



## Confessions of a Mask

*Yukio Mishima*

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## Confessions of a Mask Yukio Mishima

**Confessions of a Mask** is the story of an adolescent who must learn to live with the painful fact that he is unlike other young men. Mishima's protagonist discovers that he is becoming a homosexual in polite, post-war Japan. To survive, he must live behind a mask of propriety.

Christopher Isherwood comments—"One might say, 'Here is a Japanese Gide,'....But no, Mishima is himself—a very Japanese Mishima; lucid in the midst of emotional confusion, funny in the midst of despair, quite without pomposity, sentimentality or self-pity. His book, like no other, has made me understand a little of how it feels to be Japanese. I think it is greatly superior, as art and as a human document to his deservedly praised novel, **The Sound of Waves**."

## Confessions of a Mask Details

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## From Reader Review Confessions of a Mask for online ebook

### William1.2 says

Second reading. A portrait of the artist as a solipsistic young queen. The model is clearly Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, with a bit of André Gide thrown in too. I'm afraid the narrator has also read far too much Freud. It's a wonder then he didn't know something more about the concept of projection. For the early memories "recounted" here, those of a child three or four years old, are clearly imbued with the erotic sensibility of an experienced adult. This aspect of the novel seemed strange to me. I am not sure why the author wanted it. Mishima was 24 when he published the book. You might argue that the novel is pretentious—and, oh God, it is!—but it's also a work of burning ambition and monumental talent. I do long for an alternate translation. This may be naïve of me, but I find it hard to believe that a sentence as wooden as "The pleasure you experience at this moment is a genuine human feeling" could be anything but a failure of translation. And the book is rife with such sentences. So a problematic but fascinating novel, especially for those interested in the issues gays have historically faced when negotiating the straight world. But not a political novel. A novel of inner turmoil and a study into the nature of desire.

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### Joaquín Jiménez says

No había podido terminar esta novela la primera vez que la leí, pero ahora, en una especie de re-lectura, me atreví a circundar nuevamente en esos espacios de infancia, adolescencia e incipiente adultez que relata Koo-Chan, el narrador-protagonista de *Confesiones de una máscara*, como en una especie de evocación de su pasado.

Esta evocación se torna interesante principalmente porque no se trata de recordar con nostalgia lo vivido, sino de auto-leerse para entender el presente. Es un recuerdo tormentoso en que observamos atentamente cómo un hombre experimenta el desajuste durante toda su vida, sin comprender por qué es tan distinto al resto. Se vive en carne propia la disidencia, la extranjería del cuerpo y el complejo entendimiento sobre la sexualidad. Es un enfrentarse a la cultura, que termina convirtiéndose en un espacio inhabitable.

El protagonista de la historia relata cómo, desde que era pequeño, se siente distinto a los demás jóvenes de su edad. Distinto por la atracción de este hacia su mismo sexo o por la convalecencia de su estado físico. Koo-Chan es un niño enclenque que no logra sentirse parte de una cultura que impone ciertas conductas. Y por tal razón, se autoexilia en sí mismo, porque su identidad es una subjetividad aún no trazada en el conocimiento compartido del Japón del siglo XX.

Al menos, para mí, los personajes de Omi y Sonoko son los más fieles representantes de la tradición y la moral. En Omi se vierte esa masculinidad prototípica que obsesiona y enamora al narrador, de igual manera que en Sonoko se deposita la virtud femenina, lo cual queda claro al momento en que esta insinúa que quiere casarse. La virilidad y la comunión matrimonial son los cuchillos afilados de una cultura que pesa sobre los hombros de Koo-Chan.

Algo aparte que me gustó de esta novela fue el erotismo que impregnan algunas escenas. Mishima gusta, y mucho, y sabía cómo crear esas atmósferas de contención entre lo espiritual y lo carnal. Sabe que queremos más de lo segundo, pero nos contiene hasta la última página.

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## ArturoBelano says

Bereket Denizi Serisinden sonra itiraflara tekrar dönecek ve yorumumu 2. Okumadan sonra yapaca??m.

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## B0nnie says

A book can be a doorway into another human heart - *that* is the power of reading. The price of entry however is sometimes high - what we find can be so disturbing that we question if we really want to go there, even for a visit.

*Confessions of a Mask* takes us to some dark places.

We all have masks, of course. Living without any form of protection would be living with an open skin. But our masks are usually light, easily taken off or exchanged as need be.

This mask is made of stone.

The title seems to imply a promise - "all will be revealed" - because after all, it is the mask who is confessing. Well, this exposé is more apparent than real.

Written under a pseudonym, Yukio Mishima, we are given what seems to be a story about a youth named Kochan. But surely it is the secret memories, feelings, and pain of one sad little Kimitake Hiraoka. Yes, it is told in a disarmingly simple style that can be easily breezed through, however you'll want to pause, reflect, study it - a careful reading is very enlightening.

And yes, there is violent homo-eroticism in *Confessions*. That, I think, is a mask within masks. Obsession with death - the painful knowledge of the impermanence of life, and the need to control it, - is the true face underneath the mask. This is a person with a very strong death drive - i.e., a desire to take power from death. The one way to do that is to exit life on one's own terms. And also there's the desire to control beauty - and the strongest power over beauty, like life, is to destroy it.

*"For many years I claimed I could remember things seen at the time of my own birth."*

This is an opening sentence packed with meaning. There is some ambiguity in the word 'claimed'. There is the very stubbornness of the claim. And as it turns out, there is the imagination, that, like the Little Prince, or David Copperfield, is larger than the grownups around him can handle. Kochan was an "unchildlike child".

His childhood was largely spent in his grandmother's sickroom. She was from a Samurai family, and she implants pride and purpose in him. He obsesses over books, pictures - and on one in particular, of a beautiful knight. When he found out that it was Jeanne D'Arc not a man, why did that knock him flat?

