New Half: Japanese Transsexuals and
Their Place in Japanese Literature and Society

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Spring 2010
Abstract

In 2008, amidst the continued presence of gays and transsexuals in Japanese media after the “gay boom” of the 1990s, a “New Half” transsexual individual by the name of Tsubaki Ayana wrote a memoir entitled *Watashi, Danshikou Shusshin Desu* (I Went to a Boys’ School), which describes her experience growing up in “the wrong body” – that is, with the male-attributed penis even though she has never considered herself male. The main purpose of this paper is to determine the place that Tsubaki’s work has within the body of gay literature, and to trace the ways that gay literature has been shaped throughout different times and within different societies. In doing so, this paper ultimately shows that a link that is amorphous and indefinite – but unquestionably present – exists between works of literature, the historical times that they come from, and the social spaces that they occupy.

*Watashi* is examined as three types of literature: autobiography, entertainment, and social commentary. To examine the work’s place in literature as each of these types, it is compared to three other works that can be considered part of the canon of Japanese gay literature: Mishima Yukio’s *Confessions of a Mask* as autobiography, the late-Heian era tale *The Changelings* as entertainment, and Hiruma Hisao’s *Yes Yes Yes* as social commentary. Through literary analysis, this paper draws parallels between *Watashi* and each of the works chosen for each category.

The differences between *Watashi*’s memoir format and *Confessions*’s I-novel format create distinctive ways of experiencing an autobiography. *Watashi* simply narrates moments of Tsubaki’s life while *Confessions* allows the narrator time to examine himself. Both forms of autobiography create ways in which the narrators’ non-normativity, being in “the wrong body” and not conforming to male heterosexual ideals respectively, is represented and appreciated.

The ways that literature as entertainment vary are shown in the comparison of *Watashi* and *The Changelings*. *Watashi* is entertaining in the way it is written and presented – as an intimate conversation. A critical reading of *The Changelings* focuses on its content as a comical and fantastical story about relationships within the aristocracy. Both works use their entertaining aspects to deliver enjoyable stories about the complexities of non-normative gender roles.

Finally, *Watashi* enters into the realm of social commentary through its existence itself. As is the case with *Yes Yes Yes* as well, the existence of these works of literature is a form of social commentary in that it introduces and reveals certain ideas about transsexuality, gay men, and a myriad of other topics, that would not otherwise be introduced in the same way. The fact that *Watashi*’s audience is decidedly broader than the explicit story *Yes Yes Yes*’s audience also speaks to the range of literature’s influence as gay literature has changed and expanded, and as what is considered “acceptable” in literature has changed with the society around it.

This paper uses these ideas and these kinds of literature as a way to make one final connection – one between literature, history, and society. The three are all interwoven, and it is because of its relationship with the others that any one in particular can have any real impact at all.
Introduction

In the early 1990s, Japan experienced what was called the “gay boom,” a media phenomenon during which issues about sexuality and gender became a hot-button topic in the press, on television, and in movies. Since the United States occupation of Japan after World War II, the word “gay” had been used in Japanese media, referring not only to the gay individuals as indicated by the borrowed English word (that is, homosexuals), but also to transgender individuals in public spaces – bars, clubs, and the media later on. Terminology referring to queer individuals was thrown around – accepted, rejected, revised – and queer individuals themselves started to make a noticeable appearance in the media.¹

The term “New Half” used in reference to transsexuals is relatively new, having been a product of the mass media in the 1980s, just before the gay boom occurred. The category denoted by “New Half” is vague; the term acts as a blanket term referring to people “that range from transvestites to transsexuals and anything in between and/or that ... are gay.”² Initially the term was used in gay bars, taking the place of the “gay boys” moniker which had come into common use during the decades after World War II, but it soon became clear that “New Half” was a more multipurpose term. It had confused and disparate nuances; some seemed to think it was derogatory in suggesting that an individual was “between genders,” while others felt that the idea of “New Half” was necessary in allowing for a psychological gap between male and

¹ Beyond references to the term “gay” formerly used in Japan to connote specifically transgender individuals and particular uses in reference to homosexual men, the words “gay” and “queer” will be used interchangeably throughout this paper to refer to the same non-heterosexual, non-gender normative category or community.
female. More recently, as the appearance of New Half individuals has spread across a wide variety of media, including television and print media, the term has been claimed as a personal identifier by the individuals, for whom no other term seems to fit their purpose.

Tsubaki Ayana is a popular model and television personality in Japan. She was discovered by chance in 2007, when she began her work as a model, television personality, and news commentator. She is seen by the Japanese public as a sophisticated New Half individual who has taken it upon herself to “produce happiness for women” through a line of sweets and clothing, and she appears regularly on several television programs and as a model in a monthly magazine entitled Koakuma Ageha (Rogue Ageha). Despite her widespread acceptance as a so-called “New Half” individual, her own use of the term is conscious and not without reservations. “The easiest to understand and closest in meaning [to what I consider myself] is ‘New Half.’” Since ‘New Half’ seems to paint the picture of having some kind of questionable second profession, it feels a little out of place, but that’s unavoidable, so [the term “New Half”] is what I often use now.” Ultimately, she chooses to embrace the term and use it all the same, giving what is vague and indefinite a more specific definition.

Tsubaki is one of many New Half individuals present in the media, but unlike the majority of queer individuals on television, she respects her own femininity and focuses on being as true to womanhood as possible. There is a tendency in Japanese media to focus on what makes a person different – to point out that someone is slightly overweight by Japanese standards, that

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5 The phrase she uses is 夜の仕事をしている, or literally, “doing a night job.”
someone is black, that someone is a gay man. For the sake of entertainment, many celebrities will emphasize what it is that makes them different, because that is what is considered “entertaining,” and that difference is arguably a major factor in their celebrity to begin with.

Take, for example, Bobby Ologun, a Nigerian-born television personality known in Japan simply as “Bobby-san.” In his regular interactions with Japanese people on television programs, especially in variety programs, he feeds off of the stereotype of the “loud, scary black man,” yelling angrily and pounding on boards. He gets the laughs that he is looking for, certainly, but in process of being a socially visible black man acting that way, he serves only to proliferate an already widespread stereotype about black men that may not be true. That stereotype may, in fact, be harmful beyond the media; other black men may risk premature judgment when they meet people whose only exposure to black men is to the loud, scary black man Bobby-san.

Tsubaki fits into the mold of television personalities much more differently than many television personalities do. She is one of very few sophisticated, understated personalities in a sea of caricatures. Her position as a subtle, self-respecting New Half individual on television is significant within a society that capitalizes on difference. It is of the utmost importance especially for New Half individuals outside of the media, those searching for a role model and an ally who does not appear in public to virtually damn herself and the people like her.

