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Lessons in Immorality: Mishima's Masterpiece of Humor and Social Satire

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Lessons in Immorality: Mishima Yukio's Masterpiece of Humor and Social Satire

by

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requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

From 1958 to 1959, Mishima Yukio published a series of satirical essays titled *Lessons in Immorality* (Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza), in the magazine *Weekly Morningstar* (Syūkan Myōjō). *Lessons in Immorality* was made into a television series, a stage play, and a film.

Famous in the West for writing serious novels, Mishima's work as a humor writer is largely unknown. In these essays Mishima writes in a very comic style, making liberal use of hyperbole, burlesque, and travesty, in order to parody and satirize contemporary Japanese morality. Mishima uses humor to create a world in which Mishima Yukio, iconoclastic author and pop-culture figure, is an arbiter of his own honest and just morality that runs counter to the norms that Japanese at that time considered to be honest and just.

Additionally, Mishima used *Lessons in Immorality* as a forum to discuss some of the serious concerns that are central to his famous novels. Because Mishima was writing for young men and women, he wrote about his complex philosophical and aesthetic ideals in a very humorous and accessible style. Thus, in addition to displaying Mishima's talent as a humor writer, these essays also give the reader fresh perspectives on Mishima's serious literature.

In this paper, I will present the writing styles, rhetorical tools, and philosophical discussions from *Lessons in Immorality* that I believe make the series essential reading for anyone interested in Mishima or postwar Japanese literature.

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Introduction

Starting in the July 27th 1958 issue of the magazine *Weekly Morningstar* (Syūkan Myōjō) until November 1959, Mishima Yukio published a series of essays titled *Lessons in Immorality* (Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza).¹ These essays were so popular that they inspired a stage adaptation, a feature film in which Mishima appeared as “the author,” and a television series. Primarily social criticism and satire, many of the essays have provocative titles such as “You Should Go Drinking, Even with Men You Don’t Know,” “You Should Abuse Women,” and “You Should Tell Lies as Often as Possible.”²

I contend that this series is important to Japanese literature scholars and readers of Japanese literature for the following reasons: Mishima presents his aesthetic, psychological, and socio-political concerns and philosophies in an accessible form. Furthermore, he writes in a humorous style that is not found in most of his translated literature at present, and his humor is only infrequently addressed by Western scholars. Mishima often presents himself as a character in anecdotes, and writes most essays in the voice a witty urbane raconteur. The humor in these essays is wicked and delightful. Ignorance of Mishima’s talent as a humor writer prevents Western readers from having a full understanding of Mishima as both an author and as a cultural figure. I will analyze his humor in greater length further on, but first I will discuss the historical context of this series of essays.

Lessons in Immorality debuted in *Weekly Morningstar*, published by Shūeisha in 1958.³ Having examined the 1959 April nineteenth issue, it is clear that *Weekly Morningstar* is a women’s magazine that targets a broad readership. The April nineteenth

issue is photograph heavy, and it commemorates the royal wedding of Crown Prince Akihiko and Crown Princess Michiko. There is an interview with women connected to the royal family about their social and familial relations with the new crown princess, and several pages of photos of the couple. Mishima's *Lessons in Immorality* essay, "Catchphrase Girls," is listed as the second article in the magazine, and it begins on page 28. The essay is two pages long, and the comical line drawings that accompanied every one of these essays occupy prominent positions: one above the title, and the other two right in the middle of the first and second pages. I have included some examples these sketches in appendix one. The April nineteenth issue also includes a frame from a German film in which a high school girl exposes her breasts to her teacher, a photo-covered page devoted to the "joys of wearing blouses," a sports recap, and an article on adult sexual education. The issue is also bookended by a few pages of color photographs: the imperial family is in color in the front pages, and Deborah Kerr with her brilliant red hair is on the last page of the magazine.⁴

I do not believe that Mishima is specifically targeting a female readership with this series, despite it being published in a women's magazine. Mishima pulls no punches when it comes to discussing faults in contemporary female society, and there is not a single essay that even vaguely resembles pandering articles like "the joys of wearing blouses." However, these essays are not misogynist. Mishima presents so-called immoral and brave women, whose antisocial activities are meant to inspire and entertain readers. For example, in "Boys: Lose Your Virginity While You're Young!" Mishima recasts the older woman who pursues virginal boys as a noble woman doing a service to society, and

he writes that he would be grateful if every older woman deflowered “a hundred, or two hundred” young boys.⁵

Nor is Mishima catering specifically to a male readership. When the characters in Mishima’s essays rebel against authority figures, those figures are usually travestied men. For example, in “You Should Slurp Your Soup,” “Deep in Your Heart, You Should Disrespect Your Teachers,” and “You Should Accuse Your Teachers in the Classroom,” Mishima’s heroes stand out by embarrassing male authority figures. “You Should Accuse Your Teachers in the Classroom” is a particularly fine example of this, in which a young woman enters a full lecture hall and brazenly confesses to an illicit relationship with the lecherous lecturer, which costs him his job.⁶ So, while *Weekly Morningstar* is a women’s magazine, this series has content which appeals to a broad readership.

In order to locate *Lessons in Immorality* within Mishima’s oeuvre, it is necessary to consider other works he published during the period he was writing this essay series. According to Henry Scott Stokes’s biography of Mishima, in 1958 Mishima published four books: *The Lion*, *The Seven Bridges*, *Travel Picture Book*, and *Sunday*.⁷ In 1959 Mishima published the first of two parts of *Lessons in Immorality* as a book, *A Textbook of Style*, both volumes of *Kyoko’s House*, and *Nakedness and Clothing*.⁸ Lastly, in the year following his completion of the serialized release of the essays in *Lessons in Immorality*, Mishima published the second half of *Lessons in Immorality* in a companion volume, *After the Banquet*, and *The Young Lady*.⁹ Mishima was very active as a dramatist as well, and he either published or was working on the following from 1958 to 1960: a modern nō play *Yuya*, a kabuki play *Sash Stealing Pond*, and the modern shingeki plays

The Rose and the Pirate, *Tropical Tree*, *Salomé*, *Women Won't be Conquered*, and *The Black Lizard*.¹⁰ On top of this, Mishima also published essays and criticism regularly, and had three of his works, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, *Lessons in Immorality*, and *The Lighthouse* adapted into film.¹¹ The late 50s were a particularly fertile period for Mishima, and he was prolific in his creation of both serious literary works and works intended for a broad audience. And many of the themes and issues that were central to Mishima's serious works during this period, such as the appeal of evil and the corruption of authority figures, appear in *Lessons in Immorality*.

Mishima's most serious undertaking during this period was his novel *Kyoko's House* (Kyoko no ie). Sadism, the ties between beauty and ephemerality, and the beauty of evil and taboo are central to both *Kyoko's House* and *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Kinkakuji), his 1956 masterpiece. These same themes appear regularly *Lessons in Immorality*. For example, in "You Should Beat Your Woman," Mishima talks about violence in love, and in "All's Unwell That Ends Unwell" Mishima expounds on the relationship between beauty, evil, and death. However, the tone of these essays is distinctly different from the tone of Mishima's novels, and in these essays Mishima presents his ideas in a humorous and thoroughly enjoyable style.

Similarly, Mishima addresses the anti-establishment political ideals he expresses in *After the Banquet* in *Lessons in Immorality*. In the essays, Mishima often uses politicians as the butt of his one-liners and quips, such as we see in "Fear and Freedom" and "You Should Be as Conceited as Possible." And, while *Lessons in Immorality* represents some of the themes and philosophies that were important to Mishima during

these years of his career, many of these essays also contain the seeds of his late-period political ideals; the final essay, “All’s Unwell That Ends Unwell” hints at the transition Mishima made later in life towards political writing, political action, and, ultimately, suicide.