*...the sweet fantasies I had cherished concerning his death were now gone.*

When he was about 12 years old, and a certain 'toy' made its wishes known to him.

*It raised its head toward death and pools of blood and muscular flesh.*

There's another image he obsesses over, St. Sebastian and he develops a strong attraction to a boy named

Omi. His fantasies go beyond mere sexual attraction. In his mind he invents "a murder theatre" (in one scenario, a student is violently murdered, put on a table at a banquet, and then "I thrust the fork upright into the heart. A fountain of blood struck me full in the face. Holding the knife in my right hand, I began carving the flesh of the breast, gently, thinly at first..."). He becomes "disgusted with my true self" and "feeling the urge to begin living". But how?

*To begin living my true life...even if it was to be pure masquerade and not my life...*

The price of that decision, at least in part, is paid by the author himself: in 1970, at the age of 45, the real flesh and blood Mishima took a knife, sliced open his stomach, and, as required by the rite of seppuku, was decapitated.

His ideal was 'bunbu ryodo', the way of the pen and the sword. He believed they could join only at the moment of death. We know what he did with the 'sword' - here is what he could do with the pen:

[at a train station after an air raid]

As we went along the passageway we did not receive even so much as a reproachful glance. We were ignored. Our very existence was obliterated by the fact that we had not shared in their misery; for them, we were nothing more than shadows.

In spite of this scene something caught fire within me. I was emboldened and strengthened by the parade of misery passing before my eyes. I was experiencing the same excitement that a revolution causes. In the fire these miserable ones had witnessed the total destruction of every evidence that they existed as human beings. Before their eyes they had seen human relationships, loves and hatreds, reason, property, all go up in flame. And at the time it had not been the flames against which they fought, but against human relationships, against loves and hatreds, against reason, against property.

At the time, like the crew of a wrecked ship, they had found themselves in a situation where it was permissible to kill one person in order that another might live. A man who died trying to rescue his sweetheart was killed, not by the flames, but by his sweetheart; and it was none other than the child who murdered its own mother when she was trying to save it. The condition they had faced and fought against there--that of a life for a life--had probably been the most universal and elemental that mankind ever encounters. *Confessions of a Mask by Yukio Mishima*

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**????? ?????? says**

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*something rise swift-footed to the attack from inside me. Suddenly it burst forth, bringing with it a blinding intoxication . . ."*

It can be argued that human identity is composed of a plethora of masks, each and every one carefully crafted and subsequently picked out for any occasion that might arise.

Some are most comfortable to wear, fitting smoothly on that most expressive part of our bodies, the human face. Others might bring about some slight initial discomfort, but on the whole are quite innocuous, even lending a thrill here and there.

Yet there exists another, more treacherous, type of mask. The one that has spikes protruding from the back of it, poised to mutilate the owner's face, contorting it, piercing its flesh, causing infected wounds, and ultimately coming very near to destroying it.

Those, the user will come to realize sooner or later, can be worn for a limited period of time. They quickly become menacing existential threats, and have to be dispensed with, ere the abyss opens up before him and swallows him whole.

Being the nigh agonizingly frank reveal of self that it is, Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* ( published in 1949 while its author was still in his early twenties ) has ever since garnered a reputation for being the quintessential 'coming out' novel, serving as an inspiration to homosexuals brought up in socially conservative societies everywhere.

Of course, writings portraying males freely exercising their homosexuality saw a great surge in the post-war years (Gore Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* and Truman Capote's *Other Voices Other Rooms* being some of the most notable examples, at least in the US ).

Yet, I think a great disservice is done to Mishima's second work to classify it as merely a 'gay' - albeit semi-autobiographical - novel (does anyone else beside me detest the term?). There are multiple layers of his psyche explored here, themes touched upon, which all would play out in his later work - and, most tragically, life as well.

His apparent awe of the soldier's calling and military glory in general (even though he feigned illness to avoid the draft), the appeal he found in suicide, which he considered to be one of the noblest actions one could perform, are featured prominently. These passages provide a clear hint for what was to follow.

Also disturbing is the supreme titillation Mishima found in the convergence of male youths, torture and death by all manner of gruesome ways. So while I am vaguely curious how his Japanese readership reacted to knowing which gender he turned his affections to, I'm even more so when it comes to what in essence amounts to his sadomasochism and worship of death. One imagines detailing these grotesque erotic fantasies could either make or break a budding author from the moment he admits to them.

Fortunately for Mishima, it made him an international phenomenon. And for good reason. *Confessions of a Mask* is a brave and powerful piece of detailed, rather Freudian, self-examination. Throw the clear influence of Huysmans's decadent hero Des Esseintes in there, and you end up with an intriguing recipe for a novel.

Alas, this is not the fully-formed, masterful Mishima I first encountered in his stupendous *Spring Snow* .

The book is slightly muddled both structurally and prose-wise (perhaps the translation is at fault here?), and at times was unable to grab me as much as I wanted or expected it to. All the elements of his future

masterpieces are patently present, but he hadn't arrived at a controlled, fruitful synthesis of those yet. As a full-length novel, it falls short a tad. He was just too young.

Yet, contained within are some truly gorgeous, descriptive passages to immerse yourself in, which prefigure that older Mishima I cherish so much. His soaring ambition and talent must be obvious to anyone who reads him. It is quite impossible to deny, even by his most ardent detractors.

As for me, I can't wait to continue my – roughly chronological - exploration of both the man (in all his glorious complexity) and the writer. *Forbidden Colours* is next on the list.

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## kaelan says

Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* is of a particular species of literature, one that—despite encompassing such venerable works as Dostoyevsky's *Notes From the Underground* and André Breton's *Nadja*—is no longer in vogue. For the sake of a name, we might dub this species "the subjective novel," insofar as it tends to neglect the furtherance of story or plot in favour of charting out an intricate and scrupulously characterized first-person subjectivity. In the case of *Confessions*, the subjectivity we gain access to belongs to a unnamed Japanese youth, living in Tokyo during the former half of the 20th century. And the novel—crammed into a nutshell—chronicles his struggles in the domains of both love (he suffers from a tragic disjunction between his homosexual *ér?s* and his heterosexual *philia*) and war (Mishima sets the novel against the horrific and oppressive backdrop of World War II).