In 2008, Tsubaki published a book entitled Watashi, Danshikou Shusshin Desu (I Went to a Boys’ School), a memoir describing her experiences with identifying as female while being forced to live her life in what was considered a male body. The title refers to a moment during college when she and her female friends were discussing their high school experiences. Tsubaki
admitted to going to a boys’ school, which shocked her friends, who had met Tsubaki only after she had chosen to fully present herself as female. The social consequences were clear – her friends slowly abandoned her, and she ended up being as alone as she was when she had been the only girl in an all boys’ school.⁷

Since its release, Watashi has become a national bestseller, now in its fourth printing. That widespread popularity is not to be underappreciated. Through Watashi, Tsubaki has allowed for her voice as a New Half to be heard, to go beyond the limits of television. She has made it clear that her story is important and that she has the right as an individual, and especially as a New Half, to represent herself and to be understood. Particularly because she is one of a handful of New Half individuals who do not highlight their differences just to be “entertaining,” the publication of Watashi becomes a reminder that her life is just that – her life, not a joke, and not material for satire. Through Watashi, Tsubaki has chosen to tell her story, her real story, and if the sales numbers are any indication, people are listening.

It should be noted that Watashi is not the only memoir published by a New Half individual. In March of 2009, Haruna Ai, perhaps the most popular New Half individual in Japan, published her own work entitled Subarashiki, Kono Jinsei (with the English subtitle What a Wonderful Life) which outlines her own experiences as a woman in a man’s body. Haruna as a television personality, however, is quite unlike Tsubaki, in that she has focused within her career on performance and comedy. She often flaunts her attraction to men more than is considered appropriate, and she occasionally even switches into her male voice for comedic effect.

Haruna, like Bobby-san, becomes a caricature of what it means to be New Half — that is, seemingly a gay man with breasts — and she mocks herself relentlessly. Her most well-known skit is a lip-synced performance of a song by pop idol Matsuura Aya, which Haruna ends with a pantomimed tweak of her nipple. This variety of exaggerated performance of gender and sexuality is Haruna’s specialty, the likes of which other New Half television personalities, including Tsubaki Ayana, scarcely attempt to imitate, but because it is so radical and memorable, it is what is most favored by the general public. Nonetheless, it is still potentially harmful to those outside of the media who do not live up to what it means in the media’s eyes to be a New Half — a caricature like Haruna Ai. In the end, Haruna’s emphasis on the “difference” (the gayness, the sex change) and her chaotic gender performance overshadow the existence of people like Tsubaki, who does not highlight her differences and is very simply just a woman.\(^8\)

Despite their differences in appearance and presentation, both women are beloved figures in Japanese media, and both their stories are valuable in understanding first-hand the life experiences of a New Half individual. For that reason, *Watashi* cannot and should not be viewed as the definitive work, but instead as a representative example of the kind of space New Half individuals have recently begun to occupy within literature.

*Watashi* is an emerging type of text within the “canon” of Japanese gay literature. Appropriate for the times in which it finds itself situated, the focus of the work strays from a

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\(^8\) Haruna is very conscious of the personality that she projects on television. On the *obi* (belt) around her memoir, it is written, “I couldn’t say it on television. This is ‘my true life,’” suggesting that in her memoir she chooses to take a more genuine tone than she typically does on television. She also recently called for Japan to be more tolerant of transgender individuals, indicating her recognition of the difficulties that transgender individuals face in their daily lives. For more information, see the AFP article about Haruna’s call for tolerance: [http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jnK7ExzIExqQFKd4SnY8X1fvb90g]
preoccupation with sexuality and sexual orientation. It instead works to question the fundamental idea of gender itself, of gender identity and presentation. Through *Watashi*, one can attempt to understand the literary, social, and historical impact of such a text, which speaks so carefully and so precisely to the world around it. Over time, Japan has slowly created a society that allows for the personal story of a non-normative protagonist to exist and to be considered seriously. Indeed, where the work fits into the grand scheme of other works of Japanese gay literature is not as important as the question of what the work itself says about the world around it. But it is through works of literature like *Watashi* and their relationship with other works of literature that one can trace the flow of history, tying the past into the present, and the present into the future.

The following examination of *Watashi* will be based on an exploration of the text as three types of literature: an autobiographical text, a work of entertainment, and a form of social commentary. In comparing and contrasting *Watashi* with other works of gay literature from a variety of time periods, we will be able to discern the importance of a work like *Watashi* within that body of gay literature. From there, all of the works in question will be put into historical context, and in doing so, we can begin to make the connections between movements in literature, their places in history, and their impact on and conversations within the society around them.

**Examination of *Watashi*: *Watashi* as an Autobiographical Text**

*Watashi* is first and foremost an autobiographical text. The memoir format of *Watashi* serves several functions in autobiographical storytelling: it pinpoints what Tsubaki believes to be significant moments in her life, it explains through a particular literary focus the reasons why she
has chosen to tell her story, and with that literary focus it brings together the narrative of her life as she experienced it. In this case, the literary focus of her work is her lifelong understanding of herself as female. She speaks about the important events in her life from a gender-informed perspective, whether or not they deal explicitly with gender. In that way, the reader begins to see that what may in theory seem “gender neutral” becomes, through Tsubaki’s experiences, extremely gendered. This includes everything from the reaction her mother had (scolding instead of nurturing) when Tsubaki was upset after her classmates had mocked her for watching a certain animated series,\(^9\) to her conscious effort to change the way she ran so that she would not “run like a girl” in front of her parents.\(^{10}\) It is through these personal stories, which leave a deep impact because they come from the person herself, that the reader experiences the same kinds of feelings that the author experienced. In that way, the memoir is not only autobiographical but interactive as well.

A literary format quite different from the memoir is that of the I-novel, a term coined during the 1920s following the rash of so-called “Japanese Naturalist” authors who used common vernacular to write novels, many of which would go on to be considered I-novels, as a means of representing reality.\(^{11}\) The I-novel developed from there with the understanding that the clearest and truest form of self-revelation was through a novel, from the perspective of the author himself but not necessarily from the first-person perspective. This understanding of what the I-novel was, articulated in 1925 by literary critic Kume Masao, favored this “authentic novel” over

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\(^9\) Tsubaki, p. 44.

\(^{10}\) Tsubaki, p. 50.

a state-of-mind novel that was not autobiographical but was simply written in the first-person.\textsuperscript{12}

Such an authentic novel explored the author’s deepest emotions without becoming the state-of-mind novel that was so prevalent in Europe around the same time. The I-novel therefore came to be a uniquely Japanese creation, aiming specifically to reveal the author’s truest self through text without stylistic or literary pretense.