Despite these ties to Mishima’s major novels and their enormous financial success, these essays are almost entirely unknown in the West. Mishima himself is partly to blame for this lack of attention, because of his own opinions on the value of his “middlebrow” work. Mishima divided his literature into two categories: his “entertainments,” and his serious works.¹² Mishima “had only contempt for [his “entertainments”], and when he had finished one he was impervious to criticism about it.”¹³ He gave little credence to his “entertainments,” and the editors of his completed works (*zenshū*) intentionally segregated Mishima’s entertainments into separate volumes.¹⁴

Donald Keene writes the following about Mishima’s “entertainments”:

[Mishima] seems, however, to have found in such writing an outlet for aspects of his personality that were generally obscured in his more important works. His sense of humor, a delight to his friends, was much more readily revealed in his light fiction than elsewhere... The “entertainments” are precisely that, and they form a distinctive though not major part of his oeuvre. It is unlikely that their humble status will be much affected by critical reevaluation, but even these lesser works deserve attention.¹⁵

I certainly share Keene’s opinion that these works are worthy of attention.

However, I do not feel that Mishima’s arbitrary distinctions between his high and low literature are meaningful, and should determine this work’s value. Keene states that Mishima uses this term “entertainment” in the same way that Graham Greene did – to classify works in his canon that “are distinct from the novels because as the name implies

they do not carry a message.”¹⁶ Mishima’s attitude towards *Lessons in Immorality* is clear: he wrote it for fun and profit, and he did not consider it to be as important as *Kinkakuji* or *Kyoko’s House*. His attitude towards *Lessons in Immorality*, and his other “entertainments” for that matter, have unfortunately led many Mishima readers to disregard the quality and importance of these “lesser” works. While the work is entertaining, the term “entertainment” as Mishima uses it categorizes the series as an insignificant part of his canon.

In fact, there is much in *Lessons in Immorality* that warrants serious attention. Its genre, the serialized essay, is a descendant of the *zuihitsu*, has always been accepted and respected in Japanese literature.¹⁷ It was probably the humorous content of the essays that made Mishima define this work as a mere “entertainment.” He did the same with his other humorous writing. However, there is no reason to treat these essays as having little literary merit simply because they’re humorous. Joel Cohn writes that Japanese humor originates from two traditions: the high and the low. The high comic literature of the elite affirms cultural norms and is conservative, while low comic literature was

the expression of an oppressed social group, or of disaffected drop-outs from the elite culture, it showed a marked lack of respect for authority, gleefully portraying the pretensions, vanities, and pratfalls of legendary and historical heroes, revered religious figures, and, when possible, temporal power-holders as well.¹⁸

Mishima’s potential motivations for separating *Lessons in Immorality* from his canonical serious works are numerous. It could be that he truly wrote lightly and for his own amusement (*karui kimochi de, omoshiro okashiku...kaita*), as he states in his afterword.¹⁹ However, contemporary Western readers may not feel that “low comic literature” in general, or *Lessons in Immorality* in particular, deserve to be denigrated. In the West,

there is a rich tradition of social satire and critique through the comic essay, from Montaigne to Swift, and Western readers may not be as quick as Mishima to dismiss “low comic literature” as insignificant as mere “entertainment.”

I believe that Mishima intentionally relegated these works to a secondary status in order to maintain his reputation as a serious artist amongst the literary elite. Mishima “wrote that he learned from Mori Ōgai above all that a writer must be cheerful and proud of his profession, not a haunted intellectual like the man he glimpsed at the mummy show.”²⁰ Mishima wanted to be proud of both his popularity and critical acclaim. *Lessons in Immorality* and his other “entertainments” were the works that gave Mishima the fame he needed to become a social icon, and the wealth he needed to write serious novels without concern for their sale-ability. Dividing his canon between his financially successful “entertainments” and his critically respected serious works allowed Mishima to be both a pop-culture figure and a reputable serious author at the same time.

To gain the stature that he desired as an elite author of worldwide renown, nothing other than the Nobel Prize would do. Perhaps he felt that an international audience would not appreciate his humor, or that Nobel committee members would not think that his “entertainments” were befitting an author in contention for the prize. Whatever the reason, *Lessons in Immorality*, and many of Mishima’s other popular works, were not translated for Western readers.

In 1980 Marguerite Yournencar elegantly summed up the state of Mishima scholarship in the West when she wrote:

It seems impossible that the mediocre, the false, and the prefabricated in literature produced for the enjoyment of the reading masses...should not frequently seep

into his true works of art...But the reverse experiment has never been tried: since none of the minor works intended for popular consumption have been translated, we cannot search in that tangle of themes better developed elsewhere...for dazzling or sharp images, episodes pregnant with truth, which would have found their way into these works as if inadvertently, and which belong instead to his 'true works of art.' It seems, however, unimaginable that the two endeavors remain isolated.²¹

Yournencar is correct in thinking that Mishima's "minor works intended for popular consumption" are valuable. However, her assumption that "dazzling or sharp images" and "episodes pregnant with truth" would only have made their way into his lighter work inadvertently is not so.²² Mishima was direct and intentional in addressing serious themes in *Lessons in Immorality*.

In these essays Mishima writes in a very accessible style. In his serious works, Keene notes that Mishima employed "an exceptionally rich vocabulary: and he was a master of both contemporary and classical Japanese."²³ *Lessons in Immorality* is written for a broad audience, and in the essays he gives his readers simplified explanations of some of his aesthetics and serious philosophical concerns. Also, *Lessons in Immorality* shows a side of Mishima with which many foreign readers may not be familiar. In the West, Mishima is known for writing serious psychological novels, such as *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, but he was also an immensely talented humorist. For contemporary Western readers, these essays give a better understanding of Mishima as a multi-talented writer who can write both complex psychological novels and humorous satirical essays. It is important to note here that those readers familiar with Mishima's dramatic work already know that he can be funny. His kabuki play *The Sardine Seller's Net of Love*, for example, is a comic romp; *The Black Lizard* is an excellent example of Mishima

presenting his higher philosophical concerns using comedy, as he does in *Lessons in Immorality*.²⁴

These essays show Mishima to be an excellent writer of satire; they highlight his abilities as a provocateur and author of humor and rhetoric. In this series in particular, Mishima makes frequent use of travesty, burlesque, hyperbole, binary caricatures, and anecdote to create humor. In this paper, I have decided to use the terms burlesque and travesty in the manner of Margaret Rose (1996). I will refer to Rose's "high burlesque, that which treats something trivial in an elevated manner," simply as "burlesque," and her "low burlesque, that which treats something elevated in a trivial manner" as "travesty."²⁵ Hyperbole is the exaggeration or overstatement of something for comedic effect, and binary caricatures are simply characters in the essays which exemplify the extreme ends of whatever issue Mishima is discussing. I will revisit these definitions further when examples emerge during my summary and analysis.

The content of each essay in *Lessons in Immorality* varies, but in all of them Mishima satirizes Japanese society. He consistently promotes his own ideals as a substitute for those Japanese values and mores he criticizes, staking out an "immoral" stance in every essay. His most frequent position is that the "immorality" he champions is actually more just and more fair than its commonly perceived "moral" counterpart. While arguing against particular behaviors and philosophies, Mishima promotes his own system of moral ideals. His system, however, is unfailingly at odds with moral values and customary practices in Japanese society.

While Mishima differs in how humorous he is each essay, he is consistent in that

each essay argues some “immoral” or antisocial cause. Some of his arguments are stronger than others, and some of his essays are funnier than others, but Mishima invariably has both humor and argument in every essay. There is no essay which is either argument without humor, or humor without argument.

