Risky Masquerades:

The Play of Masks in Yukio Mishima's *Confessions* and Qiu Miaojin's *Crocodile*

> 例の「演技」が私の組織の一部と化してしまった。 それはもはや演技ではなかった。 自分を正常な人間だと装うことの意識が、 私の中にある本来の正常さをも侵蝕して、[…] 私はおよそ贋物をしか信じない人間になりつつあった。
>
> (My habitual "acting" has ended up becoming an integral part of myself. It was no longer acting. My consciousness that I am masquerading as a normal person has even corroded whatever normality that originally existed in me, […] I was becoming the sort of person who could not believe in anything except the counterfeit.)
>
> -- Yukio Mishima, 《仮面の告白》 (*Confessions of a Mask*)[1]

> 他臉上縫了二十几針的疤, 那是他 […] 拿水果刀自己劃下的, […] 他說就要這樣劃破這個別人給他的我, 他不是真正的我。
>
> (That scar on his face with more than twenty stitches was left after he cut himself with a fruit knife, […] in this way, he would rip apart this self given to him by others, which was not his real self.)
>
> -- Qiu Miaojin, 《鱷魚手記》 (*Notes of a Crocodile*)[2]

Although masquerade is typically discussed by theorists of play as a paradigmatic play-form relating to theatrical masks and the performance of fictional identities, the question of risk in

masquerade is never far away. Johan Huizinga associates masquerade with disguise and ceremonial dressing up, observing "expressions of terror" triggered by masked performances, which are "extra-ordinary" and "purely aesthetic experience[s]" that separate play from mundane reality.[3] Roger Caillois writes about masquerade almost synonymously with *mimicry*, one of his four classifications of games, which depends on simulating other identities and behaviours.[4] Significantly, Caillois adds that masked masquerades produce emotions of "ecstasy" and "anguish" that lead to *ilinx*,[5] the play of vertigo with potential "dangerous effects."[6] The danger in "histrionic play" and bluffing – both masquerading behaviour – is also noticed by Gregory Bateson, who posits that "playing with risk" has its roots in "the combination of threat and play."[7] Following upon Bateson, later critics insist that play provides "possibilities […] to experiment [and] take risks" in a fictional space regulated by game rules, without the player having to suffer "consequence[s] of the game on real life."[8] This suggests that as a form of play, masquerade is temporary make-believe and whatever terrifying experience it involves ultimately entails no serious risk or disastrous outcome. In brief, existing theories of play frequently mention the risks masquerade involves but remain focused on masquerade's ludic, imaginative, and creative aspects. Although the relation between masquerade and risk has gained some traction in anthropological and cultural studies, it is insufficiently examined in literary criticism, especially non-European literatures. Despite the proximity of two areas in literary studies to masquerade: Bakhtinian theory and Gender Studies, the former focuses on the carnivalesque mask while the latter is based upon Butler's *Gender Trouble* and prioritises performativity. This article explores, in an inter-East Asian comparative context, literary representations of masquerade and risks taken by masqueraders. Focusing on autobiographical fiction featuring queer experiences, I ask how masquerade elucidates interactions between risk and play, and how these interactions define masquerade. Rethinking masquerade in East Asian contexts is important

because in contrast to much modern European literature that deconstructs the binary of being and appearance inherited from Plato, East Asian queer literature focuses instead on fashioning and alternating between different appearances. Moreover, by shifting attention to risk and the masquerader's responses to it, I explore how East Asian fiction suggests theoretical interfaces between fiction, queerness, and masquerade, specifically articulated in the notions of autobiographical fiction as masquerade and masquerade as queer method.

While modern East Asian fiction offers a rich repertoire of literary masquerades that extensively engages with the mask trope and dissimulation, such as Abe Kōbō's *The Face of Another* and Yi Chong-jun's *The Prophet*, I choose to compare Japanese writer Yukio Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask* and Taiwanese novelist Qiu Miaojin's *Notes of a Crocodile*. Both novels emphasise queer aesthetics and experience within a deceptively autobiographical framework. They also share strong intertextual connections formed by Japan-Taiwan postcolonial relations and Qiu's deliberate evocations of Mishima, which insert *Notes* into a lineage of queer masquerade. As Margaret Hillenbrand demonstrates, inter-regional textual flows between postwar Japan and Taiwan provide many comparative possibilities, not least due to similar attention in both societies paid to sex and identity and the importance of Japanese literature in post-Japanese occupation Taiwan.[9] In post-martial law Taiwan, intense interest in LGBTQ experiences chimed with Mishima's popularity in young intellectual circles,[10] which informed Qiu's writing. Based on Japanese-Sinophone comparative grounds, I consider how *Confessions* and *Notes* help us re-examine masquerade by highlighting the oscillation between masks and between the masquerader and their spectators.

As the starting quote shows, Mishima articulates how the continuous "dissimulation" (装う) of Kō-chan – the protagonist in *Confessions* and presumed fictional alter ego of Mishima – risks inducing a paradoxical cognitive state of believing in the "counterfeit" (贋

物) even when knowing it is faked. Kō-chan's conflicted consciousness results in the debilitating inability to recognize authenticity or anything outside his "play-acting" (演技). This suggests that his masquerade is grounded in self-reflexive irony, as in "even when it's true, it's false," in French poet Henri Michaux's words.[11] Writing some forty years later than Mishima, Qiu also relates to masquerade, but highlights the distance between one's own face and the true self. The quote above equates the face with a public façade imposed by society, which must be broken by self-inflicted violence to access one's authenticity. But this deliberate unmasking cannot be wholly therapeutic, for it leaves a deep scar that one must live with. Mishima's and Qiu's articulations evoke critical points to be developed in my discussion. First, masquerade can bleed into real life, so that make-believe and reality are inextricably blurred, sometimes even reversed. Masquerade therefore threatens the stability of selfhood and transforms the relationship between self and other in unexpected, potentially violent ways. Subsequently, play-acting and risk in masquerade go hand in hand. This raises the question whether masquerade is risky *because* it is play-acting, not despite the play-acting. Next, by using the terms *kamen* 仮面 ("mask", but literally "provisional face", "assumed face") and *lian* 臉 ("face", and figuratively "reputation"), Mishima and Qiu underline the dynamics of different masks for thinking about masquerade in East Asian queer cultures rather than structure masquerade upon the dualism between truth and fiction.

Besides maximising on the historical and thematic complementation between *Confessions* and *Notes*, comparison offers a new perspective on these novels that are persistently read through the self-enclosed myth of the author. Both novels propelled their precocious authors – in their early twenties at the time of writing – to fame. Both texts are, after their authors' shocking suicides, read autobiographically and retrospectively seen to carry key clues to their authors' later writings and deaths.[12] Given their explicit articulations

of non-heteronormative eroticism, both novels are considered LGBTQ literature and have achieved iconic status in this category. These commonalities have generated insightful explorations of gender and sexuality in Mishima and Qiu. But they also produce "“monosemantic interpretations” of Mishima[13] and problematically equate Qiu's own life and lesbian identity with *Notes*'s protagonists Lazi and the crocodile. It is as if once we see a definite sexual identity and the authors' self-images in the two novels, there is nothing else to see.

My focus on masquerade in both novels proposes a different approach. The question of sexuality is present too but as a form of masquerade, with queerness as the entry point to investigate fluctuations of identity facilitated by masquerade. Aiming to theorise the novels beyond biography, I propose that masquerade is a critical tool that provides a queer approach to Mishima and Qiu. Masquerade can function as the verb "queer" functions: to "disturb the order of things" and disorient our conventional directions of attention.[14] This is not so much about the queer sexuality depicted in *Confessions* and *Notes* as about a queer reading that, as J. Keith Vincent observes, does not "capitulate […] to […] the 'homo/hetero binary'" but provides an "anti-normative stance."[15] Besides, the perspectives of risk and play theory interrogate the all-too-convenient slotting of Mishima's and Qiu's works into identity-affirming categories of gay and lesbian literature, at the expense of neglecting their ludicity and critical potential for queering the autobiographical genre. One of my key contentions is that masquerade works on the textual level as a disruptive force that queers literary genres and frustrates readers' normative expectation of discerning the real author behind the textual mask of autobiographical fiction.