If *Confessions* were written from a third-person objective vantage point, with no insight into its protagonist's thoughts and emotions, it would be far easier for me to produce a pithy synopsis. Yet such a text would also be extraordinarily and unbearably dull. This is because *Confessions* is a book in which nothing much happens, at least insofar as story is concerned. Take, for instance, one pivotal scene in which our nameless youth catches a glimpse of a classmate's armpit hair during gym class. Plot-wise, nothing more transpires: a quick glance, a tumble of black fur and that's it. Like *Notes* and *Nadja*, however, the "real action" occurs in the subjective reflection that follows. And indeed, we are soon treated to a lengthy exposition on the topics of desire, culture and identity.

All this might seem to suggest that *Confessions* is a fairly dry read, but that's only because I haven't yet had a chance duly praise Mishima's writing style. For if the book is one part philosophical reflection, it's also an equal part poetical expression. Of this, a good enough example as any may be found in the following passage, which I will be so bold as to quote in full, and which is as exquisite as any prose-poem I've ever read:

From the surface offing the waves began and came sliding in over the surface of the sea in the form of restless green swells. Groups of low rocks extended out into the sea, where their resistance to the waves sent splashes high into the air, like white hands begging for help. The rocks were dipping themselves in the sea's sensation of deep abundance and seemed to be dreaming of buoys broken loose from their moorings. But in a flash the swell had passed them by and come sliding toward the beach with unabated speed. As it drew near the beach something awakened and rose up within its green hood. The wave grew tall and, as far as the eye could reach, revealed the razor-keen blade of the sea's enormous ax, poised and ready to strike. Suddenly the dark-blue guillotine fell, sending up a white blood-splash. The body of the wave, seething and falling, pursued its severed head, and for a moment it reflected the pure blue of the sky, that same unearthly blue which is mirrored in the eyes of a person on the verge of death. ...

Such writing has a palpable hallucinatory and disorienting effect on the reader, which makes the journey into another's subjectivity as wild and perplexing as one might expect. Truly an impressive work of literature.

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### **Sidharth Vardhan says**

Mishima's attempt at portrayal of homosexuality gives only mixed results. The generalisations made about homosexuals makes one want to throw the book. If you can ignore those couple of sentences though, it is an interesting portrayal of psychology of a homosexual person living in a society where homosexuals are not supposed to exist. Interesting because I don't always find the author agreeable.

The segregation of sexes that is made in schools and colleges and jails is probably made with aim of keeping people from having sex - but aren't they presuming that all children are heterosexuals? Our narrator studies in one such boys' school. His constant efforts at denials and pretending to be a straight person is one of the two themes of novel.

The other theme is that of war. In a way, our 'mask' is a war child. Born and raised amid wars, taught in military schools. And thus has an obsession with death. An obsession perhaps common to his generation in Japan. That was raised to be soldiers - including the famous suicide bombers.

It not so much shocking then that he should find a sexual satisfaction in sadism and death.

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### **Seemita says**

**Confession**, as a word, has a strong connotation – prelude to its utterance is a hesitation, and that hesitation alone, is sufficient to engulf the confession-maker with an odour that reeks of both delay and guilt.

But Mishima's protagonist can take the liberty, because he is behind a mask. His frail body that fails him in school, denigrating his boyish flavour to a handful of jokes, holds up its masculine remnants at nights, because he is behind a mask. His impressionable juvenile mind that refuses to be grinded between familial ties bordering on love and authority, surrenders to erotic one-upmanship of images on discarded and hidden magazines, because he is behind a mask. His hasty, dubious shot at making a girlfriend and heaping her with a partner's touch despite wriggling out of it mentally (and physically), continues to go unrebuked because he is behind a mask. His unexpected but secretly nurtured corporeal attraction towards his senior, Omi, survives the onslaught of conservatives, because he is behind a mask.

*It is not pain that hovers about his straining chest, his tense abdomen, his slightly contorted hips, but some flicker of melancholy pleasure like music. Were it not for the arrows with their shafts deeply sunk into his left armpit and right side, he would seem more a Roman athlete resting from fatigue, leaning against a dusky tree in a garden.*

*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."*

But masks fall, and with them, fall something that cannot be defined in lumps of clay or words.

Mishima's tale is an exploration undertaken by a young man into the lanes of his sexuality. This journey turns daunting because during it, he encounters, not just his homosexuality, but his homosexuality hanging as an ugly prop over the backdrop of a war-ravaged land in WWII. Part-autobiographical, part-allegoric,

Mishima rips open his heart to bare his innermost battles and jumps in its midst as the lone wager from both sides. Even in his salacious exploits, one can notice his disdain towards the outcomes of war.

*I was the only one who did not have genuine lung trouble. I was pretending instead that I had a bad heart. In those days, one had to have either medals or illness.*

His initiation of the reader into the Tokyo of 1940s is authentic, and unenthused, and thus, not without merit. The beauty captured in his language dances to its master's intent, which is, yet again, expectedly tainted with hues of melancholy and unfulfillment.

*And later, as I looked down at the city from a window of the elevated train, the snow scene, not yet having caught the rays of the rising sun, looked more gloomy than beautiful. The snow seemed like a dirty bandage hiding the open wounds of the city, hiding those irregular gashes of haphazard streets and tortuous alleys, courtyards and occasional plots of bare ground, that form the only beauty to be found in the panorama of our cities.*

In his account of beauty and love, affection and bravery, friendship and isolation, lies a seething pain that is not hungry for an antidote; instead, it breathes on its charred body, heavily and without restraint. The narrative turns, in time, raucously masochistic, and this is precisely where I leave his company for my errands. His obsessive relationship with the nature of his confessions, which emerge dyed in dark, dingy varnishes, run like a treasured vinyl but repeated runs rob it of its haunting melody and its crushing palpability. But one doesn't discard such souvenirs because....