While each essay satirizes different aspects of Japanese morality, Mishima claims that the whole series was inspired by Ihara Saikaku’s *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan*, a humorous work focusing on the single moral issue of filial piety. Saikaku was himself parodying a classic Chinese text called *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety*.²⁶ While the original Chinese classic was a didactic text praising the efforts of one pious child after the next, Saikaku’s work was the opposite. He presented twenty-four fictional cases of filial impiety. It is not entirely clear whether or not Saikaku intended for this to be a comedic work, and Donald Keene has commented that, despite there being humor throughout, *Twenty Cases* “as a whole is unpleasant.”²⁷ However, Okuno Takeo, who wrote the afterword for the 1967 Kadokawa Bunko edition of *Lessons in Immorality*, describes Saikaku’s *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan* as a “satire” and that Mishima’s *Lessons in Immorality* parodies modern sensibilities just as Saikaku parodied *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety*.²⁸ By reading tales of impious people Mishima, who felt that he himself was not particularly filially pious, found that he was not as bad as he thought. In fact, he was good to his parents. And, according to Mishima, “feeling filial is the first step towards becoming so.”²⁹ This statement by Mishima in the opening essay might encourage the reader to believe that Mishima’s intent with this series was to encourage people to adhere consistently to normative Japanese morality by showing them

cases of immoral behavior. But such is not the case.

In Saikaku's stories, filial impiety inevitably brings about some kind of punishment, either from heaven or from society. In *Lessons in Immorality* however, Mishima consistently praises his "immoral" characters, and their immoral behaviors rarely have negative consequences. In this way, Mishima deviates from Saikaku in both his technique and in his intention. Although Saikaku may have hoped to create a more filial readership, Mishima tries to charm his audience into giving up those aspects of Japanese morality and custom, which he satirizes and shows to be pointless or counterproductive.

Given the presence of an original text that inspired the series, one might expect Mishima to write a literary parody of Saikaku's work. However, *Lessons in Immorality* is not "ambivalently dependent upon the object of its criticism for its own reception" – which is a requirement for these essays to be considered a literary parody of Saikaku's *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan*.³⁰ As a Western reader, I expected *Lessons in Immorality* to be a literary parody of some popular series with a title like *Lessons in Morality*, or some Japanese equivalent to our Ms. Manners. In his afterword Okuno states that Mishima satirizes *The Great Learning for Women* – a strict education course in personal conduct for women that has been around "since the feudal era."³¹ However, literary parody is dependent upon reference to, juxtaposition with, and the repurposing of an original source text, which Mishima does not do.³² He mentions Saikaku briefly, but Mishima does not incorporate or repurpose any significant elements from Saikaku's essays. Mishima's essays are without a central family unit, a narrative, or the traditional

didactic moralizing tone that mark Saikaku's *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan*. Rather, most of Mishima's essays take the form of humorous argument, without referencing any source text. Therefore, I consider *Lessons in Immorality* to be satire, a work in which "prevailing vices or follies are held up to ridicule" and is not dependent upon a literary source text.³³ While Saikaku's work may have inspired the series, *Lessons in Immorality* can be enjoyed by any reader, regardless of whether or not they have read *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan*.

However, just because *Lessons in Immorality* does not fall into the genre of literary parody, does not mean that Mishima abstains from using parody in his essays. Mishima regularly uses parody, the juxtaposition of humorous commentary against a pre-existing form, to assault contemporary Japanese behavior and morality.

Considering just how playful Mishima is in the series, and how truly dangerous and immoral some of the behaviors he encourages are, I have difficulty thinking that *Lessons in Immorality* is Mishima's serious outline for a new Japan. Therefore, I don't think this can be thought of as a "utopian satire," in which "satire's criticism is used to clear a path for the propagation of new myths and plans."³⁴ In *Lessons in Immorality*, Mishima puts forward his serious political, moral, and social ideals in a in a non-aggressive and playful tone. And while his afterword suggests that *Lessons in Immorality* may have ended up being more prescient of social change than he believed it would be, not even Mishima himself tries to claim that his essays played any part in shaping Japan in the 1960s:

On one hand, while these essays were widely regarded as the height of eccentricity when they were published, at times they seem like common sense.

Perhaps the reader can feel the real changes that have taken place in Japan over the last ten years. The bite of these essays has weakened and, instead, now what they are notable for is the places in which they preach common sense.³⁵

Mishima recognizes that many of the changes he playfully suggested in these essays became a part of everyday life by 1969, but these essays did not lead to social reform. However, they are consistently thought-provoking, funny, and a delight to read.

For my research I worked with the 1969 Chūō Kōron and the 2004 Kadokawa Bunko editions of *Lessons in Immorality*. The 1969 edition has an afterword written by Mishima himself, and the 2004 Kadokawa edition has both Okuno's original afterword to the 1967 Kadokawa edition, and additional comments he added after Mishima's death for a late 80's reprint.

Mishima's 1969 afterword is clever, and rife with paradox and contradiction. He apologizes for some of the essays seeming dated, but then writes about how some of his essays were prophetic. Some of the behaviors he had encouraged are commonplace in 1969, and he writes that

this book is proof that the people of the day were often acting while overcome by madness. But, we can't sneer at those people. Anyone reading this book today is imbued with today's common sense. But, nobody can prove that we aren't all, at this very moment, caught it up some similar kind of nonsensical madness of an era.³⁶

One wonders if the prophetic success of these essays served to bolster Mishima's confidence in his political convictions.

The final paragraphs of the Mishima afterword form a paradox. He encourages us to seriously consider these essays, and then immediately dismisses the essays as trivial play. Mishima writes that these essays are light, and intended to use humorous mockery

to disarm the “intolerable pacifist hypocrites” of his day. However, Mishima couldn’t “deny that, behind all of those playful feelings, I was expressing some of my real frustrations.”³⁷ In the very next paragraph, however, Mishima writes that

you don’t have to read into these essays, and dig up my true feelings. Maybe it would be best for me if all you did was simply have fun reading the book. After all, every age has its harmless tricksters who only want to make you smile.³⁸

Mishima again seems to be working to protect his image as a serious author. He cannot keep his reputation as a respectable author while at the same time fully embracing a work of humor and parody as a serious work. While hinting at their potential as a lens through which we can view his real concerns, Mishima casts these essays aside, encouraging his readers not to take them seriously. However, Mishima’s acknowledgment that these essays have some of his “real frustrations” in them is enough to consider *Lessons in Immorality* an important piece of Mishima’s canon.

In his 1967 afterword and in his later notes, Okuno does not bother with the qualified statements that Mishima does in his 1969 afterword. Okuno directly states the importance of these works, writing that in *Lessons in Immorality* “the reader can see Mishima himself, completely unmasked.”³⁹ Mishima hints that there may be something of himself in these works, and Okuno boldly proclaims that Mishima completely exposes himself in these essays, but I doubt Okuno’s assertion. Mishima shows many different faces in these essays, including some that he does not show in his serious work. But, at all times, Mishima controls what he shows his readers. These essays are not confessional literature, and they never read as an honest exposure of the serious inner workings of the author. So, while we can gain insight into Mishima from *Lessons in Immorality*, I think it

would be irresponsible and incorrect to take what Mishima has written in this series as the gospel truth. After all, he is targeting a wide audience and writing to shock, amuse, and, most importantly, entertain his readers.

I have selected five essays which I represent the breadth of what the series has to offer in order to summarize *Lessons in Immorality*. In each of these essays, by varying degrees, Mishima uses humor and discusses concepts which are important in his major works. The only possible exception to this, however, is the first essay. “You Should Go Drinking, Even with Men You Don’t Know” (hereafter referred to as “Go Drinking”), is the least funny of these essays. In this essay Mishima, contextualizes the series as a whole, and prepares his readers for what to expect in the coming essays. While “Go Drinking” does not provoke as much laughter as other essays in the series, in it Mishima establishes the tone and setting for the series. He also introduces readers to the dominant pattern for most of the essays in the series: in each essay, Mishima argues that some antisocial behavior or idea is better for the individual than the societal norm is.

Drinking With Strangers

In “Go Drinking” Mishima attempts to convince his readership that it is important for young women to go out drinking with men in order to learn how to navigate adult society. After the opening paragraphs in which he discusses Saikaku’s essays, Mishima begins a lengthy anecdote about a visit he and his friend made to Ginza at night. In this essay Mishima portrays himself as a sophisticated man about town, rather than as an intellectual or artist, and depicts Ginza as an otherworldly place where coincidence and serendipity are to be expected. On the way to dinner, Mishima and his friend pass three teenage girls walking down the street together. The girls recognize the celebrity author and follow Mishima and his friend to their restaurant. Mishima bids good-bye to them at the door rather than inviting them in, but later regrets his decision. At dinner Mishima mutters to himself about this missed opportunity, when his friend states that “Don’t worry, this is Ginza. In Ginza, if you see someone once, you’re bound to see them again.”⁴⁰ And surely enough, back out on the streets of Ginza Mishima’s friend’s prediction comes true. Mishima and his friend meet the young ladies, Ms. A, B and C, at an intersection while on their way to a bar after dinner.