My re-reading of these novels chimes with refreshed interest in Mishima and Qiu, evidenced by new translations and scholarship. Notably, in 2019 the long-awaited direct French translation by Dominique Palmé of *Confessions* from Japanese was published by

Gallimard, which significantly updates Renée Villoteau's indirect translation from Weatherby. Increasing attention is paid to the incoherence and plurality of Mishima's images, e.g. Stéphane Giocanti's 2021 *Yukio Mishima et ses masques* and Stephen Dodd's reading of Mishima "as a heterotopian body."[16] On Qiu's side, translations of *Notes* have mushroomed, including Bonnie Huie's 2017 English translation, Martina Hasse's German translation in 2020, and Emmanuelle Péchenart's 2021 French translation. Taiwan's landmark legalization of same-sex marriage in 2019 also prompted international readers to peruse Qiu's works. Now is a propitious moment to expand existing analyses of *Confessions* and *Notes* from a comparative viewpoint.

Below I offer close readings of *Confessions* and *Notes*, prioritising each novel's internal workings to allow the texts to speak for themselves rather than be explained by their authors' lives or other writings. Both novels suggest, I argue, that masquerade has potential for queerness and involves transformative experiences from which one cannot emerge unscathed, although risk does not have the final word. To understand queer masquerade in East Asian literatures, the notion of play is more useful than performativity because it highlights the ludic risk inherent in the malleable and vulnerable self.

Mishima's *Confessions*

Confessions is written in the first person and follows the male narrator Kō-chan from his birth to adulthood. Spanning pre-1945 Shōwa Japan to shortly after Japan's defeat, Kō-chan's life is remarkably uneventful as he is exempted from conscription due to ill health and does not die from bombings. He develops from early childhood, however, a tendency to don other identities and imagine living their experiences, which the narrative self-reflexively scrutinizes.

The title *Kamen no kokuhaku* already implies the importance of masquerade. *Kamen* is literally a "hypothetical," "temporary face," implying that the face is a mask that is also changeable. Grammatically, *kamen* does not differentiate between the singular and plural, thus implying multiple "masks" and personae. Moreover, *kamen* specifically denotes masks used in theatrical contexts and does not mean face coverings worn for practical reasons, such as medical masks (*masuku* マスク in Japanese) or balaclava (referred to as *fukumen* 覆面). The theatricality of *kamen* explains its figurative uses to indicate postures of hypocrisy and pretence. Paradoxically, *kamen* is placed beside *kokuhaku*, "confessions," the signature speech mode of authenticity that carries a "Augustinian" ring, as if there were sins to disclose.[17] *Kokuhaku* denotes a declarative act that presumes an audience and is highly performative, calling to mind Rousseauian self-representation and the conflicted Romantic interiority of Baudelaire's *Mon cœur mis à nu.* But in Mishima's book title, these connotations are ironically buffered by the mask layer that blocks access to the self, for normally we expect the person behind the mask to confess, not the mask itself. The suggestion is twofold: the mask has a life of its own and manoeuvers its own play-acting; the true self supposedly behind the mask is non-existent or unknowable, so whatever confessions the novel offers could be only masquerades of confession. This foregrounds the notion of fiction masquerading as autobiography, especially if the mask is a "prosopopoeic" voice that confers a face, according to Paul De Man,[18] but which actually "defaces" the autobiographer because it creates the self as a "spectacle of the other."[19]

Fashioning the self as a spectacle underpins Kō-chan's masquerades, which take two different forms: a private, inward-facing one counter-balanced with an outward-facing, public masquerade. The private masquerade offers him the opportunity to indulge in homosexual fantasies. The catalogue of Kō-chan's impersonations is long: e.g. the night-soil man, whom Kō-chan intensely "私が彼でありたい" (12) (*desires to be*); the "デカダンの帝王獣" (23)

(decadent, beastly [Roman] emperor) Elagabalus, reputedly a queer who masqueraded as a prostitute; the martyred Saint Sebastian pierced by arrows, painted by Guido Reni (38); and Kō-chan's hypermasculine classmate Omi, "無欠な幻影を仕立ててしまった" (61) (constructed into a flawless illusion) by Kō-chan and used as an ideal body image for himself: "私の肩がいつか近江の肩に似、私の胸がいつか近江の胸に似るであろうという期待を、目前の鏡が映している・似ても似つかぬ私の細い肩・似ても似つかぬ私の薄い胸に無理強いに見出だしながら" (78) (The mirror before me reflected my expectation that someday I would have shoulders like Omi's and a chest like Omi's, something I forced myself to believe, although my narrow shoulders and thin chest were wholly dissimilar to Omi's). These fictional and real-life figures are skins into which Kō-chan inserts himself, i.e. theatrical masks to be replaced and superposed at whim. They are thoroughly constructed images that participate in Kō-chan's fantasies, they are not evidence of any truth of Kō-chan's self.

Kō-chan's imagination of what his body could become reminds us of José Muñoz's notion of queer "ideality," where queerness is the "rejection of a here and now" and "insistence on "potentiality."[20] But Kō-chan's desire for Omi's image also means he wants to experience this futurity *now* and have the body of the other now, thus he resorts to masquerade. The desire to simulate and ultimately be another is crucial fuel for masquerade, which allows the masquerader to exist in the "as if" mode, offering the instant gratification of experiencing alterity. This state of futurity experienced as if it were the present interweaves "the world of actuality and that of the imaginary" and "create[s] an intermediary world separate from, yet contingent upon, the other two."[21] This world is also, according to Mihai Spariosu, the space of play.

But why does Kō-chan want to simulate others? One obvious reason is "嫉妬" (75) (jealousy): these figures have something that Kō-chan lacks. With the night-soil man and Omi, it is the hypermasculine body charged with raw "活力" (12) (vital power), contrasted with Kō-chan's frail physique; with Sebastian, the "輝やかしい" (45) (illustrious) fate of dying violently while theatrically exhibiting his beauty and religious faith, the opposite of Kō-chan's sheltered life and existential ennui. The second reason is to satisfy ludic impulses, for Kō-chan's masquerades are playful and fun, manifested in his "狂おしい喜び" (20) (wild delight) when dressing-up as the magician Shokyokusai Tenkatsu and the sexual pleasure he derives from impersonating Omi. The third reason, I propose, is the risk in his masquerades, to which Kō-chan is irresistibly inclined. Firstly, there is the risk of exposure to the disapproving social gaze, which Kō-chan learns about when he is chastised for parading his Tenkatsu costume play at home by being "stripped," "羽毛をむしられる鶏のように、仮装を剝がされた" (21) (like a chicken for plucking). Hereafter he understands that to avoid being seen as aberrant, his masquerades must be kept secret. But this risk of exposure also augments his guilty pleasure of indulging in erotic fantasies of mutilated male bodies, for he consciously transgresses social taboos but skilfully keeps this transgression private. Kō-chan treads a thin line between his make-believe activities and social censorship, which relates to the notion of risk as a borderline between two difficult situations. As Julia Hoydis remarks, the etymology of "risk" relates to sailing "dangerously close to rocks" and the Latin word *risicum*, which could mean both "luck" and "danger."[22] Similarly, the Japanese term *kiken* (危険), denoting danger and risk, is constituted by characters that, traced to their Chinese etymology, mean "cliff's edge," "precarious position," and "impasse." Risk as borderline emphasizes the queer nature of Kō-chan's masquerades, for he constantly risks deviating from the "straight line" of heteronormativity.[23]

The sense of being dangerously close to something threatening crystallizes as a form of attraction in Kō-chan's erotic impersonations and shapes his experience. I will call this second kind of risk – enticing rather than to be avoided – "ludic risk." Its first instance happens when Kō-chan explains why the night-soil man attracts him: the youth's "股引" (thigh-pullers), indicating sexual attraction; and "彼の職業" (his occupation), which gives Kō-chan "「悲劇的なもの」 […] 或る「身を挺している」と謂った感じ、[…] 或る危険に対する親近の感じ" (12) (the feeling of 'tragedy' […]. A certain feeling called '*putting one's own life on the line'*, […] a certain feeling of *intimacy with danger*) (emphasis added). What, we may ask, is dangerous (*kiken*) here? Perhaps the "悲劇的な生活" (13) (tragic lives) of these people in humble occupations dealing with the abject, symbol of the "大地" (11) (Earth) but also of death itself? As Andrew Rankin explains, "lower classes are closer to death" and symbolize "proximity to blood."[24] The night-soil man is an important initiation for Kō-chan, a figure that, according to Catherine Millot, establishes the prototype of subsequent avatars that obsess Kō-chan.[25]