*The moment for parting stood waiting eagerly. A vulgar blues was being kneaded into time.*

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## **Praj says**

*“What we call evil is the instability inherent in all mankind which drives man outside and beyond himself toward an unfathomable something, exactly as though nature had bequeathed to our souls an ineradicable portion of instability from her store of ancient chaos.”- Stephan Zweig.*

The air grew heavier as the blood soared; the sensuality insect crawled with an unprecedented ardor blinding the intoxication that arose from a monstrous swell. The naked flesh bled to the wraith of arrows and while tranquility festooned youthful fragrance, the insect stirred a storm that thundered as cloudy-white patches filled the empty spaces. The musty smell of the ejaculated sperm mingled with the stale cigarette stink that dangled between the tender lips of an eight-year old squatting on the broken stairs, smoking the discarded stub wondering if she could touch the voluptuous breasts of the woman who smiled at her. A topless Barbie lay besides, the naked breasts of a doll immersed in nicotine fumes. Upstairs, a man admired the lacy lingerie beneath his striped shirt and the adored swell of the breasts hid under the layers of a tightly woven bandage far from the reach of the little girl. A worn sponge was being a dutiful servant to the slapping fingers; white mist covering a bare face.

*“Indeed of all kinds of decay in this world, decadent purity is the most malignant.”*

Lust, they say corrupts the purity of love. Puberty brings lust; maturity bestows love. Love is a shapeless sensation that at times normalizes irrationalities. Love has always been an anomalous creature; sensuality

flooding sanity into passionate disorders. If so, then why are we adamant to categorize this amorphous divinity with standardize regularities? What is “normal love”? Who decides its normality stance? We, the so called societal gurus ; prisoners of our very own sins. **‘Confessions of a Mask’**, is a convoluted mêlée of a remorseful conscience between the standardized societal normality and abnormalities.

*“How would I feel if I were another boy? How would I feel if I were a normal person?”*

Kochan keeps referring to himself as an abnormal person. For Kochan, the sensuality of a woman is equated to the same emotion that arises from viewing a “broom” or a “pencil”. He was fascinated with “tragic lives”; a feeling of nothingness that emerged from self-renunciation captivated Kochan. The night-soil man in his dark-blue trousers, the smell of sweat that reeks from the marching soldiers, Omi’s armpits filled with copious youthful hair, fishermen with their naked torsos; seductions that enhanced his puberty. Masturbating to the vision of a young male teacher and not to the thought of a naked woman, made Kochan question the legitimate normality of his pubescence. Mishima keeps homosexuality afloat in the stormy waters of social mores. In a homogeneous spiritual Japanese society, the existence of homosexuality was even more unimaginable than an actor’s factual face in a Kabuki theatre. The protagonist’s continuous struggle is heartbreaking to read, particularly, when in search for a normal life he imposes a Spartan-like self-discipline to evade the indulgence his “bad-habit” (masturbation) and his alter ego masquerading in a costume gala establishing a pre-amble to a counterfeit existence. The idea of being a stranger in a crude savage land seemed more plausible for an unflustered life. The commencing of a platonic love affair with Sonoko further propels Kochan’s remorseful conscience in a claustrophobic existence. The desire of an impassive kiss from a woman; the desperate need for an embryonic feeling of heterosexuality. The prose made me furious at times, to glimpse a world ridden with hypocrisies of insecure minds. A world where rape, incest is placed on a identical immoral dais as homosexuality is certainly a malignant society. A man should not be made to feel guilty if his heart craves the touch of another man. A woman should not be ostracized for loving another woman. Love is a warm shadow where we find refuge from our own wars. So, how dare the heterosexuality elites try to shackle a shadow? If, “normal love” only flourishes through the sole act of a viable reproduction, then what right do we have for pompous declarations of ‘man being the most evolved species’? Why demean the animals when we bestow the same courtesy to our fellow members? Why do we designate homosexuality as a ‘criminal with a death sentence?’ The red lacquer is meticulously spread over a snowy visage amid the cries of a featherless parrot chastised for flying with the robins. Death being the only rescue.

*“It was in death that I discovered my real ‘life’s aim’....”*

The gory images of mutilation and blood filled hallucinations had always ravaged Kochan’s mind. Right from his childhood, Kochan had an affinity to grief with death being the ultimate seducer of his sensualities. It was as if fate had made him fond of the sinister dwellings of death; a sort of an admonition of his burdensome future. Death plays a dual role in Kochan’s clandestine existences. At times, death becomes the ultimate escapism; a respite to his chaotic predicaments and then there are moments when the thought of death compels him (Kochan) to ponder on the possibilities of an honorable life. Similar to the face of a Kabuki actor that metamorphoses with each dab of paint into a supernatural being, the snippets of death from Kochan’s empathetic soul transcends death to be the pinnacle of eroticism.

The salient features of the ongoing Japanese war further enhance the foundation of death. Death becomes a coveted symbol of equality, demolishing societal discrepancies and at the same time a harbinger with a prejudicial mask.

*“With the beginning of the war a wave of hypocritical stoicism swept the entire country”.... “The condition they has faced and fought against there --- that of a life for a life had probably been the most universal and elemental that mankind ever encounters.....”*

“Life for a life”; the Hammurabian ethics that rule the entire system of a war, exemplifies the sadistic

hypocrisy that thrives in the human society. In order to validate the significance of our own lives and its choices, we condemned the lives of others and curse their preferences. Mishima compares the absurdities of the war with Kochan's dissolute commotions. In a peculiar way, the onset of the war brings a solace to Kochan with the hope of an annihilation of his secret life. Whereas, the restitution of a peaceful aftermath evokes a personal conflict that Kochan would have to face in on a daily basis. Mishima gives an enlightening inference of how assorted masquerades of life are vanished when humanity dwells at the gates of death.