It was within the context of a changing sexual atmosphere in Japan that an I-novel situated within the body of gay literature, Mishima Yukio’s \textit{Confessions of a Mask}, was first published. The development of such a sexual atmosphere began in the 1920s, decades before \textit{Confessions}’s publication, when the concept of \textit{ero-guro} ("erotic-grotesque") had come to the forefront of literary and popular discourse. \textit{Ero-guro} was an association that linked male-male relationships (the erotic) with criminality (a depiction of the grotesque), and in doing so it created an allure for homosexuality inasmuch as it was in some way “a criminal act”; it was unsanctioned by the government, and it flew under the radar. Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, journalists and literary figures alike encouraged a national fascination with \textit{ero-guro}, conflating the excitement of male-male sex with the excitement of getting away with a crime. In addition, there was an emphasis on the homosexual potential of criminal acts, such as the homosexual take presented on the mutilation of an 11-year-old boy, sensationalized by the media despite no real indication that any anal penetration had occurred.\textsuperscript{13} Male homosexuality was romanticized as a mysterious subculture found in the shadowy depths of the cities, hidden and dark. And so continued the social association of homosexuality with the criminal.

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\textsuperscript{12} Suzuki, p. 50.
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The sentiment toward male homosexuality did not shift a great amount heading into the war, though “the militarism of the 1930s and early 1940s had a muting effect upon ero-guro culture on the whole, driving it underground if not entirely out of existence.” Still, the presence of male-male sexuality in literature did not disappear completely, and by the time Japan had fallen under United States occupation, the tight lid present during the war on public representations of homosexuality was starting to loosen. The censorship and regulations relaxed, and there was a building eagerness for new material from an audience who had been forced for years to lose out on what they found fascinating – sexuality.

Thus came the flood of publications dealing with sexuality. Interest in male-male sexuality in particular was on the rise, with the ero-guro movement gaining steam after some years of stagnation. It was during this time that those publications, and the male-male homosexual subculture itself, was becoming progressively more visible. Among them was Mishima’s *Confessions* in 1948, which contained fairly explicit references to homosexual curiosities and desires. In its I-novel formatting, it dared to dip into the realm of autobiography after already having attracted an audience fascinated by homosexuality. The timing was just right; such homosexual exploration was welcomed with open arms.

*Confessions* tells the story of a gay adolescent with an early-budding fascination with the male body and a sexual fetish for gore. The narrator in the story tells of incidents throughout his life in which his love for men and for gore greatly overshadows any desire to have dealings with women. Ultimately he forces himself to be in a relationship with a woman named Sonoko, and

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14 Pflugfelder, p. 327.
he is eventually able to find a deeper meaning in and appreciation for their relationship beyond just that of a man and a woman. Indeed, the story turns out to be autobiographical. Mishima himself, a gay man who married a woman and even went on to have two children with her, had a fetish for blood and for depictions of physical violence. Later on, he came to idealize suicide, finally taking his own life through the ritual disembowelment he so worshipped in other works.¹⁵

There have been some arguments against considering *Confessions* an I-novel. Some scholars recognize the autobiographical nature of the text but do not see it as being naturalistic because of its change of major details in the narrator’s life and the destruction of the parallel between the author and the narrator. But really, there is nothing about the novel that is counter to what it means to be an I-novel. It is not just a story written in the first-person but one that is deeply autobiographical in content and psychology. It is true that the individual incidents within the narrator’s life do not match up perfectly with the author’s life, but that does not detract from the novel as a confession or a vehicle for self-revelation. In fact, it is precisely because *Confessions* is an I-novel that it holds such an esteemed place in literature as a part of the “gay canon” and from the standpoint of influential Japanese literature as a whole. What makes it striking and important is that it is Mishima’s deepest revelation, speaking to the personal nature of homosexuality and set within a time when all kinds of literature about homosexuality and sexuality in general were coming to the forefront.

In terms of literary chronology, *Watashi* falls into the body of gay literature exactly sixty years after *Confessions* does. *Watashi* comes after the gay boom and is situated in a political and

social climate that is completely unlike that of Confessions. While the fascination with the “other” still exists in Japan, as evident in the way that that difference is still a key focus in all forms of media, sexuality – especially male-male homosexuality – has broken out beyond the confines of criminality and has settled somewhat comfortably into a place where it is understood as absolutely real, if still not absolutely right, in the eyes of the public.

Despite the social differences of their eras, there can be some parallels drawn between the two works. Tsubaki seems to borrow the idea of a “lifelong confession” in that parts of her life are revealed bits at a time, and much like the narrator in Confessions, Tsubaki gives the reader the opportunity to come to understand her feelings and ideologies as they shift throughout her life. Of course, any attempt to prove that the correlation between Confessions and Watashi is direct in this instance would be tenuous, but it is true that some literary techniques that were employed in the former have survived over a period of decades and made their way into the latter, and it is important to recognize that link, if for no other reason than to see that trend in gay literature (and literature in general) over a period of time.

It goes without saying that along with any similarities, there are necessarily a number of differences between the works. The tone between the two, for example, differs greatly. Both protagonists – Tsubaki in her work and the narrator in Confessions – face pressures to conform and negative criticisms of who they are at an elemental level, but those pressures and criticisms come from separate entities and in different contexts. A key point in the difference in reading and writing the two works comes firstly from the nature of the subject matter itself and the way in which each narrator, actual or fictional, is forced to deal with his or her problems. In Tsubaki’s
Watashi, the narrator is the author herself, and the issues she deals with are her own problems that she has had to overcome throughout her lifetime. The issues themselves, for a person who has never doubted who she was and has been forced to deal largely with the people around her, are criticisms and expectations from outside burrowing their way into her life. On the other hand, the scornful nature of the self-deprecation and self-loathing expressed by the narrator in Confessions shows an internal struggle that may be more difficult for the dissociated reader to internalize. Indeed, when Confessions was first published, many people did not take literally the homosexual desires articulated throughout the work but instead chose to read it as a parody of an I-novel because the subject matter was so lurid that it was seen to be either as “[an expression] of immature love or as satire on the aridity of post-war Japan.”

Of course, the differences between the methods of autobiographical storytelling do not end there. It is within the format itself that a difference exists in the reader’s understanding and the author’s ability to express him- or herself. The memoir format of Watashi is simultaneously more accessible and more simple; the I-novel format allows for in-depth analysis but strays from a “blank template” of sorts into which the reader can fit his own experiences. Both formats tell the story of a person’s life, but with vastly different emphases.

For example, an emergent theme in Tsubaki’s life, as told in her memoir Watashi during a chapter about her adolescence, was the struggle between how she acted and how her mother expected her to act. The act itself of “rebelling” against one’s parents is not unique to Tsubaki; it

is a moment in life that many people can associate with, which is a reason that Tsubaki’s work can be understood so intimately despite the decidedly limited experience that the majority of readers will have with the main focus of the work (the question of one’s own gender). The aspect of Tsubaki’s struggles with her mother that was the basis of her suffering as a child was her mother’s rejection of who Tsubaki was. Tsubaki only wanted an ally to understand her and to help her through what was potentially a very difficult time in her life, but the person she should have received the most support from had effectively turned her back on who Tsubaki truly was, isolating her even further from her own family.

