is in a state of confusion as Ryōhei ejaculates, then wakes up and tells Keita he has just been dreaming about him. Ryōhei reveals that he has liked Keita ever since the day Keita returned his gi, and that he “cannot bear it any longer” (もうガマンできない). Keita stammers that perhaps Ryōhei is just confused because there are no girls at their school, but as Ryōhei begins to kiss him he wonders “is this what’s called love?”

\[160\] Nohara 123.

\[161\] Nohara 129.
Ryōhei continues to kiss Keita, removing most of his clothes. Keita seems younger than Ryōhei; his face is more boyish, and his body is skinny while Ryōhei’s is muscular. Embarrassed and unsure at first, Keita becomes increasingly aroused, and his thoughts reveal that this is his first sexual experience. Ryōhei has prepared for the occasion; he produces condoms and lubricant, and penetrates Keita. Afterwards, Ryōhei apologizes for forcing Keita to have sex, although Keita denies having been forced.

Things are awkward between the boys for several days, until Keita goes to Ryōhei’s house late one night to talk to him, and reveals that he has liked him since the day in the dojo as well. Ryōhei is still wearing his sweaty judo gi, and as they embrace Keita says how much he likes the smell. Ryōhei produces the key to the dojo, and as they go inside to have sex Keita breathes in the sweaty smell and reflects that, in the end, the school has become his “paradise” after all.

3.3. Hirosegawa Yui’s “Love Love Ren’ai Kōza”

As Hirosegawa Yui’s “Love Love Ren’ai Kōza” (Love Course, published in the October 2003 edition of Bádi) opens we learn that Kotobuki, a thirty-one year-old gay man, has been running a gay bar in the countryside (inaka) since he returned home when his father died seven years earlier. As with the previous story, the dialogue takes place in

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162 It is interesting that this story explicitly depicts safer sex and the use of condoms. Many manga stories and erotic drawings suggest or explicitly depict unsafe sexual practices. On the first page of the third story examined here, “Winter Festival,” a small panel warns readers that the acts depicted in the story are fantasy, and that in real life such acts could present a danger of HIV infection.
For the first time in seven years, Kotobuki is planning to close the bar. He will be attending an annual reunion of his high school classmates for the first time. His boyfriend of three years, Hiroshi, a graduate student from Tokyo, offers to keep the bar open while Kotobuki is away, but despite Hiroshi’s assurances Kotobuki worries that Hiroshi is too busy with his schoolwork. His thoughts, however, reveal that he is more deeply worried that Hiroshi is planning to leave him. In a scene that is both tender and funny, the two embrace and Hiroshi assures Kotobuki that he wants to be together. Kotobuki bristles at being petted, saying “Hey! I’m the older one! Seven years older, actually!!” while Hiroshi laughs, saying “But you’re so cute.”

There follows a brief sex scene which is remarkable in several ways. The focus is less on the sex than on the dialogue—both internal and external—which accompanies it, Kotobuki again reflecting how much he likes being held by Hiroshi. Also, while scenes in other manga stories, photographs, and erotic drawings in the same issue of this magazine focus on the bodies and genitalia of the subjects, in this scene the focus is mostly on the faces of the two lovers. While Kotobuki’s penis is shown twice, in comparison to the overlarge penises of characters in other stories (including those of the two jani-kei boys in the story printed after this one) his penis seems almost small for his body size. Hiroshi, the younger man (whose penis is not shown at all), takes both the lead and the penetrative role in the scene, and Kotobuki thinks how kind Hiroshi is and is and

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yet how he treats him "like an adult" and how happy that makes him (大人の男として扱ってくれるのを感じて、それがうれしい). 164

Later, Kotobuki goes to the print shop to collect the business cards he has ordered specially for reunion, and is shocked (in the drawing his head literally explodes) when the proprietor, an older man, asks whether his "first love" will be joining him, and—while Kotobuki tries to stammer a denial—whether this lover is a nice man. As he leaves the shop Kotobuki ponders that, while it is nice that people in the town still like him although they know he is gay, he is still uncomfortable. We learn that everyone has known about his homosexuality since he was in high school, and that even Takenonaka, the boy he had a crush on, knew and did not seem to mind. In fact, the boy seemed to enjoy the crush, although he did not reciprocate.