In Mishima’s Ginza that which is exceptional in every day Japan is common. Mishima casts Ginza, a bar-filled district in Tokyo, as the modern day Yoshiwara – a part of Japan where, historically, virtue gave way to vice, and where normative social values were cast aside as wealthy men stayed up late carousing with courtesans. In Mishima’s Ginza, young women should go drinking with random men, and adult men should buy teenagers drinks at rock and roll clubs. Thus, from the outset, Mishima shocks his

readers: the very presence of teenage girls in Ginza after dark is a moral affront to most Japanese, and only the worst kind of man would admit to having a night out on the town with teenage girls. Mishima the provocateur makes his debut in the very beginning of the central anecdote in the first essay.

While talking with the girls at a “rockabilly café” Mishima is taken aback by A and C’s sexually charged innuendo. The girls play the roles of experienced older woman and making racy jokes, while Mishima, both in the anecdote and as its narrator, is the evening’s moral compass. His reactions to their jokes, and to the girls’ other attempts at adult humor, reflect moral judgments that would be made by the average Japanese citizen had this happened anywhere else in Japan. Because the morality of Ginza is inverted, readers might expect a Ginza reveler to wholeheartedly pursue the sexually forward girls. However, Mishima presents himself as an arbiter of normative Japanese morality, who is taken aback by their behavior. His morals do not represent those of Ginza partiers, and his actions reflect the conscience of his everyday Japanese readers. In this essay, though Mishima first presents himself as a man-about-town who knows “the backstreets of Ginza,” he shares the same morality as his readers. He is a sympathetic character, and this makes his later alternative moral judgments more persuasive.

After leaving the club, the night continues with similar sexually-charged conversation in another venue. The pattern is the same: Ms. A and Ms. C smoke, drink, and play at being adults while Ms. B tags along without smoking or drinking. The apex of the girls’ immoral play-acting comes at the final handshake, as one of the girls runs her index finger along Mishima’s palm. He laughs out of surprise and leaves the girls,

dismayed by behavior he believes is reserved for “a low woman.”⁴¹ When he gets home, however, he falls into deep thought.

Mishima thinks back on the evening, and realizes that the girls’ performance was actually harmless. After a night of listening to these girls embarrass themselves, make too much noise in bars, and seem out-of-place in the adult world of cigarettes and alcohol, he realizes that they really were innocent and just playing. He had looked down on them for being out of place, thinking that they believed that they belonged in Ginza. When he realizes that they really knew what they were doing all along, Mishima wonders: “Of all of us out in Ginza that night, wasn’t the dumbest and most ridiculous one actually me?”⁴² In Ginza, Mishima is a sophisticated man-about-town but at home he is a student. He learns one lesson from his night out, and the girls learn two. The girls learn how to safely spend time in nightclubs, and they learn how to interact with and manipulate men without getting into trouble or spending any money. The girls taught Mishima his lesson by toying with him, and forcing him to re-consider his moral judgments. His lesson is that immoral behavior and immorality can lead to personal growth and development. Mishima assumes that, as a result of their night out, the girls have gained a more sophisticated understanding of adult society and of Ginza. Thus, what seems on the surface to be immoral can actually be better for the individual than what is commonly considered “moral” behavior. Had the girls stayed home, as prevailing morality mandates, they never would have gained the valuable knowledge and experience they will need to interact safely with adult men.

In this essay Mishima makes little use of his abundant talents as a humorist. The

biggest laugh is when Ms. B embarrasses herself by mispronouncing some hip new slang. Nevertheless, this first installment is important to understanding the series as a whole. First, this essay ties Mishima to Saikaku and traditional Japanese literature, albeit tenuously. Also, this essay takes the form of a self-deprecatory anecdote. Setting the tone here, Mishima departs from his image as Mishima the brilliant novelist – this is a Mishima who can be duped by teenage girls in the streets of Ginza. This Mishima is a playboy who stays out late with friends drinking in clubs and picking up women. By intentionally emphasizing his image as a playboy, Mishima conforms to a pattern of self presentation that he followed through his career. Stokes wrote that Mishima the public figure was Mishima the novelist, playwright, and exhibitionist; he was never Mishima the son, husband, and father.⁴³ In this essay we have Mishima the man-about-town, a persona he dons in several of these essays.

In his 1967 afterword to the Kadokawa edition of *Lessons in Immorality*, Okuno talks about the results of Mishima's image construction through an anecdote about a train ride. While sitting on the train, Okuno overhears some young people talking about Mishima's chances to win the Nobel prize. "If Mishima wins it, I wonder what he'll do next" one youth says to the other.⁴⁴ Okuno muses that the more appropriate word here would be "write," but that there is a community of Japanese who know of Mishima as a pop-culture figure, and not as a writer.⁴⁵ Clearly, essays starring Mishima as the man-about-town contributed to Mishima's efforts to create a multi-faceted public persona, with aspects that appeal to both the public and the literati.

In *Lessons in Immorality*, Mishima often uses himself as a character to subvert his

reader's moral values and common sense expectations. The reader might anticipate that a sophisticated author and experienced man-about-town like Mishima would immediately see through the girls' facade. However, Mishima gives the reader a mild shock in his conclusion, with his speculation that it was he, in the end, who was really the fool. This subversion of reader expectation is a common thematic element of many essays in the series. Also, the ending establishes a structural pattern that Mishima frequently uses: ending with a brief statement that surprises his readers, often resembling the punch line (*ochi*) of a *rakugo* story. Mishima admits this use of rakugo tools: in his afterword writing that he "included rakugo or manzai-esque service for my readers."⁴⁶ And while this twist ending isn't very funny in "Go Drinking," it is the first example of Mishima finishing an essay in this manner.

Disrespect Your Teachers

Mishima hits his stride as both a persuasive essayist and humorist in his second essay in the series, “Deep in Your Heart, You Should Disrespect Your Teachers.” Building his argument around several humorous anecdotes, Mishima makes a convincing case that students should look down on their teachers. While “Go Drinking” was a general preface to *Lessons in Immorality*, in “Disrespect Your Teachers” Mishima uses travesty, hyperbole, and burlesque to criticize contemporary teacher-student relationships in Japan.

Mishima creates a more convincing and well structured argument in “Disrespect Your Teachers” than he did in “Go Drinking.” He starts his essay with a very provocative statement: “Deep in his heart, any student worth a damn thinks that his teachers are idiots. Any student who doesn’t disrespect his teachers won’t amount to anything – this is absolutely certain.”⁴⁷ Mishima opens “Disrespect Your Teachers” with this powerful and definite thesis statement; he contextualizes and re-frames his argument throughout the essay, Mishima’s conclusion that students should look down on their teachers is clear from the beginning. Shocking and immoral opening lines are a hallmark of this series.

Mishima devotes his second paragraph to providing a contemporary Japanese social context for teacher-student relationships. For Mishima, the late 1950s were rife with a youthful spirit of rebellion, exemplified by the Ishihara brothers. During that period the author and adventurer Ishihara Shintarō (1932-), was famous for making controversial statements like “you can’t trust grown-ups,” and “all adults are corrupt.”⁴⁸ His brother Yūjirō (1934-87), a movie star, was “running riot” as an icon of the younger

generation – Mishima states that Yūjirō is pressuring the older generation, and this makes teenagers feel like “God is on [their] generation’s side.”⁴⁹ For Mishima, the youth of his day pay little respect to adults. He presents this to his audience as the shared understanding of Japanese society at the moment. Rather than making his point by arguing vague and abstract concepts, Mishima uses concrete shared cultural contexts in almost every essay in this series: he grounded “Go Drinking” in the contemporary setting of the backstreets of Ginza by mentioning a specific bar name, The Suntory Bar, and talking about a shared cultural phenomenon, the Rockabilly café. In “Disrespect Your Teachers,” Mishima grounds this essay in 1950s Japan by referencing the Ishihara brothers.