*"In the fire, these miserable ones had witnessed the total destruction of every evidence that they existed as human beings. Before their eyes they has seen human relationships, love and hatreds,, reason, property, all go up in flame...."*

Although war might bring the annihilation of human prejudices with life then becoming the utmost valuable thing, yet, the very origin of war lies in festering prejudices and sadistic verdicts.

*"And at times it had not been the flames against which they fought, but against human relationships, against love and hatreds, against reason, against property. At the time, like the crew of a wrecked ship, they have found themselves in a situation where it was permissible to kill one person in order that another might live...."*

War had become an identical apologetic entity of auto-hypnosis and self-deceit that Kochan himself had metamorphosed into. In order to save a life it was permissible to kill another. In order to keep a façade of "normality" it became permissible to obliterate the true-self.

It is not surprising to spot the element of death taking the centre stage at many instances. Being, Kawabata's protégé, Mishima employs similar philosophies seen in Kawabata's prestigious works – Beauty in death and its opulence lost in its own excessiveness. War, being the perfect example of fading allure of death. The seducer being deceived by it own seduction. In Seppuku, a suicide ritual also exercised by the author himself; the samurais embellished their faces with subtle make-up before succumbing to the self-inserted sword. The samurais ached that their death would restore the very same honor and beauty that life had stolen from them. Given that, this book is also perceived as a semi-autobiographical sketch of Mishima , one can notice glimpses of Kabuki ; a theatrical art that Mishima often viewed as a child along with his grandmother. The decorated mask-like visage being a significant representation of this ancient Japanese art.

*"Everyone says life is a stage...."*

The freshly sculpted mask stares ardently into the mirror. It viciously smiles in nostalgic moments of twelve year boy masturbating to the standing picture of St. Sebastian and the nascent obsession of an eight year old girl. It howls as it hypnotizes the soul into a mass of self-deceit in a machine of falsehood. Similarly, as the ownership of a travel is lost with its commencement, the journey of mask becomes a reckless place for riots and revolutions.

*"Why is it wrong for me to stay just the way I am now? I was fed up with myself and all for my chastity was ruining my body. I had thought that with earnestness" ..... "I was feeling the urge to begin living my true life. Even if it was to be pure masquerade and not my life at all, still the time had come when I must make a start , must drag my heavy feet forward....." ...Be Strong!!"*

At the end of the day, the mask had cursed the face.

## Ana says

**Yukio Mishima** é um dos meus escritores preferidos e, com toda a certeza, uma das personagens mais operáticas (espalhafatosa, dirão alguns...) do universo literário. Mesmo aqueles que possam estar menos familiarizados com a sua obra serão conhecedores de diversos detalhes da sua vida e das circunstâncias associadas à sua morte.

*Confissões de uma Máscara*, originalmente publicado em 1949 quando Mishima tinha apenas 25 anos, foi o primeiro romance de sucesso deste autor. Não tendo sido, na altura, assumido como autobiográfico, é hoje óbvio que Kochan (o protagonista e narrador destas "Confissões") é o nome da "máscara" que Mishima usou para trazer a público esta auto-análise de um período da sua vida que inclui a infância, a adolescência e uma parte da juventude.

Esta poderá não ser uma das obras maiores do autor, mas o seu impacto é indiscutível. É um relato de uma honestidade comovente e devastadora, pela forma como deixa desprender as "máscaras", assumindo, expondo e dissecando todas as dúvidas e hipocrisias. É também relevante como contributo para a melhor compreensão da restante obra do autor e do próprio Mishima enquanto escritor, artista, pessoa e personagem de um palco do teatro que é a vida.

Trata-se de uma obra profundamente introspectiva, cuja leitura requer bastante envolvimento. Não obstante a juventude do autor, a escrita já é magnífica utilizando uma linguagem de enorme beleza para descrever tanto o belo como o horrível, a reflexão profunda ou a constatação banal, o muito significativo ou o mero detalhe.

O enredo praticamente não existe e a obra centra-se num universo de pensamentos, sentimentos e conflitos internos do jovem Kochan que, desde a infância, sente uma obsessão quase mórbida pelo martírio e pela morte, vivendo um isolamento resultante da sua desadequação ao mundo exterior. Desde tenra idade que Kochan sente uma espécie de "luxúria do sangue" e uma atracção pelos aspectos físicos da masculinidade. As dúvidas quanto à natureza da sua sexualidade vão-se adensando, à medida que atesta o fascínio que sobre ele exercem os corpos nus de homens jovens e belos. Na adolescência é despertado para a actividade sexual por uma pintura de Guido Reni que retrata o martírio de São Sebastião, amarrado a uma árvore, seminu e trespassado por flechas. A partir daí começa a satisfazer-se sexualmente através daquilo que ele chama a prática dos "maus-hábitos" que o acompanhariam pela sua juventude. (Hoje é possível alcançar a dimensão do significado dessa imagem para Mishima pelas fotografias de si próprio em pose que reproduz a da pintura original).