Simultaneously, this attractive risk establishes a difficult boundary to transgress. Kō-chan's propensity to deviate from norms both infinitely approaches *and* shirks away from the forthright transgression of taboos and real death. This is firstly manifest when Kō-chan becomes physically close to the lower class when working at a naval arsenal with Taiwanese boys. He becomes friendly with them and let them teach him the "台湾語" (Formosan language), in exchange telling them Japanese "伽噺" (167) (nursery tales). Recruited from Japan-occupied Taiwan, these boys represent colonised bodies of explicit alterity. Kō-chan's interest in learning Formosan – indigenous Taiwanese language (not Chinese) – is an exoticist gesture that suggests levelling the status disparity between himself and the boys, especially given colonial policies that required Taiwanese peoples to learn Japanese. But this

approximation halts abruptly when Kō-chan declines to share food – a gesture affirming communal belonging – offered by the boys because it is cooked with "機械油" (168) (machine oil). This refusal draws a clear line between himself and the Taiwanese, implying Kō-chan's fear of risking his body's boundaries when he ingests the impure food of the Other. Secondly, despite his imagination of "戦死" (being killed in battle), Kō-chan simultaneously "死の恐怖は人一倍つよかった" (26) (has an abnormal fear of death). This paradox affirms that death remains a risk despite its allure. Astrid Lac identifies death as a "supremely erotic value" for Mishima precisely because it is maintained as a "contradictory concept" rather than a solution.[26] This contradiction is manifest in Kō-chan's fixation on Saint Sebastian, for a beautiful male body is particularly desirable when it is potentially mutilated and destroyed. Ultimately, Kō-chan loves bodies *at risk*, beauty *at risk,* and the risk of becoming the Other. His masquerades as other bodies invite risk to happen to himself, which is a queer masochist act because it potentially fragments and annihilates his body and identity.

Too intensely absorbed in performing fictional identities, Kō-chan can no longer distinguish his play-acting from reality. This constitutes the third risk in his masquerade: risking his sense of self and normal perception of reality. Growing up into adulthood, Kō-chan is struck by the realisation that he has to live "私の人生" (94) ([*his*] *own* life). But "私のように、少年期のおわりごろから、人生というものは舞台だという意識にとらわれつづけた人間が数多くいるとは思われない" (having become obsessed with the idea that life is a stage since the end of his childhood), Kō-chan "とにかく演技をやり了せれば幕が閉まるものだと信じていた" (95) (believed that the curtains [on the stage] would fall once [his] performance was finished), without life having to go on. He cannot perceive and live his own life, for there is no life beyond the "stage" where he performs. Different from

Muñoz's notion of queer futurity, time is experienced in the here-and-now of Kō-chan's masquerade, with no vision towards transforming life outside his fantasy. For Ko-chan, queer time lacks utopian tendencies and its ideality is instead based on imaginary "as if" projections that transcend historical time and space, as illustrated by Sebastian.

Caillois's clarification of masquerade aptly explains this debilitating eternal queer present. In *The Mask of Medusa*, Caillois studies mimicry in the natural world and argues that it is entirely analogous to human make-believe games, serving aesthetic and ludic impulses rather than biological necessity.[27] The masks mimetic animals wear are akin to a device of "sorcery," an "instrument of metamorphosis and ecstasy, of possession by gods; […] and of intimidation."[28] While its apparent purpose is to hide oneself and deceive others, wearing masks is risky because the masquerader puts herself in a frenetic, uncertain situation. Caillois cites mimetic insects that have camouflaging patterns and colours which resemble so perfectly "the vegetation they forage upon that they mistakenly devour each other in a sort of cannibalistic feast."[29] This illustrates his characterization of mimicry as "*incantation fixed at its culminating point* and having caught the sorcerer in his own trap."[30] Relating this to *Confessions*, Kō-chan is precisely the spider entangled in its own web because after he continuously shifts like a parasite through various personae, the shell takes over the parasite. His interiority is colonized by his masks, his time is always trapped in the now of the mask. That this should happen is completely unsurprising, for Kō-chan's private masquerades enchant and intimidate nobody except himself.

So far I have argued that masquerade is a queering force which both allows Kō-chan to privately deviate from norms and risks fracturing his selfhood. But is masquerade always queer? Can it serve to reinforce heteronormativity and become a "straightening device?"[31] *Confessions* shows it is possible to answer "yes" to both questions, because even when masquerade is a straightening device it already introduces the awareness that normativity is

enforced rather than natural, and therefore never quite aligns with normativity. This view is supported by Kō-chan's public-facing masquerade, which involves the "as if" ludic cognition of simultaneously being and not being the persona he play-acts.

Kō-chan understands early on what kind of play-acting is socially acceptable and approved, e.g. "私は一人の男の子であることを、言わず語らずのうちに要求されていた" (29) (in this house it was tacitly understood that I should act like a boy). Echoing Joan Riviere's famous view that womanliness is "a mask […] to avert anxiety and the retribution feared from men,"[32] the effeminate and queer Kō-chan needs to exaggerate his masculinity to feign normality, i.e. cater to male stereotypes. So he pretends to be interested in playing war, and deliberately makes sexually suggestive observations about conductresses' uniforms before his male friends (97). Since this dissimulation is for others, initially it is a "義理" (29) (social obligation) and brings no pleasure to him. But his encounter with his friend's sister Sonoko and the possibility of a heteroromantic relationship become a turning point. He becomes infatuated in his game of courtship and then loses control.

Kō-chan's initiation of love rituals with Sonoko stems from his decision to love women platonically, for he "恋と性欲とがどんな風にかかわりあうのか、そこのところがどうしてもわからなかった" (107) ([does] not see any connection between love and sexual desire) and experiences the latter only for men.[33] This establishes two pairs of contrasts correlating with his binary of private versus public masquerades: sexual desire/romantic love, male bodies/female "霊" (223) (soul). Neither counterpart has precedence over the other or is closer to Kō-chan's authentic self. Just as he falls under the spell of his homosexual fantasies, he is equally entranced by his heteroromantic make-believe, to the point that his sense of disingenuousness and authenticity are completely reversed:

> 園子への心の接近を、頭から贋物だと考えたがるこの感情は、実はそれを真実の愛だと考えたいという欲求が、仮面をかぶって現われたものかもしれなかった。これでは私は自分を否定することさえ出来ない人間になりかかっているのかもしれなかった。(141)
>
> (My feeling of wanting to regard Sonoko's attraction for me as sheer counterfeit might be nothing but a masked appearance of my desire to believe this was genuine love. So maybe I am becoming the sort of person who is incapable of denying myself [i.e. denying my being attracted to Sonoko].)

Nevertheless, the masquerading nature of Kō-chan's relationship with Sonoko is starkly clarified when Sonoko reciprocates his advances and the real prospect of marriage appears. Kō-chan immediately reacts adversely: "逃げなければならぬ" (I must flee), "私は慄然とするのであった" (182-83) (I was terrified). That the make-believe game could take on the gravity of real life was unbearable. This is also the point where Kō-chan's courtship is shown as essentially *not* an "attempt to mask [his] homosexual desires", as Marjorie Rhine and some other critics understand.[34] If that were the case, there is no reason for Kō-chan to stop before marriage, one of the best ways to appear normal in a society that penalizes singlehood. The heteronormative romance fails to actually straighten Kō-chan, for he intensely resists the normal path of life laid out before him. Instead, the courtship is a "遊び" (199) (game) and must remain so, creating a queer space. The marriage prospect makes Kō-chan painfully aware of this game's risks: that it could lead to "人間の営み" (196) (human affairs), the very thing he always felt oppressed by and sought to escape from through his masquerades. When this risk was vague, it presented an attraction in Kō-chan's exploration

of his passions for Sonoko: “奇体な情熱の形で私たちにあらわれる・あの「不安に対する好奇心」に似たものではなかったろうか?” (177) (Was it not similar to that ‘curiosity about anxiety’, which presents itself to us in the form of bizarre passion)? Once the risk is spelled out, Kō-chan ends his masquerade of romance abruptly. This situation mirrors Kō-chan’s private imagination of dying violently while shunning real death, almost concretised in the prospect of conscription. The alluring risk of bodily mutilation in Kō-chan’s private masquerades parallels the risk he toys with when interacting with Sonoko.