In the series Mishima mentions famous people in order to support an argument, draw in readers, or to establish a narrative voice. He often references the Ishihara brothers in other essays; referring to them and other public figures whom he considers to all be iconoclasts of his era. Often, these celebrities exemplify the quality that Mishima argues in favor of, just as the painter Okamoto Tarō exemplifies the pride that Mishima argues for in “You Should Be as Conceited as Possible.” Mishima also draws in less serious readers with his name-dropping, and reminds his readers that Mishima, himself, is a famous and controversial celebrity author who is an active figure in contemporary popular culture.

In “Disrespect Your Teachers” Mishima laments that contemporary society does not disrespect adults in the way that he would like. He argues that adults benefit the most from Ishihara Yūjirō, pointing out that while films starring him have weak adults on the

screen, adults behind the scenes, producers and studio moguls, reap the profits. Mishima writes that he wants to give his readership a better system for rebelling against adults. For him, the key to proper rebellion is an understanding of whom you are rebelling against, and who gains by your rebellion. And he begins his instruction in how youth should disrespect adults by targeting teachers because, simply, “the overwhelming majority of them are adults.”⁵⁰

We get a glimpse of Mishima’s rhetorical style here, as Mishima takes steps to keep his older readers engaged by writing:

Even when my generation was younger we thought teachers were a bit off – they were absurd and out of touch with contemporary society. There were some teachers who foolishly tried to be hip and keep up, but they were even more detestable for their efforts. So, in fact my generation looked down on our teachers too.⁵¹

Mishima contextualizes his argument to appeal to a broad audience, a necessary move as a persuasive writer publishing in a widely read magazine. The demands of writing for a diverse readership force Mishima to use clever methods for re-framing and positioning his arguments to give them the broadest possible appeal. As a result, when Mishima presents his serious concerns in these essays, he does so not just with simplified language, but also with simplified reasoning.

Mishima devotes the first few paragraphs to contextualizing his argument, and then dives into a humorous anecdote in which he masterfully travesties his middle school principal. Mishima attended the prestigious Gakushūin middle school, where the Japanese aristocracy sent their children. One day, the students attack the headmaster of their middle school with air guns, firecrackers, and a pit. Mishima describes his victim as

“walking the grounds solemnly.” After a barrage of loud but harmless gunfire, the principal panics, attempts to flee, and falls into a “meticulously placed pit.”⁵² Mishima uses travesty to reduce his former principal to a buffoon, treating an elevated person in as humiliating a fashion as possible. The principal of the most prestigious middle school in the nation is reduced to a clown trapped in a hole in the ground. This prank is the ultimate show of youthful rebellion, and this anecdote is a perfect showcase of Mishima’s talent as a writer of travesty.

Hyperbole, exaggeration or overstatement to a comic degree, is the next tool Mishima uses in “Disrespect Your Teachers” to create humor and forward his argument. Mishima sets up his hyperbole by mentioning a recent event in which a student threw a baseball at a teacher. Mishima follows this factual account with his hyperbole saying: “But in my day, a student threw a knife into the blackboard right by the teachers back! Now, *that’s* shocking. So, it’s not as though teaching has become a life-threatening profession only recently.”⁵³ In *Confessions of a Mask*, Mishima makes it clear that the Gakushūin is not as wholesome as many would believe, but it is hard to picture Gakushūin boys throwing knives at their teachers. Mishima uses hyperbole here to both create humor and further his argument. Readers laugh at the description of teaching as a “life-threatening profession,” and older readers recognize that contemporary Japanese schools are not so different from those that they attended.

Mishima uses both travesty and burlesque in his discussion of the music class prank. Mishima’s treatment of the innocent music room prank as an act of rebellion on par with the principal in the pit prank is a form of burlesque. In music class, while the

teacher wrote on the black board, one of Mishima's friends made a gun with his hand and forced another boy to strip "at gunpoint." The teacher turned to find one boy sitting wearing only his underclothes in the middle of a sea of uniformed students. While the prank was simply innocent play by bored boys, by discussing it alongside the knife throwing and pit digging incidents, Mishima treats it as a serious act of rebellion against authority by young men. Mishima presents this childish prank as if it were a sophisticated act of social resistance; he is burlesquing a silly childish game. In *Lessons in Immorality* Mishima often treats a comically insignificant action as something meaningful and important, and uses it to support his argument. I call this literary technique "argument-level burlesque." The music room prank itself is a travesty. It reduces the over-serious classroom to a children's playroom, and travesties teacher at the respectable middle school whom Mishima depicts as clueless and unkempt: "he clapped his chalky hands, and turned around."⁵⁴ So, the music room prank is both burlesque and travesty.

Though Mishima makes effective use of both argument-level burlesque and hyperbole to amuse his readers and to make his point, travesty is Mishima's favorite weapon for disarming teachers. Though they are widely respected in Japanese society, Mishima depicts his teachers as peculiar, dirty, and poor. "The cuffs on most teachers' suits are worn out, and they are dyed white from chalk dust. Deep in your heart you should look down on them as strange bums."⁵⁵ For Mishima, "the adult world is a dog's world filled with sadness and suffering. And, teachers stink of that world. If there was a teacher who didn't give off that scent, well, you should just think of him as some mama's boy from a rich family."⁵⁶ Mishima portrays teachers as sad and dirty people incapable of

handling the difficulties of life. Mishima further travesties teachers, arguing that they can't fulfill the demands of the job. For Mishima, teachers are only useful for imparting knowledge and are entirely incapable of understanding their students, even though Japanese society expects them to. Mishima states that because adults replace their real memories of childhood with false happy ones as a coping mechanism, it is futile for teachers to aspire to understand their students or bond with them. Thus, teachers cannot possibly understand or sympathize with their students and, if one did manage to, "he'd be so entangled and confused by the contradictions between adults and children that he would certainly kill himself."⁵⁷ Mishima combines hyperbole and travesty to make his readers laugh at an absurd situation in which it is impossible for any teacher in the whole of Japan to understand a single student. Also, this travesty makes the reader question whether or not teachers can live up to the societal expectation that they should both impart knowledge and relate to their students. For Mishima, teachers are undeserving of the respect that they are habitually afforded. This is both effective humor, albeit a bit dark, and compelling argument. By combining hyperbole and travesty here, Mishima addresses his priorities as a popular essayist: to entertain, shock, and keep the audience reading.

There is also an intriguing undercurrent in this essay that connects it to Mishima's serious works: Mishima argues that the intellect must take a subordinate position to the body. He writes that teachers are only useful for imparting knowledge, but in Mishima's world knowledge is subordinate to real life experience, just as the mind should be subordinate to the body. The Gakushūin prank is a perfect metaphor for this: the intelligent and socially respected headmaster is embarrassed and shamed by the vital and

energetic young pranksters. Under the guise of encouraging youths to disrespect their elders, Mishima is also arguing for every individual to question their priorities and re-examine how they valorize the intellect over the body. This essay hints at the change in Mishima's philosophy that Makoto Ueda wrote about:

Mishima became less and less optimistic about the usefulness of literature... He came to believe that classical beauty, disciplined strength, the mind-body harmony, and other related values could be more readily expressed in the realm of action through the medium of the body, especially of the male body. Action and the body could attain a physical effect that all people, including the illiterate, would be able to see.⁵⁸

It is clear that even though he thought of these essays as separate from his canonical works, Mishima brought up his serious concerns, such as the subordination of the body to the mind, in *Lessons in Immorality*.