Martyrdom of Saint Sebastian (por Guido Reni)

Yukio Mishima (Foto: Eikoh Hosoe)

No entanto se, por um lado, apenas figuras masculinas (sobretudo quando associadas a contextos que envolvem martírio, ferimentos, sangue) são capazes de estimular o seu desejo sexual, já a sua realização e felicidade espirituais só parecem ser possíveis por via de uma ligação com o feminino: amar e ser amado por uma mulher. Mas esse é um amor que é e será sempre platónico, isento de qualquer desejo sexual e, como tal, inviável. Esta é uma dicotomia aparentemente intransponível, que o autor define como "a luta entre o corpo e a alma", e que se perspectiva como um dos grandes conflitos internos que virão a atormentar a

existência de Kochan / Mishima :

*“Nesse momento, algo dentro de mim se dividiu em dois com uma violência brutal. Como se um relâmpago tivesse rasgado uma árvore viva. Ouvia o edifício que construíra pedra por pedra ruir fragorosamente. Parecia-me estar a assistir ao instante em que a minha existência se transformava num pavoroso não-ser.”*

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## Aubrey says

*Until then I had mistakenly thought I was only poetically attracted to such things, thus confusing the nature of my sensual desires with a system of [a]esthetics.*

I can't imagine someone who's not queer understanding everything that's going on in this book, and that's not me espousing the "everyone's actually a little bit gay" bullshit. Either you've actively wrestled with a component of your sexual/gendered/etc identity that has been/is/will be a some point in history a sign of the outcast, or you're accessorizing a community in order to look "cool". Of course, the same goes for the setting in Japan and even more so for the WWII, but European productions in the vein of sodomy and its artistic insinuations are running around enough that even passport-less me can run across the section on St. Sebastian and know exactly what's going down. Throw in a bit of Proust and ancient Greece, and all you need is some of The Eye in the Door's Wilde to round off the common conception of LGBT+ in all its cis white gay glory. Kochan's experiences fit into this cookie cutter mold as much as my insane female bisexual ones do, but his narrative was concerned less with how his difference differed from similar differences and more with the fact that there was a difference in general. The nearly sixty years in difference between then and now may have something to do with it, but if there's one thing I've learned in academia, it's that the universe would rather make one cry than cater to any sort of linearity.

*But then another thought occurred to me: if we grant that human passion has the power to rise above all absurdity, how can it be argued that it does not have the power to rise above the absurdities of passion itself?*

I'm slowly but surely realizing that Mishima is a pleasure to read in general, which says a lot considering this reading is happening via translation almost five decades after the author went out with the sort of bang one usually only reads of in epics past. This was the case with high school encountered The Sound of Waves and college acquired The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea, and considering that I added Confessions of a Mask two years before I figured out I was bi but didn't read it until after the fact, it's safe to say that Mishima is going to continue following me around. Conjectured reasons for this are varied: his nice turn of phrase, his indulgence in sumptuous cruelty, the way in which his descriptions have weight whether physical or gutbound or both. I don't mind so much, especially with this latest success on his part of not setting off my increasingly visceral reactions to writers who don't have the chops to fill up books with anything other than tactics used to crystallize a particular society's arbitrary definition of normalcy.

*I had, so to speak, accepted "normality" as a temporary employee in the corporation of my body.*

I can't say every queer/LGBT+ person out there is going to get something out of this work. Being bisexual

instead of homosexual, I didn't have so much the lack of one or the other attraction and more the idea that I may be catching guy cooties cause I stared at women's breasts for too long, but I still remember the long gap between the erotica I was reading and the motions of crushes I was performing, including the time when I thought I liked one boy but was actually liking him *and* my flatmate at the same time. Talk about subconscious priorities. Anyway, this has a lot more going for it than simple we're-here-we're-queer-get-used-to-it dynamics, but I'm still getting used to the idea of being a member instead of an ally, so I found this surprisingly helpful on a personal level. I could certainly use more authors who follow me around for my own good before I have even figured out a particular aspect of said good.

*It is a common failing of childhood to think that if one makes a hero out of a demon the demon will be satisfied.*

P.S. Trust me, people who've followed me around for long enough: I know how Mishima ended his days as well as I know how long my brain's been telling me to end my own. Someone's "good" isn't always shits and giggles. So, support is welcome. Driving instructions are not.

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## Deniz Balç? says

Mishima'y? anlayabilmek için ne yazd?ysa hepsini okumak gerekiyor bana göre. Zira koskocaman bir resmin ufak parçalar? olarak görüyorum ben eserlerini. 'Bir Maskenin ?tiraflar?'n? da o resmin merkezinde konumlanan, sonras?nda yazd??? her ?eye 'ondan' bir bak?? at?lmas?na imkan sa?layan özel bir anlat? olarak kabul ediyorum. Bu yüzden üçüncü kez okudum. Mishima okumas? yapacaksan?z, sa?lam bir zemin atmak için, bu kitab? ilk s?ralara koyman?z? tavsiye ederim. ?yi okumalar!

8/10

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## Supreeth says

Yukio Mishima is one of the most acclaimed Japanese author, i can see why is that. He mostly lived through what he wrote. Confessions of a mask is an autobiographical work from Mishima, which is a story of coming out of closet, more like talking from the closet. Hence, the *mask*, and *confessions*. Published in 1945, written in his early twenties, this book bought him all the success. But at the same time, all the harsh criticisms. I can see why this book is considered too important, and a classic, written in 40's Japan. But, to me,reading it in 2018, it wasn't much shocking. Moreover, the writing and the way book flowed just didn't work out. Wikipedia article would've sufficed me. Or, perhaps it's just that I'm not the right audience this was aimed at.

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## Rowena says

What a great book! Mishima did a great job of depicting the story of a Japanese adolescent in Japanese society realizing that he is gay and thus having to wear a mask to hide his true self. There is so much mental confusion going through the protagonist's head, a great psychological account not only of teen angst but also of realizing you're different in a society that doesn't understand you. I've read quite a bit on Yukio Mishima and he seems to have been an interesting,intelligent and complex character. I look forward to reading more of his works.