Although Kō-chan’s externally oriented masquerade started as a strategy to hide his self-perceived deficiency of being abnormal and “人間ならぬ […] 生物” (212) (non-human), it does not rectify his abnormality but effectually perverts his heteroromantic mask and queers his relationship with Sonoko. Ultimately, masquerade in *Confessions* is done for its own sake, not out of necessity. It is not an instrument for perpetuating heternormativity. This affirms masquerade’s ludic nature, for one fundamental characteristic of play is, as critics from Huizinga and Bernard Suits to Warren Motte argue, that play is “intrinsically valuable” and rejects instrumentalization.[35]

Confessions is permeated by masquerade, which is both ludic and risky. Kō-chan’s masquerades do not, however, oscillate between authenticity and falsehood or self and mask, but between different kinds of play-acting and layers of masks. Both his interior and exterior selves are performed roles, for his homosexual fantasies are narcissistic masquerades that are every bit as constructed and imaginary as his public pretences. This constructed dissimulation also extends to the meta-textual level, for Mishima masquerades as Kō-chan in making readers believe that the novel’s narrative is autobiographical. Mishima comments on *Confessions* on multiple occasions, sometimes describing it as a “vivisection” and “私は自らを死刑に処す” (self-execution performed on [himself]),[36] sometimes declaring that his aim

was "完全な告白のフィクションを創ろうと考えた" (to write a perfectly fictional confession)[37] and that he let "lies pasture freely" in the novel.[38] These observations complicate rather than clarify the connection between Mishima himself and Kō-chan. The character is a mask that cannot say anything definite about the author, effectively disfiguring any coherent self-image. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, the novelist is like the clown and "can exploit any position [she] choose[s], but only as a mask."[39] So the novelist has the right to be not taken literally. We should particularly guard against reading *Confessions* as a story of an oppressed closet gay struggling to find his own identity or as a reflection of Mishima's own sexuality.

I resist the enduring interpretation, particularly since Scott-Stokes's and Inose's biographies of Mishima, of *Confessions* as a reflection of Mishima's own "coming to terms with homosexuality."[40] I also resist reading the second part of *Confessions* as Kō-chan's attempt "to escape [homo]sexuality by donning […] the heterosexual['s]" persona.[41] Kō-chan's heterosexual persona is not more fake than his homosexual persona, and in any case both personae are inadequate as sexual identities because the former lacks the sexual dimension, whereas the latter lacks the love dimension. I build on recent scholarship that argues against the retrospective reading of *Confessions* as a gay novel. For instance, Vincent argues that *Confessions* deviates from the heteronormative I-novel but is suspended between the homosocial narrative and gay identity proper,[42] while Rankin observes that Mishima considered "sexual classifications as superfluous."[43] Besides, whether Kō-chan reflects Mishima himself is not particularly meaningful for reading *Confessions,* for it perpetuates the self-enclosed circle of mutual illustration between "Mishima the historical figure and Mishima the autofictional figure."[44] Instead, *Confessions* is not only not a gay novel but also profoundly uninterested in, indeed, vehemently *against* the attempt to fix identity in any way. It is queer in content as it disturbs the homo/hetero binary and queer in that it generates queer

ways of reading that unsettle generic conventions and the authorial figure. What the text does highlight is surface rather than depth, change rather than definition, i.e. transient masks (*kamen*) and incessant shifts between them rather than the mask-wearer. That masquerade in *Confessions* invites rather than averts risks precisely affirms instability and artifice as desirable.

Qiu's *Notes*

Confessions offers points of comparison with Qiu's *Notes*: that masquerade is an interplay between different appearances; that it involves ludic risk, is a queer method but could also become a straightening device, though always involving parodic intent; and that autobiographical fiction is a textual mask that *remains* a mask, without referring to the author's personal life as the source of truth. *Notes* addresses these issues by equally underlining the dynamics between layers of masks and the contrast between private and public. But *Notes* suggests that masquerade affirms rather than disavows the authentic self. As I argue, while *Notes* intertextually imitates *Confessions* by modelling after Mishima's confessional narrative, it simultaneously hijacks Mishima's masculine and self-centred viewpoint. *Confessions* becomes a meta-textual layer of mask on *Notes*, a palimpsest on which Qiu writes queer masquerades in Taipei's context from fragmented, feminine, and de-gendered perspectives that upset any notion of a coherent queer subject. Namely, *Notes* queers *Confessions* by masquerading in its textual mode.

Notes narrates in eight diary entries the life of a female university student nicknamed Lazi, focusing on her tortured romantic relationships with two women and her friendships with young queers. Parallel to Lazi's storyline runs another narrative about a crocodile who has ""性別未知" (49) (unknown gender) going about in human disguise because crocodiles

are hounded by society. Lazi's and the crocodile's paths cross after Lazi graduates and starts working at a teahouse. Eventually, Lazi arranges accommodation for the crocodile in the teahouse's secluded basement. *Notes* visibly echoes *Confessions*'s queer and simulative autobiographical narrative, as observed by Chi Ta-wei[45] and supported by Qiu's evocation of Mishima (5). Qiu also prominently refers to modern Japanese male authors at the start of the novel: Dazai Osamu and Haruki Murakami besides Mishima. Alongside numerous other European and Latin American male authors and film directors Qiu evokes, especially Jean Genet (discussed later), *Notes* assumes a resolutely non-"nativist" (本土) posture and is sometimes criticised for prioritising the male gay/queer figure while articulating lesbian identity. I suggest, however, that this is read as a foreign masculine mask, epitomized by Qiu's mimicking of *Confessions*, which is queered by *Notes*'s focus on feminine, non-exclusively lesbian, and non-conformist experiences in Taipei. In Peters's view, masks are stylistically gendered: the "masculine mask […] represents the seeing subject, its […] concentration […] but also its narcissistic deafness," whereas the "feminine mask is associated with 'being seen'," representing "muteness, namelessness, deception."[46] Kō-chan's self-obsessed figure provides an ideal masculine mask for *Notes*, only to be reversed and split by Lazi's and the crocodile's distinctly non-masculine double narratives. That this masculine mask is foreign (non-nativist) is also important, because Qiu reiterates Mishima's repeated references to *non-Japanese* (European) queer icons in *Confessions* (e.g. Sebastian, Elagabalus, Proust), capitalising on figures of alterity to transgress self-identity. Moreover, Qiu emphasizes via the sign of foreignness that the crocodile and queer youths in *Notes* feel so out-of-place in Taiwanese society that they need to look elsewhere for spiritual affinity.

Notes plays with the idea that the feminine mask provides an alternative to the masculine but avoids drawing any straightforward correlation between the feminine mask and female subjectivity. I first question the typical identification of the crocodile with the fictional

alter ego of Lazi and the masked lesbian.[47] Beginning with the title *Eyu shouji*, *shouji* literally means "handwritten notes," denoting intimate writings such as diaries, letters, and personal records. *Shouji* thus signals private, documentary, and autobiographical writing primarily for oneself, and suggests blocking out the reader, who is relegated to a voyeuristic position. Contrasted with Mishima's *kokuhaku,* which assumes the reader as its recipient, *shouji* is solipsistic and less performative, as is the feminine mask. *Eyu* first implies that the author of these "notes" is the crocodile, who is probably the novel's protagonist. But *eyu* immediately evokes a monstrous predatory beast, which radically contrasts the "muteness" of the feminine mask. The only significant text in Chinese involving crocodiles before *Notes* is Tang literatus Han Yu's essay《祭鱷魚文》 ("Sacrificial Address to Crocodiles"), which condemns crocodiles as a local scourge to be expunged. Moreover, *eyu* implies hypocrisy and cunning, as in *eyu yanlei* 鱷魚眼淚, "crocodile tears", derived from the belief that crocodiles weep while devouring their prey and epitomize fakery. This evocation of pretence foregrounds Qiu's depiction of the gender-free crocodile masquerading as a normal member of human society. Nevertheless, the overwhelmingly negative connotations of *eyu* jar intriguingly with the novel's portrayal of the crocodile as remarkably gentle and timid, and symbol of the marginalized queer, i.e. the opposite of aggressiveness, a victim rather than predator. Why does Qiu choose the crocodile's image?