When he returns to the bar, Hiroshi, who has been getting the place ready to open, tells Kotobuki that he wants to live together; Kotobuki simply says no (やだ). Hiroshi, upset, bursts out that he is tired of only spending the weekends together. Kotobuki tells him that he does not want the neighbours seeing two men leaving the house together in the mornings. It is not the big city, and people will talk. Hiroshi remarks that he has never felt that people in the town were uncomfortable because he is gay, and Kotobuki tells him that he does not want Hiroshi to feel uncomfortable. The argument is interrupted when a customer enters the bar, but Hiroshi asks how Kotobuki would feel if they lived together in Tokyo instead. Kotobuki thinks:

I really don’t know. I was born in this town; I’ve never really left. I can’t

164 Hirosegawa 106.
even imagine living somewhere else... All this time I’ve lived here I’ve
never had a problem... Now I don’t want to stand out, or to have to fight,
or to be hated by anybody.

わかんないよ。俺はこの街で生まれて、この街を出た事なくて、他
場所で生きる自分なんて、想像もできないよ... すっとこの街で
何のイヤな思いもしないであたり前に生きてて... 今になって主
張したり、闘ったり、誰かに嫌われたり——そんなのイヤだよ... 165

Later, at his high school reunion, Kotobuki is greeted enthusiastically by his
former classmates, most of whom, we learn, have moved to Tokyo since graduating;
Kotobuki has not kept in touch with any of them. Some of the women say it is wonderful
that Kotobuki is running a gay bar, and ask whether they are allowed to visit. Flustered,
Kotobuki stammers: “Oh... Um... About half the customers are non... are normal. It’s
just like an ordinary bar” (あ... うん、半分くらいはノン... ふーマルのお客さん
だし、普通の店と変わらないよ). 166

Suddenly Kotobuki’s old crush Takenonaka appears. Takenonaka has graduated
from a university in Tokyo and now works for a major company. He approaches
Kotobuki and begins speaking to him condescendingly, making rude comments about a
manager in his company who he thinks is gay. Kotobuki realizes that Takenonaka has
always been a bully who picks on people who seem weak, and that he sees Kotobuki as weak too, perhaps because Kotobuki is gay. Takenonaka, who has become increasingly drunk, begins taunting Kotobuki:

You run a fag bar? You’re a real fag aren’t you? That’s funny. I’ll do you a favour and come and drink there. Where is it? You brought business cards or something right?

なり、オカマバーやってんの？本格的にオカマじゃん。

おもしれー、飲みに行ってやるよ。場所どこ？名刺くらい持って来てんだろ。167

Fingering the business cards in his pocket, Kotobuki replies: “Sorry, but it’s a gay bar, so people who hate gays aren’t allowed. Besides, I didn’t bring any cards.”168

Upset, Kotobuki throws his full colour, double-sided, ¥30,000 business cards into a rubbish bin at a convenience store, and wanders back to the bar where Hiroshi greets him lovingly. Kotobuki begins to cry. He realizes that he has been foolish. He thinks that he does not like being bullied. He wants to live happily with someone he loves, among the kind people in his town. In a declaration reminiscent of marriage vows, he tells Hiroshi that he wants to be with him, to live together, “no matter what, in tears, in pain, through anything,” and that they can go to play in Tokyo together once in a while.169

167 Hirosegawa Nobu 117.
168 Hirosegawa Nobu 118.
169 Hirosegawa 122.
3.4. Masatake’s “Fuyu no Matsuri”

Masatake’s “Fuyu no Matsuri” (Winter Festival, published in the September 2003 edition of G-men) opens with the protagonist Kudō going to a winter festival. As he trudges through the snow, he thinks: “Makoto... In order to part from you I came to see the festival where I met you.” Most of the story takes place in a series of flashbacks, beginning with a telephone conversation the previous winter, when Makoto tells Kudō that he is leaving the following week to climb the Northern Alps. As with the previous two stories, the main character’s thoughts are available to the reader. Kudō, worried, tells Makoto to be careful. Makoto jokes that Kudō can warm him up when he gets back, but the joke goes too far when he suggests that there is more danger of Kudō cheating on him than of Makoto being hurt on the mountain; Kudō is furious, telling Makoto to show respect for his elders (お前な！！年上をからかうな！). Still, Kudō promises that nothing will happen while Makoto is away.