Mishima's conclusion in "Disrespect Your Teachers" is clear: if children don't disrespect adults they will not grow up to be successful. Mishima makes liberal use of travesty, hyperbole, and argument-level burlesque to create a funny and convincing argument. Mishima changes his reader's perspective on society so that they believe that Japanese children and Japanese society have a brighter future if students around the nation look down upon their teachers. This is a common pattern in these essays: rather than simply tearing down morality by promoting immorality, Mishima champions his personally constructed morality over the unchallenged and established social values promoted by Japanese moral authorities. In his final essay "All's Unwell That Ends Unwell," Mishima writes about his realization that many of the essays actually promote morality, despite his initial intent to spread immorality.

“Disrespect Your Teachers,” balances anecdote, argument, and comedy to humorously argue that children shouldn’t respect adults. He succeeds in writing an amusing and strong argument, and he establishes an essay formula that he will use throughout the series: Mishima will open an essay with an antisocial and controversial statement which he re-casts and discusses until the reader has no choice to concede that Mishima’s argument has merit. However, Mishima varies the amount of humor he uses to support his argument in each essay. And while “Disrespect Your Teachers” had many funny moments, it pales in comparison to the absurd comic romp that is “You Should Slurp Your Soup.”

Slurp Your Soup

In the absurd essay “Slurp Your Soup,” Mishima showcases his talents as a humorist, using comical anecdotes, hyperbole, travesty, argument-level burlesque, and binary caricature. While the essay does pose the argument that it is important to consider why one conforms to particular societal norms, there is much less at stake here than there is in “Disrespect Your Teachers.” This essay is lighter “Disrespect Your Teachers,” and in it Mishima devotes a great deal more energy to his humor in this essay than he does in some others.

The essay opens much less boldly than “Disrespect Your Teachers,” with an introduction to etiquette courses, and how Japanese people are coached to avoid making noise when drinking Western soup. In Japanese custom it is common to slurp soup noisily, and these etiquette courses contradict Mishima and other Japanese who “grew up slurping their miso,” and finishing their tea noisily.⁵⁹ Mishima sees etiquette courses as pointlessly forcing Western traditions onto the Japanese. Mishima is often painted as a nationalist, and while some of his works, such as “Patriotism,” have nationalist overtones, I do not feel that this essay is particularly nationalist. Rather, Mishima chooses soup slurping because it is a clear symptom of an underlying social phenomenon he dislikes. Mishima hates that so many Japanese thoughtlessly conform to societal norms, rather than deciding their actions based on what suits their own nature. Mishima uses argument-level burlesque just like he did in “Disrespect Your Teachers,” by arguing this socially important issue through the trivial matter of table manners. This argument-level burlesque imbues Mishima’s argument and the whole essay with a sense of absurdity.

Conforming to the Western habit of drinking soup quietly is seen as refined behavior, and non-conformist noisy soup consumption is looked down upon as rude. For Mishima, however, slurping one's soup is an act of social resistance that shows refined Japanese society that you are not "a social sheep."⁶⁰ In this essay Mishima divides society into a binary: sheep and wolves. For Mishima, a sheep thoughtlessly conforms to societal rules and trends, while wolves are governed by their own sentiments and slurp their soup as noisily as they please. Mishima uses caricatures that exemplify social sheep and social wolves in this essay to make humor through contrast: either Japanese eat meekly, or they disturb whole restaurants with their raucous table manners. And these caricatures serve his argument as well; by the end, readers are ready to agree with Mishima when he presents his conclusion as a compromise between being either an obsequious conformist sheep or a dangerous antisocial wolf.

Mishima describes Japanese etiquette teachers as people who simply know about Western manners, but are not particularly respectable. Thanks to their influence, women think of men who slurp their soup as uncouth. Mishima contradicts his readers' assumption that Western manners are the pinnacle of social refinement, by asking them "aren't the people who eat with dangerous weapons, knives, the real barbarians?"⁶¹ This clever analysis is not only funny, but it also turns his Japanese readers' understanding of etiquette on its head. By getting his readers to laugh at his clever interpretation of Western etiquette, Mishima undermines their acceptance of the West as the arbiter of manners. In Mishima's inverse interpretation, the Japanese already possess sophisticated table manners, and should think twice about adopting Western ones. Mishima uses humor

to invert the relationship between Japan and the West, and makes his readers re-examine their relationship with the morals they've hastily and thoughtlessly imported from foreign cultures. The final essay, "All's Unwell That Ends Unwell" also discusses the difficulty of adopting Western customs in Japan.

Mishima continues with an anecdote about two of his anonymous acquaintances. Both men are leading minds in Japan whom Mishima respects deeply, and they both slurp their soup with a "tremendous noise."⁶² They're both men who have toured Europe, and Mishima jokes that, had they ever met in some "pompous European restaurant," their combined slurping would have shocked the Westerners dining there.⁶³ Mishima states that slurping soup has not harmed two of the greatest minds in Japan, and furthermore, Mishima has often thought that if he could drink his soup without any regard for his surroundings, he might be able to achieve the intellect of those two men. Readers laugh at this ridiculous statement because of Mishima's relation of two completely discrete elements as a cause and effect. This technique, which I will refer to as "fallacious cause and effect," is one of two techniques Mishima uses to create humor in this anecdote. The second is travesty.

Mishima's scholars are slurping soup in a Western restaurant, and not just one in Japan, but a fancy Western restaurant in a European city. Mishima travesties the restaurant, and brings it down to the level of the cheap noodle shop that his readers doubtless think of when one thinks of slurping one's soup. In doing this, Mishima travesties that which his readers would have considered to be the epitome of a civilized dining experience.

In this essay Mishima develops his hyperbole slowly, gradually introducing more and more absurd and over-the-top instances of people behaving in socially unacceptable ways. After the slurping-soup scholars, Mishima next mentions another anonymous acquaintance who likes to put his knife in his mouth when he eats, which thrills and entertains his dining mates.⁶⁴ And after this dangerous diner, Mishima introduces “Mr. S.”

Pseudonyms allow Mishima to introduce characters who might be completely fictional, or might be Mishima’s real-life acquaintances whom he wishes to protect through an alias. And while Mr. S. starts out as a believable character, by the final anecdote no reader could believe that Mishima really knew a man who did all of the crazy things Mr. S. did, or a woman who could love a man as bizarre as Mr. S. Mr. S. transitions from a possible real-life acquaintance of Mishima’s to a caricature that represents the most extreme social wolf-like traits possible. The reader at first feels pity or sympathy for Mr. S. as a social outcast, picturing him as a real-life person who just does not belong. As it becomes clearer that Mr. S. is fictional, and his actions become increasingly antisocial, readers retain some of their initial impressions of Mr. S. So while Mr. S’s actions become more and more dangerous, it is clear that no real people are being hurt, and the readers continue to laugh at and cheer for Mr. S. Thus, Mishima succeeds in creating a sympathetic social misfit who, despite being a danger to himself and others, is a character that readers cheer for. This technique contrasts with Mishima’s use of real people in his essay “Disrespect Your Teachers,” and in other essays in *Lessons in*

Immorality. Mishima alternates between fictional and non-fictional characters in the series.

Mr. S. is introduced as the boyfriend of Ms. N, a “star student” of Mishima’s *Lessons on Immorality*. Being a “star student,” Ms. N hears Mr. S slurp his soup and, rather than being disgusted, thinks to herself that Mr. S is a man with a lot of promise.⁶⁵ This is the beginning of the tale of Mr. S, the ultimate societal wolf. Mr. S. is a burlesque, as Mishima elevates a simple antisocial and dangerous prankster to impossibly heroic heights. Mr. S’s most dangerous pranks initially go unpunished, his misbehavior cures his own illness, and, he earns to love of a woman and the respect of a famous author. Let us join Mr. S. on his adventures.