Existing criticism offers some explanations. Fran Martin sees the crocodile as the mediated and "monstrous object of collective looking" at *tongxinglian* ("homosexuals") in 1990s Taiwan.[48] Carlos Rojas reads it from the Foucauldian lens as a metaphor for the homosexual as a new biological "species" created by modern knowledge and surveillance systems.[49] Rojas also observes that salamanders – crocodile-resembling amphibians also mentioned in *Notes* – are inauspicious in Chinese cultural perception.[50] Contrasting these interpretations that focus on negative public perception, Chi reads the crocodile as an "empty

sign" that does not symbolize anything specific,[51] a placeholder (that could have been anything) retrospectively read as a symbol for the queer or lesbian. While I agree with interpretations that affirm the crocodile's monstrosity as an effect of biased perception, this can be equally evoked by other animalistic images such as the snake or centaur (one of Lazi's self-images) (106). I disagree with Chi, however, and think that there are particular reasons for Qiu's choice of the crocodile, for instance its non-human biological characteristics: an oviparous reptile rather than a mammal and difficult to "sexually differentiate,"[52] which echoes the gender ambiguity of Qiu's crocodile. Moreover, we should account for the paradox in Qiu's crocodile as a being that, as Hélène Cixous describes in relation to the rabbit in Qiu's *Last Words from Montmartre,* "intermingles cruelty, tenderness, and rabbit-heartedness."[53] To further complicate the picture, the novel title's twin implications of documentary-style diary and the crocodile as first-person narrator are double-crossed by the fictional narrative and the actual first-person narrator Lazi, whereas the crocodile is narrated from the third-person viewpoint. How do we square the novel's fictionality with its diary form and understand the crocodile character? Examining masquerade and its risks in relation to queerness clarifies these issues.

Firstly, Lazi and her queer friends are prominent masqueraders. Although they do not wear a costume of disguise as the crocodile does, they feign normality and construct false images of themselves for their families and society. Lazi describes her relationship with her family as a "和諧的舞步" (harmonious dance) trotted while "他們抱著我的偶身" (they embrace [her] puppet), which is a "假我虛相" (false illusion of [herself]) closely "接近他們想像的我" (106) (resembling [her] family's imagination of [her]). Her public self is a "幻影" (phantom) she maintains to "符合[世人]的範疇" (106) (conform to social expectations). Throughout *Notes*, Lazi is painfully aware of the split between her interior self and her

various social roles, shown in her citation from W. Somerset Maugham's memoirs: "'我的人生出奇地沒有真實感, 像一個我看著**另一個我在海市蜃樓扮演各式各樣的角色**'" (101) ("My life exceptionally lacked all sense of reality, as if one self were watching another self performing all sorts of personae in a mirage").[54] This spectacle of the self as other echoes Kō-chan's obsessive acting of personae to the point of losing the sensation of living his own life.

The performativity and multiplicity of the self extends to other queer youths in Lazi's circle. Chukuang, whose self-presentation oscillates between flamboyant glamour and abject shabbiness (72), "他體內本來就有很多個楚狂" (219) (contains many different Chukuangs). Mengsheng, Chukuang's ex-partner and a delinquent, appears to "過最正常的日子" (36) (live in utmost normality) though he performs "激情戲" (highly erotic dances) simulating gay sex and even defecation in an underground bar with the bar owner (128), nicknamed Nothing and a queer who defaced himself by slashing his own face at age twenty (beginning quote). Nothing's violent defacement gains significance when juxtaposed with the pretence of normality of other queers from Lazi to Mengsheng, which fundamentally concerns maintaining their social faces. Hinging on the term *lian* 臉: "face", which figuratively means "public self" and "reputation", these young queers' masquerades as normal members of a conformist society are public (sur)faces that hide their vulnerable, non-heteronormative private selves. In Martin's view, the metaphor for oppressed *tongxinglian* in late twentieth-century Taiwan centres on masks and layers of membranes instead of the "closet" precisely because of the paramount importance of not "losing face" (*diulian* **丟臉**) in society.[55] Nothing's self-inflicted disfigurement, -- literally to "not want face" (*buyaolian* 不要臉), the expression for "being shameless," -- is a vehement protest against face-centric society and the refusal to masquerade. He refuses to have the face imposed by others or to "give face" (*geilian* 給臉) to others by acquiescing to social norms. But this means being reduced to

"nothing", an underground person existing in the shadows and scatological realm. Contrasting the heroic martyrdom fantasy in Kō-chan's queer masculinity, queer men in *Notes* enact a queerness grounded in "failure," "anti-social" masochism, and "self-destruction."[56]

Nothing's scarred face is relevant to the questions raised in *Confessions* about queer futurity and masquerade as a straightening device because it implies that queer youths like Lazi have no future, unless they are ultimately straightened by their masquerade of normativity, which is also deeply damaging. For these queers who are all "deformed" (97) by the curse of gender,[57] their masquerades risk exposure, i.e. losing face, disappointing their families, social stigmatisation, and potentially death. Lazi is haunted by the fear of being unmasked and showing others her "原形" (46) (real form) of a "怪物" (118) (freak), for she knows that "自己的樣貌" (her appearance) is "難容於社會" (118) (hardly tolerated by society). In Huie's words, *Notes* "is about living in permanent wartime" and being trapped in a "vicious cycle."[58] As in *Confessions*, queer time is experienced in the abysmal now, oscillating between different socially-conforming masks that, with every repetition, exacerbates self-damage.

Otherwise, these masquerading queers simultaneously risk being completely reappropriated by heteronormativity and integrated into the societal mechanism as just another cog, i.e. becoming their social face. Lazi observes that in Taipei, "人們活著只爲了被製成考試和賺錢的罐頭" (8) (people live only to be processed into cans of exams and money-making). This is the opposite of Kō-chan's situation. Rather than the masquerade corroding one's original normality, any non-conformist in *Notes* risks being devoured by an imposed normality when they masquerade for too long. For instance, the female couple Zhirou and Tuntun drift apart and become competent in navigating heteronormative romantic

relationships with straight men whom they actually despise. Zhirou detests her boyfriend for being "功利" (utilitarian) and "計算" (140) (calculating); whereas Tuntun regards dating men as a matter of "挑水果" (169) (picking the choicest fruits), inadvertently reflecting the very attitude of instrumentalizing others which Zhirou rejects. Both women's futurity lies in being straightened from their queer aberrance, as Lazi predicts, they will "往 […] 渴望男子且不適合再愛女子的方向演去" (137) (develop in the direction of desiring men [and be] no longer suitable for loving women). Lazi's predicament is, however, being caught in the impasse (*xian* 險, "edge") between two risks: she cannot drop her mask of normality like Mengsheng or Nothing, nor is she of material suitable enough to be consumed by the mask and processed into a regular member of society.

Secondly, parallel to Lazi, the crocodile exemplifies the masquerader. It first appears as an object of intense media speculation and impossible to taxonomize: "鱷魚是一種很像魚的人, 不是很像人的魚" (45) (a sort of human who strongly resembles fish, not a fish that strongly resembles human beings).[59] This reference to fish plays on the premodern Chinese classification of crocodiles as "fish",[60] for *eyu* literally means "crocodile fish"; whereas in modern zoology, crocodiles are reptiles, not fish, which further deepens the taxonomic confusion about the crocodile in *Notes*. The crocodile is referred to in "去性化稱呼" (49) (de-gendered terms), offering an uncategorisable, human-animal perspective that juxtaposes Lazi's female subjectivity and unsettles the notion of a fixed central subject in *Notes*.

The crocodile masquerades, like Lazi, to protect itself from persecution by camouflage. It wears a full-body "人裝" (57) (human costume) to conceal its shape and green skin. The outfit is so thorough that it includes flat "齒罩" (69) (teeth covers) to hide the crocodile's fangs. As social discrimination coerces the crocodile to be armed to the teeth, a

sense of its vulnerability prevails upon the first impression. Nevertheless, in his exposition of animal mimicry, Caillois reminds us that we too easily suppose animals masquerade to protect themselves from predators by blending into the environment. The equally important function of camouflage is to "prepare for offence, and [that] invisibility is often assumed to ensure the success of making a frightening and sudden appearance."[61] For Caillois, "the two aims of mimicry:" defence and attack, "are often inextricable."[62] The purpose of disguise is therefore, to "show oneself" as much as to "hide oneself."[63] This is relevant to the crocodile's masquerade and brings out the crocodile's radically dissident dimension.