But Makoto never returns. Although a year has passed, Kudō can neither believe that Makoto is dead nor move on. In a flashback to three years before, Kudō remembers meeting Makoto for the first time. The festival is the famous Naked Festival, where near-naked men dance with fire. “Men who like men” come from all over Japan to see it. Makoto was one of the participants in the festival; he is pictured dancing wildly in a

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170 Masatake, “冬の祭” (Winter Festival), in G-men (September, 2003): 64. The artist goes by a single name.

171 Makoto addresses the older man by his last name, Kudō, throughout the story, while Kudō calls the younger man by his first name, Makoto.

172 Masatake 67.
fundoshi, a traditional loincloth, his hairy body impressively muscular. Emerging god-like from a blazing fire, Makoto suddenly looms over Kudō, grabs him by the wrist, and drags him through the heaving throng and to a secluded wooded area, saying: “This is a festival where men who like men gather. Are you the same, old man?” Clearly a little frightened (a drop of sweat rolls from his face as the younger, taller and much more powerful man frowns intently at him), Kudō replies that he is; as he does so he wonders whether he is about to be beaten. However, Makoto asks him what he thinks of Makoto, to which Kudō, still sweating, stammers that he likes him (“suki da yo”). Embracing him urgently, Makoto tells Kudō that he likes him too, and Kudō wonders if it can be true. A lengthy sex scene (or perhaps, since they begin outside and end up in a bed, a series of sex scenes) follows, in which Makoto penetrates Kudō. Although he is both shorter and clearly older, Kudō’s body (which had previously been obscured under a large coat) is also muscular and hairy. At the end, Kudō declares his love (“aishiteru yo”).

Some Japanese gay men have created a fetish around the fundoshi, with a variety of magazines and videos dedicated to images of men in loincloths. The same issue of G-men in which this story appears features a series of photographs of men in traditional settings (at hot springs, in tatami rooms, and so on) wearing fundoshi. According to McLelland, “In pornographic images and stories created by and for Japanese gay men [unlike those created by and for women] . . . foreign locations and foreigners themselves are largely absent. Featured instead are many representations of ‘the traditional Japanese man’ that evoke nostalgia for scenarios from Japan’s homosocial past: the Shrine festival, the boys’ school, the playing field. ‘Authentic’ Japanese props, such as the fundoshi . . . are common signifiers of this Japaneseness” (Abstract, Nostalgia and Desire in Japanese ‘Homosexual’ Porn). Mishima Yukio can be seen wearing a fundoshi in several widely published photographs.

Here, Makoto calls him ossan, a rude term for an older man.

Masatake 71.

Masatake 77.
As they lie in bed, Kudō tells Makoto that he never wants to part, but to his surprise Makoto asks whether it is right to say “never” so easily, and tells Kudō that the time will come when he will have to forget about him. As the scene returns to the present, Kudō is just thinking that he must try to forget Makoto when he hears his name and turns to see Makoto dancing wildly, just as he was the first time. The two have a brief conversation which, as it is drawn without the customary speech bubbles, appears to be happening without speaking, as if in a dream:

Makoto: Don’t you think I’ve been praying for your happiness? Forget about me. Move on!
Kudō: But my promise to you!
Makoto: Please. Leave. For your sake. For your happiness, and mine. I love you, you know.177

Makoto again tells Kudō to forget him and to move on. Kudō, crying, thinks says he will never forget Makoto. As Makoto disappears back into the blazing fire from which he first appeared Kudō walks away, thinking that Makoto will always live in his heart as he tries to start afresh.