The first of Mr. S’s adventures takes place at a Chopin concert. He sets off fireworks during the performance, and scares everyone out of the theater. Mishima makes his humor here through travesty – the formal performance hall is reduced to a stampeding mass of people. This is the first of two dangerous actions that Mr. S. performs which go far beyond simple antisocial enthusiasm, and clearly threaten the well-being of others. In the second, Mr. S. takes the hand of an old woman waiting to cross the street, leads her to the middle of the road, lets go of her hand, and leaves her alone in heavy traffic. Miraculously, she survives unharmed and Mr. S walks off unpunished. These two anecdotes are the most absurd of the five in the Mr. S story, and the most clearly fictional. These are clearly invented by Mishima, and push Mr. S. out of the plausible and into the realm of fantasy fiction. And these anecdotes are also instances where, by Mishima’s

skill in creating a sympathetic character, the audience finds themselves laughing at clearly dangerous behaviors, and cheering for a villain.

The other three anecdotes are somewhat more believable and relatively harmless. In one, Mr. S decides to go to the movie theatre despite being sick. He picks a serious drama and, sitting in the middle of the theater, sneezes upwards of twenty times. The other moviegoers laugh, and Mr. S's cold gets better. Here, Mishima amuses his readers with travesty: Mr. S's sneezes reduce the sophisticated audience for a dramatic movie to a mob laughing at bodily functions. And Mishima re-uses the fallacious assumption of cause and effect, this time stating that Mr. S's antisocial behavior somehow cured his cold.

As a second relatively harmless act of social disobedience, Mr. S goes by the local police box in the morning, doffs his hat, and bows deeply. Mr. S. does all of this, however, without saying a word. The police are put off, and suspect his actions as being some new kind of communist tactic. Mishima's over-simplified and absurd logic travesties the establishment here: for the police, if communists are odd, then any person behaving oddly must be a communist. Mishima's audience would no doubt recognize this conclusion as absurd. But the policeman's logic is not the only laugh here. Normally, Japanese greetings include set phrases, and are relatively formal. To repeatedly greet the same person with a superfluously polite deep bow, while neglecting even a cursory "good morning," is an absurd contrast. While showing respect physically, Mr. S's silence shows his absolute disdain for the policeman. Anyone familiar with Japanese greetings would find Mr. S's behavior to be both funny and almost unbearably awkward.

The last of the harmless Mr. S anecdotes is a story about his trip to the park. He goes to a park with a pond filled with birds and, to scare them, floats a flaming bag of paper scraps out into the water. The birds are scared, and fly off. If the anecdote ended here, Mr. S's prank would amount to nothing more than simple and pointless social disruption and teasing of animals. However, Mishima turns the tables on Mr. S, and this time he is the butt of his own joke as the fleeing birds poop on his head. This mishap returns Mr. S to the realm of mortal men from his lofty position as the ultimate societal wolf, and it foreshadows his even greater downfall.

Mr. S. is eventually forced to take a psychological examination, and is committed to a psychiatric hospital. Mishima describes Ms. N as "severely disappointed," and she becomes acutely aware of "the power of a flock of sheep who had forced a wolf into a pen."⁶⁶ This is why Mishima concludes that the wolves among his readership should limit their teasing of the sheep to slurping soup, lest they end up in prison too.

As Mr. S's hyperbolic antisocial pranks are laid before the reader, and as the reader's incredulity and laughter increase, Mr. S. increases the reader's tolerance for antisocial behavior. And, when Mishima acknowledges that Mr. S is extreme and encourages the moderate conclusion that we admire people who slurp their soup, the reader agrees. Thanks to this hyperbole, Mishima's reader now sits in expensive restaurants hoping to hear courageous men and women slurping their soup. Mishima himself was something of a wolf when it came to table manners. As Donald Keene recalls, "When he invited me to dinner, it was invariably to a fine restaurant.... While eating, we

laughed a great deal. Sometimes his laugh rang out so loudly that other diners in the restaurant turned in our direction.”⁶⁷

The implication that Mishima makes in the end of this essay is that “sheep society” seeks to protect social norms through the government and the medical establishment. Mr. S is confined for social reasons, rather than psychological ones. He is not judged to be psychologically crazy, but rather socially crazy because he is too antisocial to fit into “sheep society.” According to Mishima, the medical establishment considers anyone who opposes societal norms to be insane. In this essay sanity is a social quality rather than an individual one. If a perfectly sane man makes the conscious decision to be antisocial, he risks facing accusations of madness and being locked up in an asylum.

“Slurp Your Soup” is all the more enjoyable for its argument-level burlesque. As he did with innocent child’s play in “Disrespect Your Teachers,” Mishima treats simple actions as sophisticated civil disobedience. His leap of logic, from slurping soup to a conscious act of social resistance, is so fantastic and absurd that it is funny. Every simple prank in the essay is elevated to the status of some noble antisocial action made in defiance of an establishment that seeks to oppress those who do not want to conform. The slurping scholars are noble bulwarks of individual freedoms in the face of an oppressive society, rather than two old men who just don’t care to learn how to eat a different way. Mr. S is a revolutionary who defies the establishment, rather than a dangerously inconsiderate man who nearly killed an old woman. At the same time the reader is

laughing at the scholars slurping soup somewhere in Europe, the reader is also laughing at Mishima's treatment of innocuous eating habits as social resistance.

“Slurp Your Soup” is hilariously funny, and presents one of Mishima's most fantastic fictional characters. In “You Should Be as Conceited as Possible” Mishima is just as funny, but he introduces us to more realistic fictional characters, as well as to his own real-life acquaintances.

Be as Conceited as Possible

In “You Should Be as Conceited as Possible” Mishima writes about his personal experiences, and uses anecdotes featuring both real and fictional characters to satirize normative Japanese morality. Contemporary Japanese morality considered conceit to be a vice, and encouraged people to suppress expressions of personal pride. Mishima argues that being conceited allows one to live every day happily and with confidence. His voice in this essay is that of the renowned and sophisticated author: he writes about celebrities, foreign writers, and his personal interactions with fans. The decision to affect this voice is, in and of itself, a conceited act. Mishima could easily make his argument without mentioning his fans or celebrity friends. Moreover, Mishima draws upon a particularly wide array of sources: from traditional Japanese literature, native popular culture and its icons, to foreign arts and letters. Mishima is preening, and shows his readers how well-read and famous he is.

As he did in “Disrespect Your Teachers,” Mishima clearly and boldly declares his immoral thesis in the opening of his essay: “If there was no conceit, there would be no fun.”⁶⁸ Moreover, Mishima asserts that not only is conceit enjoyable, but it’s also ubiquitous. To support this, he cites personal experience: every time he writes a story about a boy or girl who is remarkably beautiful, his acquaintances ask if the character was modeled on them. Mishima uses this personal anecdote to establish his position vis-à-vis his readers. In one paragraph he writes about his conceited celebrity acquaintances, and in the next he cites the seventeenth century French writer Rochefoucauld. As he did

in “Go Drinking,” Mishima reminds his readers that they are reading essays by a renowned and well-read celebrity author.

Mishima encourages his readers to have pride in not just superficial features: “People who’ve given up on being conceited about their looks can shift that conceit to their face, their notoriety, or to anything else.”⁶⁹ Here, Mishima travesties pride itself: it is not only to be reserved for something of merit, but people can have pride in their negative qualities as well. For Mishima pride in anything is good, regardless of whether or not that quality is actually healthy for either the individual or society. Mishima’s afflicted are proud to be ravaged by disease, and his criminals are secretly pleased with just how despicable they really are. This travesty of pride serves Mishima’s argument; while readers laugh at this topsy–turvy notion of pride, they also seriously re–consider just what pride is.

In “Conceited” Mishima supports his argument by citing the philosophy of-pride in the Edo Period’s definitive treatise on samurai honor and duty, the *Hagakure*. He states that the author of the *Hagakure*, instructed samurai on how to make proper use of hubris: “Valor, one of the highest ideals for the samurai, is really just pride that one is the greatest warrior in all Japan...Samurai must develop pride in who they are, and be prepared to die bravely.”⁷⁰ Mishima’s citation of the *Hagakure* is a perfect example of “high” concerns appearing in his “entertainments.” He further explored the philosophical basis of bushido in his 1967 study, *The Way of the Samurai: Yukio Mishima on Hagakure in Modern Life* (Hagakure Nyūmon). This “Pride in dying bravely,” which Mishima

discusses in “Conceited,” is a major theme in his serious literature, as well as a philosophy that influenced the manner of his suicide.