Nowhere is this dimension better exemplified than in the crocodile's self-identification with Genet, *enfant terrible* of twentieth-century French literature, openly homosexual, and a most savage enemy of bourgeois values. In the oft-cited scene of the crocodile-exclusive masquerade ball, the crocodile attends under the pseudonym "Genet" and is more a risk-taker than a risk avoider. When attendees are exhorted to take off their human costumes (124), the crocodile willingly does so because it wants to unmask itself. After Lazi prevents its own unmasking at the last minute, the crocodile complains: "嗚嗚……, 我差一點點就可以永遠不再穿人裝見人了" (125) (Alas, alas! I was so close to being able to be out and about without wearing the human costume ever again). While the crocodile is aware of the risk of exposure, it is attracted to self-disclosure, which also risks stigmatization and surveillance. The key difference between exposure and self-disclosure lies in the agency of unmasking: to be exposed is to suffer violence imposed by others (i.e. non-crocodile humans), whereas to reveal oneself voluntarily pre-empts the possibility of being exposed and asserts one's own agency. By trying to unmask itself, the crocodile aspires to become an active agent like Genet, as it professes: "沒有**哪個名人比**[惹內]更棒" (124-25) (no celebrity is more wonderful than Genet). More importantly, Qiu's suggestion that the crocodile parallels Genet connects *Notes* to the French avant-garde's interrogation of sexual norms and

calls to mind Genet's depictions of lethal masquerades – famously in *Les Bonnes* (*The Maids*, 1947) and *Splendid's* (1993),[64] where both masqueraders act in ever riskier ways and finally die as the person they impersonate, -- thus foreshadowing the crocodile's death.

The potentially "attack" function of the crocodile's masquerade becomes explicit in the crocodile's filmed self-immolation, which is posted by the crocodile to Taiwan Television (TTV) and broadcasted to the eager public. Here, the crocodile breaks its silence and makes a dramatic public appearance which resembles the camouflaged animal's "frightening and sudden appearance" expounded by Caillois. The ironic and remonstrative nature of the video is confirmed by several details. Firstly, the crocodile reveals its identity: "嗨! […] 我是鱷魚" (222) (Hi! […] I am a crocodile), but it does not die *unmasked*. It is only shown wearing "白色頭套, 身體密密包著白色罩袍" (a white head covering, its body thickly wrapped in white robes), and later it "脫掉一層緊身衣" (222) (takes off one layer of its tight-fitting clothes). The quantifier *yiceng* ("one layer") contrasts with *mimi baozhe* ("thickly wrapped"), indicating that more layers of clothes lie underneath and that the crocodile has not bared its skin. Although the crocodile has broken its cover, it masquerades *forthrightly* and refuses to grant the public the pleasure of seeing its real form, frustrating the objectifying gaze. Secondly, the video, apparently shot by Lazi under the pseudonym "Jarman", explicitly recycles imagery and words from Derek Jarman's film *The Garden* (1990), which includes lynching scenes of a gay couple and violent paparazzi filming an assault on a crossdresser. Although Jarman's film conveys rage against homophobia and social injustices: "I have no words. My shaking hands can't express my fury,"[65] the final words in the crocodile's video adapt this citation and express no indignation: "我無話可說……祝你們幸福快樂!" (223) (I have no words… I wish you happiness and joy)! These words accompany the last shot of the

crocodile in a flaming bathtub drifting into the sea, a spectacle of death that adds dark irony to the voiceover.

Despite this light-hearted valediction, the final scene is completely grim because self-immolation carries Nothing's self-harm to the lethal level and is an extreme method of protest. To have the self-immolation taped and broadcasted is to publicly denounce the very public who watches it. The crocodile's suicide not only recalls the shocking self-immolation protest of democracy activist Cheng Nan-jung in 1989, it also re-enacts, as Heinrich observes, the suicides of Dazai and Mishima.[66] Nevertheless, by ending upon an ironic blessing, Qiu pointedly does not reproduce Mishima's masculinist militarist rhetoric at his suicide. In this final performance, the crocodile emphatically affirms that it is not content to remain a silent oppressed minority hiding in society and merely allowed to exist. Rather, it assumes the role of the protestor whose sudden and dramatic appearance is a disruptive queer force that shocks society out of its complacency and challenges its biases and oppressive institutions. I argue against Chi's view that the pseudo-citation of Jarman suggests "退縮避戰" (withdrawal and avoidance of combat),[67] for its ironic incongruity with the immolation means we cannot take its best wishes at face value but should understand them as a confrontation. By deliberately realizing the worst risk of its masquerade: death, the crocodile nullifies this risk, simultaneously achieving self-annihilation and self-affirmation. Its filmed death is both the end and climax of its masquerade.

If we relate to Catherine Malabou's positing of woman as "not […] a passive non-subject, but […] an active *negative subject*,"[68] we can read the crocodile as precisely such a negatively defined subject that opposes the masculinist and heteronormative subject. Here, the crocodile comes closest to Genet's iconoclastic stance. Its performative suicide emulates the gay and queer martyrdom which Genet comes to signify after Sartre's seminal *Saint Genet, comédien et martyr* (1952), which Qiu must know about since she cites (125) Sartre's

support for Genet in *Notes*. But similar to the way she hijacks Mishima, Qiu desists from Genet's masculinist position, particularly his predilection for male martyrs. In contrast, the martyr in *Notes* dons the masculine masks of Mishima and Genet but without their male heroism, occupying instead a queer and feminine position that is doubly stressed by Lazi's assistance in the crocodile's suicide.

Is there any room for ludicity in *Notes*'s sombre picture of masquerade? Yes, though much of the play here is neither spontaneous nor pleasurable. Rather, play is a formal game enacting role-play and a strategy to counter violence and trauma. Firstly, the novel's masqueraders play the game of conforming to social expectations. As discussed, they inhabit different roles such as the conscientious daughter, the diligent university student, or the normalised human being. According to Motte, one key contribution of Oulipo writers to theorizing the ludic is to understand the game as structure, and that "structure itself, *as game*, engenders meaning."[69] If we interpret social roles as structures, which masqueraders in *Notes* perform self-consciously as public-facing appearances, then the ensuing masquerade is a game. Lazi describes her tedious duties as president of a university club: "像要把一個無聊的游戲煞有介事地玩起來" (71) (it was as if I had to play a meaningless game dead seriously). Moreover, to act these roles while retaining a radically different sense of one's inner self means playing a formal, rule-based game where the stakes are high. Indeed, games in social practices and competitions are rarely fun or inconsequential. This points to a crucial area where the semantic fields of play and game do not overlap, as Hamayon articulates: "There cannot be *game* without *play*, whereas we can *play* without playing *games*."[70] One can also play a game without any *playfulness*, i.e. without experiencing pleasure and not for leisure, which is typically the case with games in professional sports, diplomacy, and warfare. This distressful experience of gameplay applies to the obligated masquerades in *Notes*. Play can be forced, traumatic, and deadly, especially when masquerade is a straightening device.

Nonetheless, masquerade in *Notes* is not devoid of spontaneity and enjoyment. There are glimpses of playfulness where masqueraders have some agency despite the demanding gameplay. A different kind of play emerges here: play as a counter-strategy to violence, providing interstices of breathing space in a suffocating environment. This suggests possibilities for reparative experience, as Eve Sedgwick emphasises, for queerness cannot only be "paranoiacally" critical but should take account of "pleasure."[71] For instance, despite its prison-like life in the teahouse basement, the crocodile is childlike and playful. It plays with toy crocodiles in the bath (133) and enjoys "娛樂" (78) (leisure activities) such as knitting and model making (134). This cartoonish and homely behaviour contrasts the ferocity and non-domesticity of the crocodile's conventional image, creating the ludic effect of "gap moe" (反差萌) in contemporary manga language. It also shows that the crocodile's life is not all doom and gloom. Similarly, there are many playful and solidarity-building interactions between Lazi and her queer friends. Prominently, Lazi suggests founding a "無性化共榮圈" (97) (gender-free co-prosperity sphere) with Chukuang and Mengsheng to recover from the damage they suffer from heteronormativity. The term parodies the Japanese imperialist discourse of "Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere" (大東亜共栄圏) promoted in colonial Taiwan and queers the paternalist notion of Japan leading other Asian nations against Western powers. This postcolonial rebuttal from a queer perspective shows that queerness fundamentally resists patriarchal projects, shedding light on Kō-chan's inability to really engage with the war, as his sole imagination of the war is his own death rather than Japan's victory. These ludic instances puncture the tortured main narrative that brims with depression and suicidal thoughts, suggesting that space for spontaneous and reparative play must be preserved even in – indeed, particularly in – harsh circumstances. This point is observed by Oulipo writer Georges Perec in his auto-biographical fiction *W* when the narrator visits an exhibition on concentration camps and sees "photos […] of a chess game made from

bread patties."[72] Although the situation in *Notes* does not match the horror of concentration camps, Perec's example implies that in dire situations, playing of one's own free will offers respite and asserts one's dignity and humanity.