3.5. Analysis and Conclusion

Hawkins has argued that the “primary function” of the fiction in gay magazines is to provide “sexual stimulation and diversion.”178 While all fiction provides entertainment,

177 Masatake 79.

178 Hawkins 467. In discussing the fiction in gay magazines, Hawkins is referring to both short stories and manga.
and while providing sexual stimulation certainly appears to be an important part of manga production in Japanese gay magazines, there is more to these stories than just providing a “diversion.” Each of the three manga discussed speaks to the deeply affecting experiences of a gay male audience, and in each story the reader has access to the private thoughts of the main character, inviting identification with him by the reader.

For example, both “Boys’ School” and “Love Love” deal with the common adolescent experience of having a crush on a schoolmate who either does not know or does not reciprocate, while “Winter Festival” deals with the pain of a love lost. Other themes in these stories include self-acceptance, coming out, and negotiating gay life in a straight society. According to Hawkins, for instance, the yearning for senpai is a “frequently repeated theme” in gay magazines and fiction. In a pleasing twist on this theme that presents an idealized—and for many gay men unrealistic—view of gay adolescence, Keita, the protagonist in “Boy’s School” eventually gets his man.

All three stories deal with the common gay experience of hiding and fearing disapproval of one’s sexuality. When Keita’s first crush introduces him to the girl he is dating, Keita must behave as though he is pleased for his friend. Similarly, although Kotobuki’s homosexuality is common knowledge, he is so used to performing straight outside the gay bar that the casual revelation that a neighbour knows he is gay—and thinks no less of him for it—literally blows his mind. And in “Winter Festival,” Kudō worries that Makoto has singled him out as a gay man for a beating rather than for sex.

As Harada explains, current gay relationships in Japan are different from those in

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179 Hawkins 361. In the school context, senpai refers to students who are older or more experienced than oneself.
the *shudō* tradition in that they feature a higher degree of equality, or what Harada calls “mutuality.” ¹⁸⁰ Although this is evident in all the stories examined here, there is still a real or suggested age difference—the primary feature of *shudō*-type relationships—among all the couples. While in *shudō* age difference dictated both power and the privilege of sexual penetration, as one informant told Hawkins, in modern gay life the roles of *tachi* and *neko* (top and bottom) are no longer dependent upon the ages of the people involved, but rather their personalities. Hawkins, however, notes that for most of the men he interviewed, “power, age and sexual position could often be joined in fantasy.” ¹⁸¹ Clearly, however, this joining does not always occur in the traditionally expected manner. While in “Boys’ School” the smaller, younger-looking Keita is, as might be expected, penetrated by the larger, older-looking Ryōhei, in both “Winter Festival” and “Love Love,” it is the younger man who penetrates the older man, and it is the older man who is less sure of, and seems to have less power in the relationship. While in both these stories there is reference to age difference (in both cases the older man reminding the younger who is the elder in the relationship), the relationships are also egalitarian, not least in the fact that both partners experience sexual pleasure, not just the “top.”

Both “Boys’ School” and “Love Love” deal with self-acceptance. As Harada has put it, “As a consequence of society’s negative attitude towards . . . homosexuality, many


¹⁸¹ Hawkins 333.
gays have great difficulty accepting themselves," especially as adolescents.\(^{182}\) In these two stories, however, both the main characters have reached a certain level of self-acceptance by the time they reach high school. In "Boy's School," Keita anticipates that as a "boy who likes guys," attending an all boys school will be "paradise," while in "Love Love"-Kotobuki is open to all his classmates, even his crush, about his homosexuality. Still, Keita is uncomfortable in an all-male environment, largely because he does not identify with the rough masculinity of the other boys. As Herek has described it, "gay men are taught the ideal of heterosexual masculinity. When they acknowledge their own sexual preference to themselves, however, they must discard this ideology in order to maintain their self-esteem."\(^{183}\) Keita's eventual boyfriend, Ryōhei, on the other hand, is both gay and the image of masculinity: he is not only sufficiently accomplished at judo to be entrusted with the key to the dojō, he is also one of the largest, strongest boys at the school. Ryōhei has clearly both accepted his own homosexuality (he procures condoms and lubricant in preparation for Keita's visit) and is comfortable with his masculinity (he is fully part of the masculine culture at school), yet Keita is initially unable to believe that this masculine young man desires him. For Keita, acceptance of his own masculinity—represented by his changing feelings about the smell of male sweat—comes only after his first gay sexual experience. In "Love Love," despite his homosexuality having been common knowledge at least since high school, Kotobuki does not fully accept himself until he is finally able to stand up to the bullying of his