Tsubaki recalls a moment from her first year of middle school, during which her mother told her, “You have a penis,17 so you should act like a real man.” In her narration, Tsubaki explains her response to this: “But that wasn’t how it was. The person I wanted most to understand [how I felt] didn’t understand one bit.”18 She continues on to explain that because she was an only daughter, she did not have any people her age with whom she could discuss her problems, so her experience of living in a household in which she could not talk of her troubles continued on. But ultimately, she says, looking back in the briefest of afterthoughts, she was happy, and her narrative leaves it at that.

The physical format of the memoir allows for this anecdote to fit logically into the story of her life. The reader is pulled into that story, from beginning to end, as she narrates the different aspects of what she believes made her the person she has become. The frank nature of

17 The quote uses the phrase “‘tail’ attached,” which is the euphemism for having a penis that Tsubaki adopts at the beginning of her memoir and uses throughout. More about her choice of wording can be found in the subsequent section concerning Watashi as a form of entertainment.
18 Tsubaki, pp. 78-79.
her memoir allows the reader to experience those quick snapshots of her life, to relive the moments with her, to feel as she felt. And as the story progresses and her life is revealed bit by bit, the reader comes to understand how her life – and her relationship with her mother – developed over time. The introspection and retrospection during the moments in question are minimal in deference to the overall growth throughout the story.

Experiences told through Mishima’s Confederations, however, take on a different feel, not only in terms of who the “antagonist” is within the story (where Tsubaki’s “antagonist” for a time is her mother, the narrator in Confederations constantly gets into heated arguments with himself), but also in terms of the way in which the narrator chooses to look at his own life in retrospect. The I-novel format allows the author a certain amount of space to play with thoughts and emotions, to go beyond simple step-through recollection and to delve into a more complicated response to the emotions that the narrator is feeling. Mishima uses the vehicle of the I-novel to recreate not only a moment in time, but the atmosphere in which that moment occurred. He much less expects the reader to empathize with the narrator in his self-deprecation but much more wants the reader to understand the feelings with which the narrator approaches each moment in his life. A passage following an initial instance of courtship with the woman Sonoko reads like the berating words that Tsubaki received from her mother, but the difference is that the scorn comes from within:

“Then again a different voice mocked me, secret and persistent. This voice was filled with an almost feverish honesty, a human feeling I had never experience before. It bombarded me with questions in quick succession: Is
it love you feel? If so, all right. But do you have a desire for women?
Aren’t you deceiving yourself when you say that it’s toward her alone that
you have never had a ‘lustful desire’? Aren’t you trying to hide from
yourself the fact that actually you’ve never had a ‘lustful desire’ for any
woman?”\(^\text{19}\)

The sentiments expressed are not necessarily sentiments that many readers can identify with,
unlike Tsubaki’s experience, which appeals to the broader idea of being misunderstood at the
core by someone whom one so desperately wants to be understood by. Mishima is not attempting
to receive understanding from the readership the way Tsubaki is, nor is the narrator in
Confessions lamenting a lack of understanding from anyone outside of his head. Instead,
Mishima uses the narrator in Confessions to express his thoughts and reactions to what could
very well have been a struggle he experienced in his own life. He is able to distance himself from
the specific experience of the narrator while at the same time working through a set of emotions
that he identified with on a more personal basis.\(^\text{20}\) His goal is not to tell the truth, but his thoughts
are revealed nonetheless.

The difference of the formats, of course, has a great impact on the ways in which the
works are digested. Watashi is a straight-faced autobiographical text, without the trappings of
characters or fictional plot points, so it gets to the heart of the “gender question” it constantly


\(^{20}\) Of course, it is to some extent speculative just how closely Mishima identified with the narrator of Confessions at
any particular point of the novel, but based on later interviews with Mishima in which he explains that the events of
the novel happened in real life in more or less the same way, it is reasonable to assume that at least some of what the
narrator felt and experienced was based on Mishima’s own feelings and experiences. See Lilly, pp. 127-143.
asks and is able to involve the reader in a personal, intimate way. *Confessions*, on the other hand, is on the surface a fictional story. One, therefore, cannot be sure without digging through Mishima’s personal life whether an attitude or an experience outlined in the story was actually existent in his life or was simply a device used to make the story interesting.

There have been criticisms of the I-novel as self-indulgent and full of pride about the perceived uniqueness of the experiences.\(^{21}\) This kind of thought is certainly in line with a deeper look at Mishima, who admitted to a narcissism so great that he spent many hours body-building and appearing in erotic photographs.\(^{22}\) The advantage of this literary narcissism, though, this belief that what is being written is unique, is that the writers of I-novels do not attempt to represent society as a whole. Therefore, that which is being represented is the truest and purest self,\(^{23}\) as close to a strict autobiography as one can hope to get without actually being an autobiography.

It would not be unreasonable to say that *Watashi* would have achieved much different things had it been an I-novel. The questions of which details are real might have been question—did her mother really say that to her? Was that really how she came to be friends with that person?—but Tsubaki would have been given freedom to really focus on moments of her life without bringing the narrative too close to home. Nonetheless, especially in the current time in which transsexual individuals are progressively being brought into the fold of Japanese mainstream culture, *Watashi*’s memoir format is well-suited for the story it tells. The memoir, in its blatant autobiography, is more frank than an I-novel, which necessarily has some elements of

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\(^{21}\) Suzuki, p. 60.

\(^{22}\) Lilly, pp. 128-129.

\(^{23}\) Suzuki, p. 60.
fiction in it. In addition, the aforementioned “narcissism” of the I-novel in the blind belief of its uniqueness might hinder the process of consciously writing for and engaging with a wider audience, which is what allowed Tsubaki in *Watashi* to enter into a dialogue with her readers with an eye on mutual understanding.

**Examination of *Watashi: Watashi as Entertainment***

As with most materials produced for a mass market, *Watashi* extends beyond its memoir format to appeal to a large following as a work of entertainment. The format itself is only one aspect of what makes *Watashi* an accessible work to a wide array of readers. The honesty with which Tsubaki presents herself through stories about her life is one way in which the work lends itself to entertainment – the simple and unadorned tale of her life, without the trappings of an ego to smooth over the harrier aspects of her relationships with the people around her, at once makes the reader feel closer to Tsubaki and incites reflection on the reader’s part. The reader, in encountering a difficult memory, may be forced to recall his own difficult memories and reflect on what he learned from them, not unlike the way Tsubaki actively reflects on her own life throughout her memoir.

Another way in which *Watashi* excels as a work of entertainment is in the language itself. The text is explanatory (especially of technical or niche terms related to her brand of transsexuality) without being condescending, and the words flow in an exceedingly easy-to-read manner. She allows the reader to be a part of the events of her life by inviting the reader in through dialogue underscored by narration. Even the earliest events of her life, which she must
have been told about after the fact owing to her inability to remember them herself, are narrated in the moment, as if the reader is actually there to experience them. She tells, for example, the tale of her birth: “He was born! It’s a boy!’ My father called his parents right away.”