Qiu's choice of the crocodile image makes sense because the crocodile needs to be simultaneously a harmless person unfairly vilified by public perception as monstrous, a figure of dissimulation (as in "crocodile tears"), and a fierce force of queer criticism of social oppression. Despite readers' inclination to identify the crocodile as Qiu's lesbian self, especially after Qiu's suicide, *Notes* insists on the crocodile's uncategorisable nature by depicting it as gender-neutral and prone to fall in love with all sorts of people (88-89), not exclusively women. As concerns textual form, the crocodile's narrative correlates with allegory and fiction whereas Lazi's narrative correlates with diary and epistolary confessions. The parallelism between both narratives means that *Notes* masquerades on the level of genre. Fiction masquerades as autobiography and autobiography masquerades as fiction. Both literary forms are ultimately masks for Qiu herself, who stands in a meta-textual position and cannot be equated with either Lazi or the crocodile, just as Mishima cannot be identified with Kōchan. Moreover, Qiu's authorial voice is filtered through other writers' fictional confessions and masks: besides Mishima and Dazai, García Márquez's *Chronicle of a Death Foretold* and Abe's *Face of Another*, a novel about a scientist who wears a plastic face after his real face is destroyed. These layers of textual masquerade caution us against interpreting *Notes* as Qiu's own story, a caveat echoed by Heinrich and Eloise Dowd in their examination of Qiu's *Last Words from Montmartre*.[73] As in the crocodile's suicide scene, even when the true self is affirmed, it is not something that the public, or readers, are entitled to see and know.

Comparative Reflections

In both *Confessions* and *Notes*, masquerade oscillates between interiority and exteriority, the mask and the self, a queering force and straightening device. This clarifies the nature of masquerade: though masquerade can be used to reinforce dominant norms, it inherently has queer potential because it always involves an alternative position that disidentifies with the position that aligns with power. The masquerading subject's starting point is crisis rather than unconscious compliance. The sense of crisis finds expression in Mishima's and Qiu's differing articulations of the mask and queer selfhood. For Mishima, the mask is an enhancement, as Kō-chan's masks are extensions of himself by creating multiple selves. But the enhancing mask can trap the masquerader in an undermining sense of self-deficiency. For Qiu, the mask is a cure, donned to counter the inhibiting social gaze. But this curative mask is subverted in the end to become a supplement that reinforces the masquerader's agency and affronts voyeuristic spectators. In neither case is masquerade risk-free. Kō-chan risks his sense of self since he can no longer take off his masks and is condemned to eternal role-play; whereas Lazi and the crocodile increasingly risk identity crisis and death precisely because their masquerades accentuate the split between their masks and selves. Although masquerade in both novels has much to do with queer sexuality, their representations of queer experience are dissimilar. In Mishima, masquerade utterly undermines authenticity whereas in Qiu, authenticity is precisely asserted through masquerade.

Simultaneously, as authors, Mishima and Qiu are both masked by the confessional narratives in their novels, with *Confessions* acting as an extra layer of textual dissimulation on *Notes.* After all, the effect of truth that autobiographical writing creates firmly remains within the fictional framework. Contrasts between Mishima's and Qiu's aesthetics and literary expressions are striking. Mishima adopts a queer, masculinist, and narcissistic perspective and is mercilessly ironic in *Confessions,* whereas Qiu's *Notes* is painfully sincere

to the point of being maudlin and emphasises a female perspective while encompassing gender-fluid and queer perspectives. Nevertheless, both irony and sentimentalism, artificiality and sincerity are ultimately textual effects resulting from mediation. Namely, the mediation between author and work, Mishima and Qiu, different narrative layers in each novel, multiple fictional and real literary figures, and between the text and its readers.

Although masquerade depends significantly on the masquerader's imagination, performativity, and intention, often it cannot be dropped at will without endangering the masquerader. Masquerade is neither an unconstrained game nor the antithesis of reality, for its fictional space can be permeated with real risks. But risk is not always shunned by masqueraders but sometimes actively sought. In *Confessions*, this is because risk produces the pleasure of transgressing taboos and is integral to playful movements between different bodies and subject positions. In *Notes*, one kind of risk – voluntary self-disclosure – is chosen to thwart another kind of risk: forced exposure. Although the multiple masks in *Notes* worn for masquerade are a "survival tactic,"[74] they are not only that. They reveal different degrees and experiences of risks attached to masquerade. They also assert the agency of masqueraders to use masquerade for their own purposes: affirming the authentic inner self, resistance, and play. Masquerade is not merely a game with rules defined by social conventions or audience expectations, it is a space of risks that elicit different responses from masqueraders. I therefore define "ludic risk" as denoting both risks that produce or enhance playfulness and risks inherent to game structures and which may advance gameplay. Ludic risk allows for a concept of play that includes, sometimes even depends on, danger and violence. It also highlights the question of limit in play. As Georges Bataille argues, the ultimate limit of play is not work, duty, or reality, but death: "the genuine player is […] one who *risks her life*, […] real play is a matter of life or death."[75] Thus, "the limit of play is the limit of potential expenditure,"[76] and the maximum expenditure for the masquerader is nothing other than life

itself. This expenditure of life does not mean death *tout court*, but it must be death *in the act of masquerading*. The supreme player who risks everything in her play-acting is suggested by Kō-chan's obsessive replays of his own imaginary death scenes and actualised by the crocodile's theatrical suicide.

That masks and masquerade simultaneously conceal and reveal is a truism. But what masquerade reveals, as Mishima and Qiu demonstrate, is not some invariant core of selfhood but risks to identity and the body, and experiences and interpretive modes that are obscured by identitarian and epistemic categories. Masquerade is like a sieve through which the self can be infinitely sifted, leaving nothing but dregs, "a remnant that neither relates nor flows back," in Mishima's words.[77] Rather than being invariant, the self is shown to be particularly malleable and *vulnerable*, possibly grounded in nothing. By playing with different masks, the masquerader discovers possibilities of queering, reinventing, or annihilating the self – a potentially liberating and terrifyingly abysmal prospect. Instead of constituting gender identity through performing "*stylized repetition of acts*,"[78] masquerade offers the possibility to *play* with all kinds of identities and therefore disrupts established patterns of behaviour and recognition. In this way, *Confessions* and *Notes* articulate masquerade *as risky play* between different appearances and as a queer method.

University College London

Notes

[1] Yukio Mishima 三島由紀夫, 《仮面の告白》 (Tokyo: 2020 [1949]), 141. Hereafter *Confessions,* cited by page number. Translation modified after Meredith Weatherby's translation, *Confessions of a Mask* (New York: New Directions, 1958). Translations from non-Anglophone sources are mine unless otherwise stated.
[2] Qiu Miaojin 邱妙津, 《鱷魚手記》 (Taipei: 2020 [1994]), 127. Hereafter *Notes*, cited by page number.