\(^{182}\) Harada 91.

\(^{183}\) Qtd. in Harada 49.
former crush and face his fears of rejection by the community.

The question of gay male masculinity continues to be debated within and without gay circles, both inside and outside Japan. As Hawkins points out, gay men in the non-gay Japanese media are not often portrayed as masculine. Rather, the mainstream Japanese media prefers to present images of gay men as feminine:

Because [effeminate men are seen as] female-like (joseiteki), and present an anomalous mask in public, they are funny. Conversely, masculine-appearing (danseiteki) [gay] men are seen as men, and as such they are who they represent themselves to be, ‘normative men,’ and because of their straight appearance, their [gayness] becomes invisible.”

Perhaps as a reaction to this, the gay Japanese media seems to present gay men as only and always masculine. In manga in particular, where artists are unconstrained by the facts of human biology and physiology, subjects are often hypermasculine, always with short hair, and often with—depending on the particular publication—gigantic muscles, enormous genitalia, bodies thickly covered in hair, and with the capacity to engage in and withstand sexual activities that would be impossible for a real human being. Several of the other manga stories in the three magazines selected feature extreme forms of sexual activity (including, in one, penetration with what appears to be a large club), characters with very large penises, and characters with traditionally masculine occupations such as construction workers and firemen.

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184 Hawkins 322.

185 Hawkins 323.
McLelland writes that (straight) men are often depicted as hyper-masculine in straight men’s comics as well, though he adds that competitiveness and aggressiveness are also part of the image in such manga. Though there are some similarities in representations of gay men in gay comics and straight men in straight comics, such depictions are in stark contrast to the depictions of gay males in *yaoi* manga, who are slender, androgynous, “always beautiful, depicted with the big eyes and flowing hair which often characterizes female figures in [straight] men’s comics”—in other words, more like women.\(^{186}\) Interestingly, several of the gay men interviewed by Harada stated that masculinity and femininity were unimportant concepts for them. As one respondent put it, whenever he sees a “masculine man,” the man does not seem “natural,” and he believes the man is “restricting himself too much to a role that [is] not real.”\(^{187}\)

Yet the association of ultramasculinity and male homosexuality in the public imagination has a long history in Japan. The *nanshoku* tradition was “clearly associated with [the] hypermasculinity which formed the core of the samurai culture.”\(^{188}\) In the modern period popular images of male homosexuals have ranged from Mori Ōgai’s rough, masculine, same-sex-loving “kōha” boys—in contrast to the “dandified” preening of female-loving “nanpa” boys—to the *bushidō*-inspired masculinity embodied by Mishima Yuko, while in contemporary Japan, gay men who are part of the scene in gay areas like Tokyo’s Shinjuku ni-chôme favour a consciously masculine image.\(^{189}\)

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\(^{187}\) Harada 90.

\(^{188}\) Vincent, “Writing Sexuality” 138.
In the stories examined, too, all the gay male characters are masculine, though their masculinity is less extreme than the examples above. In “Boys’ School,” Keita, while slim and physically smaller, has a penis which is only slightly less large than that of his boyfriend Ryōhei (despite which, when he first sees Ryōhei’s penis, he gasps “It’s so big! And thick!”). In “Winter Festival,” both Kudō and Makoto have hairy, muscular bodies, large penises, and facial hair. Even in “Love Love,” where depictions of their bodies are less important, both the gay characters appear masculine, with short hair and fit physiques. Masculinity is evident also in the use of language. In the three stories examined here, for example, all the male characters refer to themselves using the masculine, rough-sounding ore except for Keita, the protagonist in “Boys’ School,” who consistently refers to himself using the rather softer (though still masculine) boku.