She goes on to express her concern with the situation, attributing very simply and factually what she later recognized as grief to her newborn self, who could not possibly have thought the way she thinks about the event now: “[The traditional male name] was a lot, too much. Even though I was born a girl... Because of the ‘tail,’ the doctors and my parents all thought I was a boy.”

While the reader logically knows that Tsubaki was not thinking those things at the time, just minutes into the world, her open discussion of her emotions entices the reader to want to learn more about why she came to feel the way she did, and it gives the reader something new to look forward to.

Throughout the text, Tsubaki also makes the vocabulary itself easily digestible. She makes the choice to use the word “tail” to signify “penis,” which reveals a vulnerability she has in her inability to write the name of the thing that has caused her so much pain throughout her life simply by its existence in relation to her body. This substitution in vocabulary also demonstrates her trust in the reader to understand why she has chosen to tell her story the way she has, and she asks the reader to actively substitute in the actual word (if he so chooses) where she chooses to use the euphemism. She explains, “In going back and writing about my story, I wasn’t able to write the word that I can’t go without saying, ‘penis.’ ... In Japanese it can be called the ‘tail,’ so please allow me to use the word ‘tail’ in order to say ‘penis.’”

This appeal

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24 Tsubaki, p. 15.
25 Tsubaki, p. 15.
26 Tsubaki, p. 11. It should be noted that she does not spell out the word for “penis” here but instead censors it, using おちんちん (ochinchin; notably a feminine version of the word, whereas a man would call it chinko). While throughout the text she occasionally quotes another person as saying the actual word, she herself refrains from using it.
to the reader is found very early on in the text, signifying the trust that she places in the reader and allowing the reader to feel a certain closeness to Tsubaki from the beginning.

There are, of course, different ways in which a text can be entertaining that do not have to do with the presentation. Tsubaki’s life, especially her early life in which she was criticized and misunderstood by her parents, is full of sorrow, but her story is entertaining in that it is told casually, as if it is a friendly dialogue. But in an alternative view on entertainment, the story itself can be entertaining, as is the case with the Heian-era gender-play story *The Changelings*.

*The Changelings* has no authorship that can be definitively placed in time or even in gender. After its initial release, dated through analysis of language and cultural elements to the late Heian era, it seemed to be lost and uncirculated until it came back into focus in fairly modern times. Whether it is the subject matter itself, with its story of a brother and sister whose natural inclinations are toward the gender roles of the opposite sex, or the overt and crude emphasis on physicality, the story was lost – neglected or even scorned – for much of its existence.\(^{27}\) Who the author was is also a question left unanswered. While the story is written in a woman’s style, scholars have suggested that the poor use of language may be indicative of a male author who failed in his attempts to imitate women’s writing.\(^{28}\)

On top of being ambiguous in authorship, *The Changelings* is also ambiguous in reception as well. The two most common readings of the work are a comic reading and a serious reading. The comic approach to the text is based on the plot itself and the very strange occurrences that happen to the characters throughout the story. Translator Rosette Willig


\(^{28}\) Willig, p. 5.
explains, "In some respects [The Changelings] can certainly be seen to fit the comic mode. Its plot can be seen to reveal the exaggerated absurdity and improbability conducive to comedy." The more serious approach focuses on the nature of the content itself, with very grave consequences to sexual and gender-related deviance that seems to suggest a heavier kind of karma and realism involved in the characters' constant sexual problems, which were considered at the time to be "grave maladies."

While the pragmatic and cautionary aspects of the story should not be overlooked (for it is unfair to label any one work as exclusively one thing and not the other), the main focus of the story can easily be the story itself, and undoubtedly the story came out of hiding because of its blend of pragmatism and entertainment.

The most pervasive entertaining aspect of the story is the dramatic irony present throughout the tale – the reader knows the truth about the brother and sister. He is told in unspoken confidence about their predicament, and he is able to experience the rest of the events of the story with that knowledge. Like Tsubaki's work, The Changelings encourages the reader to become an active, knowing part of the story from the beginning, where the reader is told of the conscious decision to switch the gender roles of the brother and sister: "Hereafter I shall refer to the children as the others had come mistakenly to do; the son I shall call the daughter, and the daughter the son." There is a certain pleasure that can be gained from being "in on the secret" about the biological sex of the brother and the sister, and that pleasure is magnified as the story

29 Even in English texts, the story is often known by its Japanese title, Torikaebaya Monogatari, which Willig chose to use throughout her introduction to the story.
30 Willig, p. 8.
31 Willig, p. 9.
32 Willig, p. 16.
progresses and the characters all encounter different aspects of sexuality that they are not expecting to encounter based on the perceived gender of the brother and sister. Even the siblings themselves have moments of surprise, like the several moments when a male friend of the sister (posed as a man and therefore in the friend's confidence) laments the lack of interest displayed by the brother (who is posed as a woman, but is actually a man uninterested in other men).

Despite the prolonged reversal of roles, which results in quite a number of misunderstandings and mysterious pregnancies, eventually their gender roles are reverted to fit their biological sexes, and the story comes to a decidedly happy, neatly-tied close. The reader has been pulled through a long and confusing tale, but in the end the story "rights" itself into roles that are easily understood, and social and political glory is found on the part of all involved.

As would be expected of two works from such vastly different time periods, the writing employed in each work is different from the other in a variety of ways. *Watashi*, for example, is written like a play-by-play story through Tsubaki's life, and almost like a conversation, inviting the reader in to ask questions and have them answered as he progresses through the text. The writing is simple and the words flow smoothly, reaching her audience of "anyone and everyone who will listen" very easily. Indeed, in writing a memoir, Tsubaki hoped to clarify her life situation to those who knew her from television (presumably a great amount of people, seeing as she is a national television personality) or were interested in the more intricate details of her life; she wrote with those people in mind.

The question of whom *The Changelings* is meant for as a text depends on the reading of the work itself. If, for example, it is meant to be read strictly as a serious, moralistic text, its
readership would likely be scholars and the religious, but if it is meant to be a more satirical piece, it is conceivable that it was a work that circulated – to the guffaws of men and women alike – within court. It is reasonable to believe that an element of credibility in the latter case was an underlying reason why the text could have been read as entertainment – after all, “such impersonations (under many layers of garments) did in fact occur in the court society of eleventh-century Japan, when the roles of women and men were so rigidly delineated.”

Scholars have argued for both readings, and both make some historical sense, considering the historical emphasis on morality and pragmatism in literature, especially as compared to modern day.

The *The Changelings*’s lasting survival cannot be understated, especially in light of the initial limited audience that the work may have had. It has survived centuries of social and literary upheaval within Japan, even to come back out of literary “hiding” within recent centuries to become appreciated as a classic text. What it is that makes it relevant and entertaining might be different for each person, but the general consensus remains that it has stayed on board as a part of the canon of gay literature, and as such, it places and informs the literature that has come after it, whether or not that literature subscribes to the same ideas.