## Marcel says

The publisher's page quotes a passage from Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov*:

"Beauty is a terrible and awful thing! It is terrible because it never has and never can be fathomed, for God sets us nothing but riddles. Within beauty both shores meet and all contradictions exist side by side. I'm not a cultivated man, brother, but I've thought a lot about this. Truly there are mysteries without end! Too many riddles weigh man down on earth. We guess them as we can, and come out of the water dry. Beauty! I cannot bear the thought that a man of noble heart and lofty mind sets out with the ideal of the Madonna and ends with the ideal of Sodom. What's still more awful is that the man with the ideal of Sodom in his soul does not renounce the ideal of the Madonna, and in the bottom of his heart he may still be on fire, sincerely with fire, with longing for the beautiful ideal, just as in the days of his youthful innocence. Yes, man's heart is wide, too wide indeed. I'd have it narrower. The devil only knows what to make of it! but what the intellect regards as shameful often appears splendidly beautiful to the heart. Is there beauty in Sodom? Believe me, most men find their beauty in Sodom. Did you know this secret? The dreadful thing is that beauty is not only terrifying but also mysterious. God and the Devil are fighting there, and their battlefield is the heart of man. But a man's heart wants to speak only of its own ache. Listen, now I'll tell you what it says..."

Yukio Mishima's mask was too much the "point". (What did Oscar Wilde say about giving a man a mask and he'll tell you the truth?) I was wishing that he had read more books to not shove "normal" too far into the corner. He read books to figure out what other boys were supposed to be like. I know, he gets to where he won't hang a girl right along with him for the cause of being normal. But a whole book? Of a mask hiding from a mask that he wasn't really seeing? Because I don't think HIS mask was the problem... (Knowing what is in the hearts of fire?)

Sighs. Reading books. Mishima was Kawabata's protege. He should have known better (but then I didn't agree with his writing about my favorite Kawabata). (I'm not going to post pictures of other such relationships in art. No photos of Dr. Dre holding a dewey Dr. Pepper can in his hand while a thirsty Eminem sweats it out under the spotlights. No Justin Bieber post-Bieber hair! I'm not gonna play this review like that. I've turned over all new leaves! I'm a normal goodreader from now on.)

The Karamazov quote about the heart concerned only with its own ache? Yes. The kissing off airplane arrival fanfare (no photos of The Beatles stepping into adoring American crowds for the first time. You won't find that here) of it happened to me so it must be super ultra important. I didn't need a whole book of this. A young boy feels confused about his sexual feelings for other boys. He's afraid of having to join the adult world where he feels unbalanced in unspoken rules everybody else can hear (like a dog whistle for trained doggies). If Mishima could have touched my hands I'd have felt this much from the fingertips. The rest of the hand shake would have been one of those weakened, feel nothing handshakes that unconfident people give when they don't really want to touch you. (I probably do handshakes this way.) I know he was aching because he said he was. Dictionary definition of ache.

I CAN relate to the not wanting to grow up and be an adult. I related to the staring problems. Only I would have stared at something else than armpit hair. It's probably the generic how would teen boys behave books he was reading...

There was a weirdly innocent, almost sexless quality to *Confessions of a Mask*. I don't think it was all of the Jean Genet I've been reading the past few months. I can't help but make comparisons, though. I can't help make comparisons with the lyrics of Morrissey, for that matter. The momentary erotic moments of death? "And if a double-decker bus crashes into us, to die by your side would be a heavenly way to die" (There is a

light that never goes out by The Smiths). Mishima felt his whole life the gravitational pull to the darkest center of the universe. He says he did, anyway. He says it a lot. I wish I could have felt that it could really happen like I would listening to Morrissey sing about it. I'd also pine for the timeless quality of the thug that would throw themselves into anything (eyes shut to past or future) that Genet and Morrissey loved so much. I'm finding it harder and harder to feel romantic about symbols like that. At least I can feel the echo of the ache, and the dying drum beats of the heart beats, from their stage lights charisma of feeling. If you feel excited by possibilities of a crush? Like that. I know Mishima felt that thing because he said he did...

These are some of my favorite passages from the book. The glimpses past the talk. (Mariel, it is all talk. It's a memoir! It goes with the territory. I know! But it could at least be a heart spilling stain on the sleeve. I ask that much! I have a serious staring problem to maintain, you know.)

Page 62: "Something like a secret feeling of superiority was always hovering about his face. Perhaps it was that sort of feeling which blazes higher and higher the more one's pride is hurt. It seemed that, for Omi, such misfortunes as failures in examinations and expulsions were the symbols of a frustrated will. The will to what? I imagined vaguely that it must be some purpose toward which his "evil genius" was driving him. And I was certain that even he did not yet know the full purport of this vast conspiracy against him." I kinda think that "us against the world" mentality is kinda wrong, if it is real love.

There are vague ideas about platonic love throughout, especially when Mishima attempted to "love" women. I'm thinking he was unclear on the concept. Love. It's just a lot of putting names on fleeting moments of what sounded good.

This next part reminded me of me too much. I used to think sometimes that I'd like to move to a country where I didn't know the language so I wouldn't know if people were being rude to me or not. (I was wrong. I could pick up enough rudeness in Spanish.)

Page 65:

"Thus, when confronting those possessors of sheer animal flesh unspoiled by intellect- young toughs, sailors, soldiers, fishermen - there was nothing for me to do but be forever watching them from afar with impassioned indifference, being careful never to exchange words with them. Probably the only place in which I could have lived at ease would have been some uncivilized tropical land where I could not speak the language. Now that I think of it, I realize that from earliest childhood I felt a yearning toward those intense summers of the kind that are seething forever in savage lands..."

I'm willfully ignoring the "unspoiled by intellect" part and "savagery" and instead reading between the lines that there was no risk of ever slipping up if the possibility of saying the wrong thing was taken away.

The best part, I think, is a sample of his writing from age seventeen that he included. Not the kind of fear if you aren't afraid of heights you aren't gonna get stuff.

Page 107: Most people are always doubtful as to whether they are happy or not, cheerful or not. This is the normal state of happiness, as doubt is a most natural thing." Because of this, people are inclined to believe in his so-called "unquestionable happiness." And at last a faint but real thing is confined in a powerful machine of falsehood. The machine sets to work mightily. and people do not even notice that he is a mass of "self-deceit."