Manga stories in the gay monthly magazines appear to fulfill various needs for the men who consume them. Like all fiction, they provide entertainment, or as Hawkins puts it, “diversion.” Gay manga, which can represent sexual activities in considerably more detail than in other forms (such as photographs, which are more rigorously censored), also provide sexual stimulation. For example, in recent years detailed drawings of male genitalia have appeared in Japanese gay magazines, while photographic images of the penis are still blacked out or digitally obscured. It is also possible, in comic form, to depict activities and positions that would be impossible in reality, providing, as Hawkins puts it, “a fertile field for the play of fantasies.”

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189 Pflugfelder 215. Pflugfelder translates kōha and nanpa as “roughneck” and “smoothie.”

190 Hawkins 468.
As has been demonstrated above, however, gay manga also deal with subject matter and experiences common to gay men in Japanese society. Besides offering sexual stimulation and entertainment, stories published in gay men’s magazines serve to create a shared ideology and to provide validation.\textsuperscript{191} All the stories examined here feature men who are both gay and masculine. All three main characters are able to find love (while Kudō in “Winter Festival” ultimately loses his love, at the story’s end he is both free and determined to create a new life). “Love Love Ren’ai Köza” in particular provides validation as a positive coming out story: although Kotobuki has been worried about being accepted as a gay man, it is his own fear that has kept him from finding happiness by living as an out gay man, while his friends and community have always been accepting of him. Not only that, but the only character who does not accept him, the homophobic Takenonaka, is a drunk and a bully whose boorish behaviour only disgusts the women at the high school reunion. Other manga stories in the same issues of the magazines in which the stories discussed here were originally published feature themes of love, idealized depictions of the daily lives of gay men, and deal with problems faced by Japanese gay men such as being closeted or having a lover who is married to a woman.

According to Hawkins, fiction in gay magazines creates a “social imaginary” which unites ideological stances, represents “collective archetypes of fantasies,” and indicates at least some of the “shared imaginary” of the gay community.\textsuperscript{192} Gay manga not only provide entertainment but both reflect and inform gay culture, and validate gay male lives and experiences.

\textsuperscript{191} Hawkins 467.

\textsuperscript{192} Hawkins 467-468.
Chapter Four: Conclusion

Japanese writers have been depicting male-male romantic and sexual relationships since the earliest times, and have continued to do so in periods when such practices have been celebrated, condemned, or simply deemed unspeakable.

By the time of the Edo period, the “way of youth” was being seen as part of a historical tradition that stretched back, by some accounts, to the time of the gods.\(^{193}\) *Shudō* was one source of sexual pleasure for the adult male, beyond the pleasures offered by his wife and by female prostitutes. In the samurai tradition, *shudō* was seen in terms of moral gain for both partners. More than this, though, knowledge of *shudō*, disseminated via *shudō* texts, came to be socially valuable, and, for a man, a lack of such knowledge might cause a loss of status in the eyes of his peers.\(^{194}\) With the Edo period came a torrent of materials on male-male themes, not only in literary works, drama and poetry, but also in other artistic forms such as song, dance, and woodblock prints.

Rather than prohibition or moral repugnance, Edo-era legal approaches to *shudō* were concerned primarily with keeping the peace and maintaining the power of the *daimyō* (feudal lords); *shudō* was seen as potentially disruptive to both—to the maintenance of harmony because of violence that might erupt over a popular boy, and to the power of the *daimyō* because *shudō* encouraged vows of mutual loyalty unto death, which undermined the *daimyō*’s ultimate authority over the lives of his retainers.\(^{195}\) By

\(^{193}\) Pflugfelder 87.

\(^{194}\) Pflugfelder 52.