*The Changelings* was written for a limited audience, an audience perhaps less ready to accept the story than the audience that Tsubaki wrote for in *Watashi*. That difference in audience should be duly noted when comparing the texts, and it is with the understanding that *Watashi* is

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meant for a wider audience that *Watashi* finds its place in the body of gay literature. Over the course of a good few centuries, the course of literature itself has shifted from one of limited focus and attention to one that can be consumed by the masses. *Watashi* takes advantage of the place in which it fits into society and reaches out to that larger audience, now more literate and more interested in gay issues. It is set apart from *The Changelings* by simple virtue of its historical context, but it is the deliberate nature in which Tsubaki uses that historical context to her advantage that her work has come to reach the wide and varied audience that it has.

The accessibility of an autobiographical text is important, especially for a person like Tsubaki who wishes to explain the way she has led her life and encourage people to understand the kinds of hardships she went through on her way to where she is now. Those personal ideas and concerns come to the forefront in an autobiographical text, but what makes them easily understandable is the way in which they are presented. Tsubaki does a fine job of mixing autobiography and entertainment in her work, and it serves as a vehicle through which she is able to put forward her thoughts to the widest possible audience.

**Examination of *Watashi*: *Watashi* as Social Commentary (“Manifesto”)**

If it were not for the autobiographical nature of *Watashi*, by which the reader is introduced to a large amount of intimate and personal emotions, and the entertaining format in which it is delivered, through which the reader becomes able and willing to continue on with the story, the worth of *Watashi* as a text would have ended before it began. It is because of those two aspects of the work, however, that the third and perhaps most important aspect can emerge – its
existence as social commentary.

A broader definition of “social commentary” is necessary in order to appreciate *Watashi* for what it attempts to do in terms of expression within the body of gay literature. As with the gay rights movement in the United States, on the heels of Stonewall with slogans like “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it,” it is the presence itself of a previously underappreciated or neglected idea that is a valuable part of social commentary. The presence of a movement and the widespread acknowledgement of its existence in and of itself makes an impact — instills a certain dose of social commentary — on the ears that it is trying to reach as well as some ears that just happen to be close by. Through that existence, a movement has a voice; through that existence, the people within the movement create their own space in which to become even more visible and to tell their stories to the people around them.

The gay presence movement in the United States during the late 1960s is a fine example of the power of presence to become social commentary. One of the slogans of the gay movement at the end of the decade was a mandate that members of the gay community “Come out!”, which held a variety of meanings — it was a call for activism, for proud self-affirmation, and for a gay presence in the political climate of the day.34

It is along those lines that a work like Tsubaki’s *Watashi* can be considered social commentary. Where a satirist might remark on an oppressive government through drawn-out literary allegory, Tsubaki uses herself and her story as a form of social commentary, as a “manifesto” with which she declares who she is and what she demands — acceptance.

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The “flavor” of social commentary is easily apparent in Watashi at every point of the memoir. It begins, even before the title page and the table of contents, with the three questions she always hears as a New Half individual, and the blunt condemnation following:

"'When did you realize [that you were a woman]?' 'Which do you like, men or women?' 'When you go to the bath or toilet, which one do you go to?' Till now, I’ve been repeatedly asked these, my most hated three questions, countless, countless times. If you read this book, I think that you’ll be able to begin to understand the answers to these questions."

It is in passages like these that Tsubaki’s vested interest in making her own social commentary heard comes forward. Throughout the text, she takes every opportunity to express her unhappiness with the things that she has encountered in her life, from the words available for describing people like her, to the assumption that a person is male just because she has a penis attached. Tsubaki makes clear that what she wants is for people to listen to her, and the way she does it is by, quite simply, “putting it out there” – making it available and understandable, so that people can read her thoughts and come to their own understanding of the issues that she is bringing forward.

In the same way, the work Yes Yes Yes, a collection of vignettes by Hiruma Hisao about a teenaged boy who plays host and sex toy to a variety of male clients, is social commentary by virtue of its existence, especially in terms of the historical context in which it was first received. Yes Yes Yes was published in 1989, just before the beginning of the contemporary “gay boom,”

35 Tsubaki, p. 1.
during which ideas about the gay community in Japan underwent a major upheaval. It was, as mentioned previously, the time in which there was a veritable explosion in the media of gayvisibility. Significantly, there had been a prior gay boom in the 1950s, which some scholars have coined “the original ‘gay boom,’” and in true “social commentary” fashion, the increasing presence of gay bars led to media coverage on them and on the workers there, “gay boys,” as well as the clientele that frequented the gay bars. The presence of “gay boys,” who for the most part did not choose to identify as women but instead fell into androgyny, persisted until the 1980s, when their influence died out and eventually New Half individuals took their place.

What that all meant in terms of visibility was just that — visibility. People were made aware of the existence of the gay boys in those gay bars, and their patronage from both homosexual men and companionable women increased. And it was in their existence, in that consciousness of their presence in the world, that the gay boys were given the opportunity to speak, to clarify who they were and who they were not (not women, but androgynous; not all gay, but sometimes just companions). Had they not been brought into the light, they perhaps would not have needed that clarification to begin with, but because they were in that position, they could make that social commentary — educate people about something they did not know or understand, inform the world in the way they felt was most beneficial for them.

As is the case in the media, the “existence” and therefore social commentary expressed within every work of literature is different. The same is true for Watashi and Yes Yes Yes. Tsubaki’s memoir is obviously meant to bring forth the issues of being a transsexual individual and of being born with a body incongruent with the feelings of the individual. Tsubaki baldly
Suhardjo says, “I’m coming out as having [Gender Identity Disorder],” from which she springboards into a brief discussion on the words used to refer to people like her and the way in which she chooses to be understood. It could very well be the first time for her readers to understand the language used and the concepts themselves. That forum she has to expose others to the concepts she has grown up around and the emotions that she feels as a New Half individual is extremely powerful. Even if it is just one person who reads her work and comes to understand her situation more fully, she has written social commentary on what exactly it means to be who she is in the society she lives in – she has participated in activism and created a manifesto for herself.

*Yes Yes Yes* approaches social commentary in the same way. In introducing the ways in which gay men experience sexual encounters, Hiruma opens up new ideas on just what it means to be a gay man, to have homosexual experiences, simply by putting text on a page. The varied ways in which the narrators of Hiruma’s work express their homosexuality, and the varied people with which that expression is done, is the pinnacle of what makes his work so important in social commentary through existence. It says with fourteen separate stories, “Not all gay men are the same. They choose to do different things for different reasons, and they hope to get different things out of their own experiences.”

Take, for example, the narrator of the prologue who wants to figure out just who he is and why he does what he does. “It was a time when I was searching for meaning, meaning, meaning in my life, and I came here looking for it on some deeper level. Yet at the same time, part of me wanted to be freed from the troublesome threat of meaning.”