If only he listened to his earlier self...

I wrote down other page numbers, actually. Stuff about his self-deception. There's only so much waiting room I can take. Where they find the beauty in never gonna happen moments? Talk, talk, talk. I'm in the magazine waiting room with not pictured photographs of Usher's man crush on Bieber, maybe. Genet didn't give me the goosebumps of what I'd lost but at least my staring problem was eye to eye. I have another Mishima book to read too (a short story collection). Two might be my limit, after all. If I had book amnesia I know I wouldn't read this a second time. It wasn't really worth it.

P.s. The person who owned this book before me left their Marmaduke book mark in the book. Finders keepers losers weepers!

P.s.s. Genet would have had a lot more names for his penis than "the toy". I'm used to more variation!

(Edit: This review is out of date. I freaking love Mishima!)

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## Barry Pierce says

It is crazy to think that next year we will be celebrating *Confessions of a Mask's* 70th birthday. Mishima's queer classic, his second novel (written in his early 20s) and earliest currently available in English, is a coming-of-age story of a young boy who struggles with his queerness.

When Kochan happens upon a reproduction of Reni's *Saint Sebastian* in a book he is immediately drawn to the overt homoeroticism of the work. The perfect male physique paired with the gashes and wounds of the arrows implanted within his torso act as a mirror for the novel itself. For the two main themes of *Confessions* (and quite a lot of Mishima's other works) are male queerness and sadomasochism. Both are explored beautifully through Mishima's unflinching prose.

When reading this I was somewhat taken aback by its sheer influence on the world of queer literature, particularly in the works of Edmund White. I was not aware of just how much of *A Boy's Own Story* owns a debt to *Confessions*. In fact nearly all major coming-of-age queer tales seem to eventually trace their genealogy back to Kochan.

An engrossing and influential tale, *Confessions of a Mask* is still as fresh (and shocking) in 2018 as it was in 1949. It was the foundations upon which Mishima planted his immense literary legacy. An essential book in the queer canon.

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## Imogen says

It's interesting how much of Mishima's experience being a queermo in the first half of the twentieth century resonates with my experience of being a queermo like eighty years later: the unintentional denial, the mopeyness, the obsession, the self-consciousness, y'know. He put a bunch of stuff into words that I'd never even thought about \*trying\* to put into words. So yeah, that blew my mind.

Still, it's all mannered and slow and reflective and all the un-viscerally-exciting things you'd (well, I'd) expect from the time period and from such a complicated obsession with decorum. Especially in Japan.

Also, hey, in case you were wondering, it is 100% moping and obsessing and 0% hot gay sex- he jacks off a lot, but the part of the story where he starts boning lots of well-hung thugs happens after the last page. That actually felt kind of sweet to me, in this old timey way.

So yeah. This little fella does a good job describing what it was like to be queer for me in high school and not to know it.

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## Nicole~ says

Confessions of a Mask (1949) rocketed Yukio Mishima to the literary prominence he so desperately sought as a struggling modern writer. The novel explores the obsessions of a young man suffering inwardly with erotic fantasies of men, beauty and violence. He strains to conform to a heterosexual life while secretly idolizing depictions of St. Sebastian, martyred, with his hands bound and his naked torso pierced by arrows, or becoming aroused by the sight of the muscular nightsoil man walking through the neighborhood. Confusion of his sexuality takes shape at a very early age when he falls in love for the first time with Omi, a schoolmate.

*There were, however, numberless impressions that I got from Omi, of infinite variety, all filled with delicate nuances. In a phrase, what I did derive from him was a precise definition of the perfection of life and manhood... Because of him I cannot love an intellectual person. Because of him I am not attracted to a person who wears glasses. Because of him I began to love strength, an impression of overflowing blood, ignorance, rough gestures, careless speech, and the savage melancholy inherent in the flesh, not tainted in anyway with intellect.(64)*

The protagonist's psychological examination of his thoughts and feelings is logically sound and vividly clear; he possesses an unfaltering understanding of himself. He is able to pinpoint details, causes, subconscious symbols with the accuracy of a professional psycho-analyst.

*Actually, the thought that I might reach the height of an adult filled me with a foreboding of some fearful danger. On the one hand, my indefinable feeling of unrest increased my capacity for dreams divorced from all reality and, on the other, drove me toward the "bad habit" that caused me to take refuge in those dreams. The restlessness was my excuse.. It was undoubtedly the sight of the hair under Omi's arms that day which made the armpit a fetish for me.(82-83)*

Confessions of a Mask is widely considered as an autobiographically inspired novel. If the sadomasochistic fantasies are truly Mishima's admission of his own feelings, he is even more strongly connected with his protagonist by the latter's unyielding struggle to prove himself as special, destined for martyrdom like St. Sebastian - a fate proud, tragic, transcendent.

Mishima's confessional pose in the guise of the protagonist is dramatic, theatrical, even feels 'staged:' as an 'I' narrator agonizing over his perceived 'abnormality,' he is neither apologetic nor interested in suppressing his homosexual desires. By composing his supposed confessions, Mishima was completely the producer, playwright, director and actor of his own social 'norms', free to judge himself, and perform to the beat of his own damask drum.

***The true essence of confession is its impossibility.***

Mishima himself stated that his intent was to write "a perfect fictional work of confession." Certainly, the novel is dramatically written; a sense of Mishima teasing his reader's attention with a performance much like the masked *Kabuki* plays his grandmother introduced him to as a youngster, enabling him to exist, not only as a man in an easily alienating social sect, but as the brilliantly talented, ingeniously creative writer he knew he was.

William Shakespeare's words from 'As You Like It' came to mind that: ***All the world's a stage*** ; Mishima's own words sum up my perception of him that: ***life is after all a masked play.***

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## **Tolgonay Dinçer says**

... Ve hep bir danst? sonsuz...

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