\(^{195}\) Pflugfelder 129.
the latter years of the Edo era, shudō was experiencing a downturn in popular discourse, and by the Meiji era, male-male sexuality had come to be seen as outdated, barbaric, uncivilized, and eventually, unnatural. Same-sex attraction began to be understood more in terms of what now would be called a “sexual orientation” which, unlike shudō, implied an exclusive desire for one sex over the other.

Same-sex attraction also came to be seen as socially and morally dangerous. While authors continued to write about male-male eroticism, they tended to restrict such depictions only to stories in historical settings, in which the unspeakable could be safely, if usually obliquely, depicted. Medical discourse framed same-sex attraction in terms of pathology; male “homosexuals” (dōseiaisha) were classified into two groups: active (males who took the insertive—therefore, masculine—role in anal sex) and passive (males who took the “feminine,” receptive role). Both roles were seen as having the potential to cause physiological and psychological changes, usually including some degree of “feminization.” At the same time, the explosion of popular sexology created a forum for males who had experienced same-sex attraction or sexual contact, and the new medical model provided them a way of understanding their feelings. Sexology journals also provided, for the first time, a voice for those—such as male-desiring males—whose voices had not previously been heard.196

By the Shōwa period, depictions of male-male eroticism in literary productions no longer expressed a celebrated cultural discipline with links to elite culture; instead they would gradually begin to be used to express such things as national abjection and misogyny. With war, however, came a decrease in textual discussions of sexuality,

196 Pflugfelder 105.
though some literary and academic works continued to be published. By the 1930s and 1940s, most works dealing with sexuality became ineligible for publication; those that were published promoted an “increasingly heteronormative” sexuality for both men and women.¹⁹⁷

Post-war, censorship was relaxed and erotic publications began once again to flourish; Mishima’s Confessions of a Mask, for example, was published just three years after the war’s end. The end of the Occupation saw the importation of the word “gay,” and the rise of the “gay bar” as an institution. The adoption of “gay,” and the choice of that term over dōseiisha, suggests another change in understanding, at least among those who identified as gay. The rise of the perverse press in the 1950s led to increasing discourse of non-heterosexuality, and eventually to the publication of the first magazines intended for a homosexual male audience. Japan was still suffering the humiliation of defeat and occupation, however, and this humiliation is reflected in post-war writings by authors like Kojima Yuio, who portrayed the struggles of ordinary people after the war, and by Ōe Kenzaburō, who employed male homosexual characters to express post-war Japan’s shame and dishonour. Other modern writers who have written on male-male themes include Kawabata Yasunari, Mori Ōgai, Edogawa Ranpo, and Tanizaki Jun’ichirō.

By the 1980s, according to McLelland, a new generation of modern, gay Japanese men had emerged;¹⁹⁸ with them came a new “distinctly ‘gay male literature’” which echoes that of modern Western gay writers: “confident, proud, exploring what it means to

¹⁹⁷ McLelland, Queer Japan 31-37.

¹⁹⁸ McLelland, Queer Japan 161.
be gay in a sometimes unfriendly world.” The fiction in the gay monthly magazines, which speaks to the fears, hopes and desires of modern Japanese gay males, must be counted as part of this new “gay male literature.” Such fiction challenges the mainstream prejudice that still faces gay men in Japan, and the notion, reflected not only in the work of Mishima, Ōe and Shiba examined here, but also in current mainstream (heterosexual) media, that gay men are by their nature weak, feminine, and ridiculous.

Male-desiring male characters have been deployed to various ends in Japanese fiction in the modern period. In the work of heterosexual writers like Ōe and Shiba, homosexual characters are used to symbolize the degradation of society. Ōe’s Natsuo, for example, is a weak young man who cannot even stand up to a woman, let alone a foreign man. While foreign homosexual men in the story, like Natsuo’s lover Lucien, can be both homosexual and strong, part of their power clearly rests with their status as non-Japanese. Natsuo’s homosexuality, on the other hand, stands for the weakness and feminization of all Japanese men, and the humiliation and powerlessness of the country as a whole—in other words, even a foreign homosexual is more powerful than the Japanese male.