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36 Tsubaki, p. 17.
contrast with the narrator from the story “Love,” who says of a customer at a bar, “He understood something inside me. I wasn’t especially hoping for anybody to understand me, but he understood that thing within me as his own pain.” There is on one hand a man who ultimately wants to reject the deeper meaning of whatever it is he is doing, but there is on the other hand a man who was not looking for anything deeper to begin with but instead finds that he is at a deeper level appreciative for what it was he actually receives. They are just two in a lineup of different men with different experiences, and they represent a group of men whose lives are uniquely their own, who are just beginning to come out into the open.

There it is: the existence that makes a difference to those who come across it. Those especially at the beginning of the gay boom who had not personally encountered gay men in their lives are given the opportunity to understand what they are feeling from the inside. Those who vaguely know about what it meant to be a gay man are able to realize just how varied a culture it can be. Those who have lived that life are empowered by the confirmation that they are not alone, and that there are those men out there, fictional and otherwise, who share the same experiences.

What is shown through Yes Yes Yes is precisely that there is a varied gay community, filled with different kinds of men who do things for different reasons. Especially in a culture that “fails to discriminate between different types of difference, ... [in which] queers are basically all queer,” Yes Yes Yes demonstrates a presence, gives a voice to the men who are different from other men who are themselves different from a third kind, et cetera. The “cause” that is begging

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38 Hiruma, p. 335.
for commentary is the dissemination of information and a plea for understanding. Just as one straight man is different from another, one gay man is different from the next, and *Yes Yes Yes* uses a variety of stories to make that idea clear.

As with any kind of social commentary and activism, the works by Tsubaki and Hiruma differ greatly despite using the same idea of existence as commentary. Tsubaki’s work, from an autobiographical perspective, specifically addresses issues that she has come across in her life, and through explaining what those issues are and talking about why they are issues, she has taken steps to educate the readers and to instill in them their own sense of the issues; she has opened the door for discussion just by mentioning them and making sure people know that they exist and that they *are* questions to be concerned about. On the other side, Hiruma uses fictional accounts of a variety of homosexual encounters to explore the varied existence of a group that is too often, by media or internal prejudice, conflated and caricaturized to be a single kind of person. In highlighting the different people involved and the different reasons for their actions, he is able to make clear what needs to be made clear – that not all gay men are the same, and that each individual will have a different story to tell.

In terms of overall accessibility of the tales of existence-turned-commentary, *Watashi* is clearly meant for a wider audience, with precise definitions and an inviting writing style, and the portions of society it appeals to come in all shapes and sizes, all with unique backgrounds and understandings of the message that Tsubaki is trying to get across in her work. The transsexual individuals reading her work may not have to have Gender Identity Disorder explained to them, but they may find value in the way in which Tsubaki comes out as having GID and subsequently
tells the story of living with it. Those who know her simply as a celebrity and want to better understand where she came from are treated to a crash course in what it means to understand oneself one way and to be understood another. The commonality between the readers is clear—they are all asked to consider the society they live in, with its stereotypes and its forced adoption of gender, and in their reflection they are taking in that social commentary.

The social commentary from *Yes Yes Yes* is also valuable, though the vehicle through which it is presented, an extremely explicit fictional story essentially about different forms of gay sex, sets it apart from both Tsubaki’s work *Watashi* and its predecessors within the realm of Japanese gay literature. The audience is limited, and it may even pander to a specific set of people, causing others to turn away from the work if they had no interest in it in the first place. But the fact remains that it is still there, available, published where it has not been in the past. That existence is the first step in a process of “coming out” as a kind of literature meant for a certain audience, and therefore as a set of people whose experiences they find valuable enough to need to be known.

The differing audiences in works of social commentary can work to the advantage of those commentators. Separate individuals or groups can make the same commentary, and that is important because the audience for each is different. Ideally, though, in terms of the spread of knowledge through widening visibility, what would happen is that the existence of one group would inspire the coming out of another, and in a domino effect of presence movements, all of the different groups of people whose voices need to be heard—New Half, gay men, *hikikomori*, housewives—will be heard, and their messages will come to see the light of day. The readership
may not be the same for all of the groups, but from those who learn about the issues and come to understand the positions that the groups have, there is a chance that another person with a different story to tell may come forward. It is in this way that works of gay literature, like _Watashi_ and _Yes Yes Yes_, can find their niche and make an impact, one reader at a time.

Tsubaki’s _Watashi_ works as a piece of literature on three different levels. It is autobiographical in its memoir format, entertaining in its writing style, and socially meaningful in that it directly refers to the issues of being a New Half individual. It is in these three ways, working with and in contrast to other autobiographies, entertaining tales, and works of social commentary, that _Watashi_ has created for itself a valuable place in the body of gay literature. And in recognizing the similarities and differences between these works, another connection appears: the lines between literature, history, and society are drawn unflinchingly taut.

**Conclusion**

Through the work of Tsubaki Ayana and the way it is placed within gay literature, we can begin to understand the impact that literature has on the world around it. The intersection of literature, history, and society is the place in which the three separate entities find their collective power. Literature would hold no emotional value without its historical context; history would just be a series of events without the social implications; society would scarcely understand itself and the people within it without a vehicle like literature. They each separately mean something miniscule, but the sum of their parts is only a fraction of what they all become together.
Oftentimes, literature is a reflection of the times, rooting itself in tangible events or in social constructs dependent on a certain place and time. History itself traces the changes within a society and the changes over time in how people think and breathe. Frequently, literature can be the tool that moves people in the first place, that inspires action and incites change.

The historical context of the works of gay literature discussed above all inform the ways those works are accepted and digested within the society in which they are presented. Mishima’s *Confessions* came at the right time for an I-novel of its nature. The war had run its course, as had the accompanying stifling atmosphere surrounding works about sexuality, and interest in male-male homosexuality was again on the rise. Because people wanted a work about male-male homosexuality and were eager for the return of *ero-guro* literature, the self-loathing — to some extent self-incriminating — narrator in *Confessions* was given a stronger and more valid voice, one that decades later still reverberates within the body of Japanese literature as a whole.

*Watashi* comes at an important time in the history of Japan socially. When the traditional family system seems to be breaking down in favor of later marriage and the birthrate is consistently low, there are pressures, both from older generations and from the nation itself, to conform to certain standards and to fulfill roles — father and mother, for example — that will foster the growth of the nation. Especially at a time like the one that Japan is facing at this very moment, what *Watashi* says about being oneself despite outside pressures to be someone else is valuable. Readers are given the chance to see how Tsubaki has made a life for herself beyond the one that her mother expected her to have (namely, that of a man), and certainly the social implications of that individuality and that self-confidence, whether good or bad, are not lost on
the people living in that place at that time. In the search for happiness, or for family, or for tradition, it is a work of literature like *Watashi* that can guide individuals to make the decisions that they make, decisions that fit into their history and impact the people around them.