[3] Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), 23, 13, 26.
[4] Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et les hommes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1958), 39.
[5] Ibid., 222.
[6] Ibid., 59.
[7] Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (London: Jason Aronson, 1987 [1972]), 140-41.
[8] Roberte Hamayon, *Why We Play*, trans. Damien Simon (Chicago: HAU Books, 2016), 25-26.
[9] Margaret Hillenbrand, *Literature, Modernity, and the Practice of Resistance* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).
[10] Chi Ta-wei, "《美與暴烈》紀大偉推薦序：著作等身而且身等著作的三島由紀夫," *The News Lens* (2018), https://www.thenewslens.com/article/98561 (accessed May 24, 2021).
[11] Henri Michaux, *Face aux verrous* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 66.
[12] E.g. In biographies of Mishima: Naoki Inose with Hiroaki Sato, *Persona* (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 2012); Henry Scott-Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1974); Paul Schrader's film *Mishima* (1985). On Qiu, see Fran Martin, *Situating Sexualities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2003), 231; Hélène Cixous's preface to Qiu, *Dernières lettres de Montmartre,* trans. Emmanuelle Péchenart (Paris: Editions Noir sur Blanc, 2018).
[13] Thomas Garcin, "Par-delà l'exotisme: lire et traduire Mishima en France," *Critique* 888 (2021): 423.
[14] Sara Ahmed, "Orientations: Toward A Queer Phenomenology," *GLQ* 12:4 (2006): 565.
[15] J. Keith Vincent, "Queer Reading and Modern Japanese Literature," in *Routledge Handbook of Modern Japanese Literature*, eds. Rachael Hutchinson, Leith Morton (London/New York: Routledge, 2016), 70.
[16] Stéphane Giocanti, *Yukio Mishima et ses masques* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2021); Stephen Dodd, "The Pleasure of Dark Places: Heterotopia in Mishima Yukio's *Inochi urimasu* (Life for Sale)," *Japan Forum* (2020): 3.
[17] John Marmysz, *Cinematic Nihilism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017), 183.
[18] Paul De Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *MLN* 94 (1979): 919-30.
[19] Gerald Peters, "Autobiography as Masquerade," *Mosaic* 25/1 (1992): 81.
[20] José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia* (New York: NYU Press, 2009), 1.
[21] Mihai Spariosu, *The Wreath of Wild Olive* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 29.
[22] Julia Hoydis, *Risk and the English Novel* (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2019), 1.
[23] Ahmed, 554.
[24] Andrew Rankin, *Mishima Aesthetic Terrorist* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2018), 93.
[25] Catherine Millot, "L'érotisme de la desolation," *L'Infini* 45 (1994): 135.
[26] Astric Lac, "Community by Death: Mishima, Bataille, and Metaphysics of the Flesh," *Comparative Literature Studies* 54, No. 2 (2017): 436.
[27] Caillois, *Œuvres* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 558.
[28] Ibid., 546.
[29] David Lomas, "Artist-Sorcerers: Mimicry, Magic and Hysteria," *Oxford Art Journal* 35, No. 3 (2012): 370.
[30] Caillois and John Shepley, "Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia," *October* 31 (1984): 27.
[31] Ahmed, "Orientations", 562.
[32] Joan Riviere, "Womanliness as a Masquerade," *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis* 10 (1929): 303.
[33] Translation modified after Weatherby.
[34] Marjorie Rhine, "Glossing Scripts and Scripting Pleasure in Mishima's *Confessions of a Mask*," *Studies in the Novel* 31, no. 2 (1999): 222.
[35] Bernard Suits, *The Grasshopper* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2005 [1978]), 146.
[36] Mishima's Letter to Sakamoto, November 2, 1943, *Zenshū* 38, 507, cited in Inose and Sato, 169; Mishima cited in *Confessions*, cover page.
[37] Mishima's *Notes*, cited in *Confessions*, 271.
[38] Mishima cited in Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West,* vol. 1 (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984), 1183.
[39] Mikhail M. Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel," in *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 159.
[40] Damian Flanagan, *Yukio Mishima* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 97. Flanagan warns against reading *Confessions* as an autobiography, but then reads it autobiographically.
[41] Susan Joliffe Napier, *Escape from the Wasteland* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 51.
[42] Vincent, *Two-Timing Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 175-98.
[43] Rankin, 119.

[44] Gavin Walker, "The Double Scission of Mishima Yukio: Limits and Anxieties in the Autofictional Machine," *positions* 18:1 (2010): 147.
[45] Chi Ta-wei (2018).
[46] Peters, 88.
[47] E.g. Juliette Savard, "Bas le masque," *Lire: Le magazine littéraire* (2021): 86; Chi Ta-wei, "Tongzhi Literature, Taiwan," in *Global Encyclopedia of Lesbian, Gay, Transgender, and Queer History*, eds. Howard Chiang, Anjali Arondekar, et al. (Farmington Hills, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2019), 1613; Liang-ya Liou, "愛慾、性別與書寫: 邱妙津的女同性戀小說," in 《性別論述與台灣小說》 ed. Chia-ling Mei (Taipei: Maitian, 2000).
[48] Martin, 228.
[49] Carlos Rojas, "'A New Species': Gender, Sexuality, and Taxonomic Logics in Sinophone Communities," *Prism: Theory and Modern Chinese Literature* 17:2 (2020): 278.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Chi Ta-wei, "**鱷魚的正面與背影**," (2012) https://okapi.books.com.tw/article/1470 (accessed June 8, 2021).
[52] Chih-Chen Tsai, "同志悲歌及其純愛：論邱妙津《**鱷魚手記**》、《**蒙馬特遺書**》**的動物意象、性別政治**與情感象**徵**," *臺中教育大學學報：人文藝術類* 31(1) (2017): 50.
[53] Hélène Cixous, "Orphée chinoise," in Qiu, *Dernières lettres de Montmartre*, 17.
[54] My translation of Chinese citation of Maugham in *Notes*.
[55] Martin, 197-98.
[56] Halberstam, 124.
[57] The original text says "被性別這頭箍得變形" (deformed by the headband of gender), alluding to the Monkey's headband in *Journey in the West*, which squeezes Monkey's skull whenever Xuanzang chants an incantation to punish Monkey.
[58] Bonnie Huie, in Veronica Esposito, "Exploring Translated Lit's Ecosystem: A Conversation with Bonnie Huie," *World Literature Today* 94(3) (2020): 13.
[59] The latter clause is ambiguous and can be understood as "the crocodile is a sort of fish that does not resemble human beings very much." Huie's translation of *yu* as "reptile characteristics" misses the joke on taxonomic confusions.
[60] The 廣韻 defines: 鰐, 魚名 ("*E* is a fish's name").
[61] Caillois, *Œuvres*, 533.
[62] Ibid., 512.
[63] Ibid., 548.
[64] *Splendid's* was published in 1993, so Qiu could not have known it when writing *Notes.* But the resonance between Qiu and Genet does not need to be exclusively historical.
[65] Derek Jarman, *The Garden* (film, 1990), ending voiceover.
[66] Ari Larissa Heinrich, "Afterword," in *Last Words from Montmartre* (New York: NYRB, 2014), 156.
[67] Chi Ta-wei, "發現**鱷魚—建構台灣女同性戀論述**," in《**晚安巴比倫—網路世代的性慾、異議，與政治**閱讀》 (Taipei: Tansuo, 1998), 148.
[68] Tawny Andersen, "Ontological violence: Catherine Malabou on plasticity, performativity, and writing the feminine," *Culture, Theory and Critique* 61:1 (2020): 17.
[69] Warren Motte, *Playtexts* (Lincoln & London: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 143.
[70] Hamayon, 122.
[71] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading," in *Novel Gazing*, ed. Sedgwick (Duke University Press, 1997), 1-37.
[72] Georges Perec, *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (Paris: Editions Denoël, 1975), 215.
[73] Heinrich and Dowd observe that readers assume the first-person narrator in *Last Words of Montmartre* is a woman, whereas the narrator's gender is ambiguous. See Heinrich and Dowd, "In Memoriam to Identity: Transgender as Strategy in Qiu Miaojin's Last Words from Montmartre," *TSQ* 3, Numbers 3-4 (2016): 569-77.
[74] Heinrich, "Consider the Crocodile: Qiu Miaojin's Lesbian Bestiary," *LARB* (2017), https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/consider-the-crocodile-qiu-miaojins-lesbian-bestiary/ (accessed May 31, 2021).
[75] Georges Bataille, "Sommes-nous là pour jouer? Ou pour être sérieux?" in *Oeuvres complètes*, v.12, articles ii (Paris: Gallimard, 1950-1961), 111.
[76] Ibid., 112.
[77] Mishima cited in Walker, 148.
[78] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York: Routledge, 2006 [1990]), 191.