Shiba, similarly, uses Sōzaburō’s homosexuality as a mirror for the breakdown of traditional society. Shiba was influenced by new thinking that imagined homosexuality as feminizing and pathological, as well as by vestiges of the nanshoku tradition which still saw youths as beautiful yet saw the potential for danger in that beauty. His character Sōzaburō “tricks” the other men in his camp by enticing them with his female-like

charms. Such are these charms, and so devious is he, that even otherwise heterosexual men find themselves attracted to Sōzaburō. Even in this historical setting, however, the old tradition of nanshoku has already declined. Yet, inflamed by inappropriate and destructive passions, even the tough, manly samurai of the feared and respected Shinsengumi fall victim to the beauty of a youth with unshaven forelocks. The inevitable result is that order becomes chaos, and men die, including, of course, the lascivious Sōzaburō.

Mishima, who lived a “bisexual” life (he was married to a woman, yet was to some extent active in various homosexual communities), represents a sort of halfway mark between heterosexual and modern gay authors. His narrator is, like Sōzaburō and Natsuo, to some extent feminized, but rather than the destructive potential or weakness of homosexuals, Mishima, writing in a time when homosexuality was still widely seen as a perversion in Japan, uses him to emphasize the innateness of same-sex desire. By making reference to a Roman emperor and evoking the shūdō tradition, Mishima demonstrates that male-male desire has existed across cultures and ages, and by having his narrator try, and fail, to make himself heterosexual, proves (or perhaps reassures himself) that it is futile to try to deny such desires.

While heterosexual authors used homosexual characters as a symbol for national weakness or social problems, modern gay men’s manga fiction, while still arguably political, uses gay male characters to provide entertainment (and sexual stimulation) in the form of gay stories; to express gay fantasies, and to reflect the realities of living as a gay man in modern Japan; and to validate and inform gay culture.

In “Boy’s School” Nohara’s Keita must learn to accept himself as both gay and
masculine, which he does by finding love with a senior classmate. Keita, a young student, represents an ultra-modern gay sensibility: though still in high school, he has both the self-awareness and the courage to live as gay, if only to the extent that he has an emotional and sexual relationship with another boy. Ryōhei, his boyfriend, also reflects this modern sensibility: handsome, masculine, powerful and popular, and equally at home in the masculine culture at school and in his role as Keita’s lover, Ryōhei represents both an ideal to which young gay Japanese men can aspire and an object for their fantasies.

Hirosegawa’s “Love Course” also reflects a modern gay sensibility. In this story, thirty-one year-old Kotobuki must learn to accept himself as a gay man by standing up to a homophobe and a bully. Only when he does this can he have faith in the acceptance of his rural community and find the courage to live openly with his “first love.” This story reflects the desire of a great many gay men, especially in rural communities, for acceptance and for the courage to live openly. And in Masatake’s “Winter Festival,” Kudō must deal with the pain of losing his lover but, as the story progresses, finds the courage to move on and to seek a new love.

These three manga stories represent a spectrum of gay lives, from the young schoolboy to the middle-aged man. Each character learns valuable lessons about how to live and find happiness as a gay male in modern Japan.

While both mainstream writers and the creators of gay manga use homosexual male characters to political ends, the characters created by mainstream writers like Shiba and Ōe are an embodiment of problems affecting the nation as a whole, the characters’ own lives and experiences being unimportant except as a reflection of the problems of the larger society. Even the narrator in Mishima’s Confessions of a Mask, a character whose
life closely mirrors the author's own, struggles with his sexuality against a backdrop of war and changing, often contradictory views on homosexuality.

Conversely, gay manga writers use homosexual characters as a mirror for the gay world—a mirror that often reflects an idealized, rather than a realistic view of gay life in modern Japan—and as an example for gay Japanese males to follow. Unlike the stories by the mainstream authors examined, the stories created by these writers are in every sense "gay": they are created by and for gay men, the characters in them are gay because the stories are about gay life. While writers of mainstream literature use male-desiring male characters for destructive reasons, gay writers use gay male characters for constructive and instructive reasons—as a positive exploration of gay life, and as an ideal example for Japanese gay men to follow.
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