Much of history itself can be traced through literature, regardless of content or audience. Following the gender trends over time, for example, is as easy as picking out the gender roles that the characters – fictional or not – in literature placed in the context of the society around them. The gender roles of men and women throughout the works changed greatly, a sign not only of the times but of the direction in which gender may have developed over the course of history. What was typical for a woman to do in court was different than what the typical woman in war-torn Japan did, which itself is different from what the expectations for men and women are today. Each piece of literature existed at a certain moment in the historical timeline, and each character was a reflection – whether honest, satirical, or counter – of the people of the time. Indeed, literature itself can be the inspiration that moves history, the voice that gets all of the Elizabeth Bennets to stick up for their sisters or all of the Tsubaki Ayanas to stand up to their parents and be true to themselves until they find acceptance.

The existence of works like *The Changelings* from very early on is significant in terms of understanding the development of gay literature, of a queer community within society. Even as literature, the gender-play is the main conflict within the story, and in that way we can see that gender – gender as determined by sex, gender roles within society – has been a topic of thought for centuries, if not longer. We can see the social trends stemming across the body of literature – the effeminate male in *The Changelings*, to the very masculine male ideal in the mind of the
narrator of *Confessions*, to the different kinds of men in *Yes Yes Yes*, to the man who was actually never a man in the first place in *Watashi*. Through literature we can make connections based on what we know about gender at any given moment, and what the social atmosphere was concerning effeminate men or masculine men, what historical events brought the men who were never really men out into the open.

Two lines (out of dozens, hundreds, thousands) worth tracing for now: What kind of influence did a work like *Confessions* have during post-war Japan? What is the social place that *Yes Yes Yes* holds as a work of gay literature that came out before the gay boom? These questions are interesting and important because they demonstrate the connection between literature and history, and they serve to inform the future while making commentary on the past.

*Confessions*, for example, can be situated several ways in history. It was an I-novel that came out a decade or two after the Japanese Nationalists’ I-novels came out; it was a novel about male-male sexuality when interest in male-male sexuality had once again been piqued; it was a story about a self-loathing gay man in a time and country that could not accept him, where he could not accept himself. In order to appreciate the historical significance of the work along any one thread, it would be useful to isolate that thread and look simply from that perspective. Let us look, then, at *Confessions* in terms of the self-loathing gay man.

It was not always the case that the gay man was self-loathing. It was in the specific instance of *Confessions*’s narrator, a reflection of Mishima’s own thoughts and experiences, that the gay man happened to hate that he was gay. He, like Mishima, entered into a relationship with a woman just because he knew that that was how it was “supposed to be.” He, like Mishima,
came to understand the conditions under which he found things beautiful or attractive or erotic. Emotionally, it speaks to the difficulties of pretending to be someone one is not, of being unhappy with who one is and all that that entails. Historically, it does not speak to anything in particular on its own, but it was placed within the context of a post-militaristic atmosphere where manly men were the ideal and doing anything that fell outside of the norm — such as liking other men — was frowned upon. The interest in *ero-guro* had returned, but that *guro*, the element of grotesqueness, wrongness, criminality, was what informed it as a novel — was the attitude with which the narrator narrated his tale — and placed it in the context of other literature at the time. Ultimately, what it did in history was further that idea of and fascination with *ero-guro*, and it would not be until about a decade later that the tide started to shift and a new kind of male-male homosexuality came to the forefront.

In something of a parallel to *Confessions*, *Yes Yes Yes* came out before the gay boom in the 1990s, a fairly racy and radical work of literature to be found before the gay boom took place and the media frenzy surrounding non-normative individuals settled into what is now a routine appearance by queer individuals in magazines and on television.

What it means for a work of literature to have a social place is not necessarily easily quantified. It depends on the people who read it and the atmosphere in which it was read. At the point when *Yes Yes Yes* was published, Japan had seen a small amount of under-the-table action within the gay community. A small crop of gay and lesbian organizations had been appearing, such as ILGA, the International Lesbian and Gay Association (then just IGA until “Lesbian” was
added in 1987), which had its first public activity in June of 1986. Beyond that, it seemed that what the gay community saw was at a fairly stagnant place socially and politically.

The potential for Yes Yes Yes socially depended entirely on the people who read it, the social climate of the time, and the historical setting it found itself in. One cannot with utmost certainty attribute a social phenomenon to any one work, but the implications can be made. Perhaps Yes Yes Yes was one of a hundred snowflakes that eventually created the snowball of the gay boom, perhaps Yes Yes Yes was met with a wide array of reactions from people who were not expecting such an explicit work, and perhaps gay men took the opportunity afforded by the work to come out in their private lives as one individual gay man unlike any other gay men. The potential for all of that was there, whether or not it actually happened, and what ends up being truly important in all of that is that there are those social implications. It is because it is literature, spread across a certain audience at a certain time in a certain place, that any one of those things could have happened. Whether or not it is quantifiable is not the issue; what is important is that the work, any work, has that potential to impact society in minute and immense ways.

In the end, we have come to understand Watashi as an autobiography, a work of entertainment, and social commentary. It is also a third in the trio of literature, history, and society that dance together to inform and create the world as we knew it throughout history and as we know it today. We have compared and contrasted Watashi with other works in gay literature that fall under the same categories, and seeing how it has added to the conversation that we have had thus far within that body of gay literature, we can use the similarities and

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differences to trace the journey that literature, history, and society have made jointly up this point. What that grants us is knowledge, a deeper appreciation for and understanding of different kinds of literature, different points in history, and different aspects of society.

The memoir, and especially the memoir about New Half in the current social climate and historical place in time, is a literary achievement in a number of genres and categories, including the autobiography, the work of entertainment, and the social commentary. Each individual work is special, informed by its own social standing and historical background, and *Watashi* is no different. It is a difficult and to some extent arbitrary endeavor to attempt to value one work’s worth over another, since it is clear that the close relationship between literature, history, and society means that every work will have some kind of value, some kind of impact on the world around it. But it is certain that *Watashi* comes at the right place and the right time – and that if it were to come at any other place or any other time, it would still be the right place and the right time; that the literature will make it the right place and the right time, and the subsequent impact it has on history and society will determine what it meant to be “right.”

There are some questions that are left, and will be left, unanswered until we see how history shifts (or does not shift), how society reacts (or does not react), what trends in other works of literature happen (or do not happen). What might *Watashi* portend literarily, historically, and socially in terms of gay literature and gay culture? Does *Watashi* move the world – any world – in a certain direction? Does it need to?

All these questions, and many more, cannot be answered by looking at one moment in particular or one work on its own. It must necessarily be examined in context, and it is that
context – the shifts between, within, beyond – that we can trace once we figure out what it is we are seeing. Until then, all that is certain is that literature is something created from the bodies that shape it, the histories and societies that give it its place, and in turn, literature examines, informs, and creates the world around it.
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