For Mishima, getting readers to join him in embracing conceit is a great challenge. Both Japanese society and Japanese language are well known for prizing and expressing humility. Japan is recognized as a “group society” which demands a certain degree of humility to maintain harmony. In Japanese conversation your position vis-à-vis both your conversation partner and your topic are a vital consideration. Children are raised to deflect compliments, and every learner of Japanese as a second language is taught to deflect compliments or flattery. In short: Japanese society prizes humility, and hubris cannot exist where people prioritize humility.

So, Mishima supports hubris by attacking humility – starting first by assaulting the writing style of an anonymous academic. Mishima’s academic is more of a caricature than a character: a professor of languages in Japan who is superlatively humble in his writing. The professor refers to himself as “just an elderly professor,” or as a “lowly teacher of languages,” and Mishima wonders “who really believes that this is true humility?”⁷¹

The professor believes in the old Japanese idiom that “the stalk will droop as it bears grain (minoru hodo kōbe no tareru inaho kana).⁷² This means that, in Japan anyhow, men are humble in proportion to their achievements. Mishima’s professor is a hypocrite: knowing that people believe this idiom to be true, he acts superlatively humble in the hopes that his affected humility will make others believe that he is actually a great scholar. Mishima argues that the idiom should be changed to “the stalk droops because of

its grain” (minoru yue kōbe no tareru inaho kana).⁷³ For the professor, humility is an affectation of those who have truly achieved something great. Thus, rather than being humble in proportion to his work, the professor hopes his superlative humility might actually help him to become regarded as a great scholar. In the original Japanese, Mishima re-casts the idiom by changing one word, (hodo) into (yue). It is an elegant example of Mishima’s wit; he has taken an idiom that exemplifies an ideal of Japanese morality and, by altering just one word, has corrupted its meaning.

Here Mishima travesties proverbs, beloved and respected expressions of traditional wisdom. Time worn phrases like “the stalk will droop as it bears grain” have become clichés precisely because they succinctly express something important to the Japanese people. In “Conceited,” Mishima deconstructs proverbs, and in so doing shows his readers that he is willing to assault more than just the meager professor. He takes on the most authoritative aspects of Japanese society, including the language itself. And by manipulating cliché, language that has become a part of culture, Mishima forces his readers to question both Japanese language and society. Particularly, Mishima asks his readers to consider the sort of humility expressed by this idiom, and whether or not the reflexive association of humility with achievement is good or accurate.

Mishima uses cliché again in his discussion on the relationship between conceit and love. Mishima’s postwar Japanese readers believe in “true love,” which he argues is built upon individual conceit. He quotes Rochefoucauld’s description of lovers: “the reason lovers can spend so much together and not get bored is that, from start to finish, all they do is talk about themselves.”⁷⁴ Mishima then asserts that all couples think of

themselves as Romeo and Juliet, rather than just “a mended lid for a cracked pot” (ware nabe ni tojibuta).⁷⁵ Here Mishima is blending both the European influences, which so strongly inform much of his “high” fiction, with Japanese-homespun idiom. Romeo and Juliet embody the Western ideal of romantic love between a beautiful boy and a beautiful girl, while “a mended lid for a cracked pot” is a Japanese saying used to describe a husband and wife who suit one another, although though both of them are quite flawed. The latter describes a marriage that is practical, realistic, and far removed from the Western ideal of romance. “A mended lid for a cracked pot” marriage would be the complete opposite of a pairing like Romeo and Juliet for Mishima’s readers. Conceit is what allows his readers to live with the illusion that they are not mediocre and flawed.

Further on in the essay, Mishima moves from travesty of proverbs to travesty of ritualized humble language. If Mishima’s professor is moderately hypocritical, then Mishima’s actress is a flagrant poseur. Mishima writes about an anonymous actress who, despite being known the world over, introduces herself with “hello, my name is Jane Doe, and I’m a student of the avant-garde acting style.”⁷⁶ Mishima calls this “covert pride” (insei no unuboreya), in which the person behaves humbly when they are completely aware that they are superlative.⁷⁷ While Mishima’s professor may actually harbor some doubt as to whether or not he is great, this actress’ renown is proof of her greatness. More caricature than character, Mishima’s actress is false humility personified. Rather than being honest with her audience and acknowledging her excellence, Mishima’s actress is absurdly humble in her public speeches. Her grossly exaggerated humility, proving that overuse of humble language is mis-use, provokes laughter. This woman is “ridiculously

polite.” When “ridiculously polite” people attempt to be humble and sound sophisticated, they so grossly misuses polite language that they expose themselves as fools. Consider this self-introduction by Mishima’s ‘typical’ actress:

I’m still an amateur, really thank you so much for your guidance and patronage. Really, you all give me too much. The only reason someone like me has been able to become a star is thanks to all of you. Every night I press my hands together, thanking all of you from deep in my heart. And I’ve never once slept with my feet pointing in your direction. [Who is this for? Who even cares about what direction she points her feet in when she sleeps?] Thank you all so much. Really, thank you.⁷⁸

This is a clear case of humility being misused by a foolish and covertly proud person in an attempt to conceal her hubris.

Mishima creates a binary with “covert pride” and “overt (yōsei), pride,” and cites two popular public figures whose public and open conceit has not been a barrier to their success: Ishihara Shintarō and the famous avant-garde artist Okamoto Tarō. Both of these men are so proud it is entertaining, and Okamoto has gone so far as to proclaim in public that, “I’m a greater artist than Picasso.”⁷⁹ In fact, their hubris is part of their charm, and Mishima begs his readers to ask themselves which they prefer: the “covert pride” of the clearly disingenuous actress, or the proud boasting and charm of Ishihara and Okamoto. Mishima clearly prefers the honest and overtly proud men to the dishonest and covertly proud actress. The humility affected by the “covertly proud” person is false, and to further convince his readers to accept honest hubris Mishima contrasts a conceited person and a show-off.

A show-off is, at his core, a liar. For Mishima, a show-off “brags about vacation homes he doesn’t have, claims to have graduated from Keiō University even though he

never finished elementary school, and he puts on airs like he owns cars when he really does not.”⁸⁰ A show-off’s bragging has no connection with reality. He spends his life covering up for over-compensating and lying about things he does not have. When show-offs are caught in their lies, they fall very hard. A conceited person however, is just overly proud of some quality he truly believes he has, even though he may not actually have it. With this contrast Mishima has gotten his readers to forgive the boastful man for his pride, as he honestly believes that what he says is true. For Mishima, it is better to be conceited and honest, than to be a liar. And, just as the show-off is a liar, so are most Japanese when they cover their real pride with false humility. This is especially true for famous and talented actresses who persist in introducing themselves like a humble “schoolmarm from the countryside” at their own press conferences.⁸¹

Mishima closes the essay with an unexpected revelation: pride has health benefits to both men and women. The psychological distress and jealousy that men and women face in their everyday lives is a result of having too little pride. Mishima believes that pride will keep a woman from being jealous of another woman on whom the same dress looks better. And pride will help those men who worry that they’ll lose out on promotions to their imagined office rivals. Mishima encourages men to look at their rivals and think: “that S.O.B? – who does he think he is? He should make tea from my toenails, then he’d be half the man I am.”⁸² This idiom “drink a tea made out of my toenails” (*ore no tsume no aka demo senjite nomiyagare*), is the last cliché that Mishima uses in the essay, and in using it here he accomplishes two things. First, it is hyperbolic and ludicrous. Second, Mishima has used a cliché to affirm hubris as a positive trait. Mishima contends that,

with the proper use of hubris, his readers will “never experience any psychological distress.”⁸³ So, Mishima has shown the psychological benefit of hubris to his readers, as well as having shown them the ways in which Japanese society and language already recognize pride and achievement.

Of the five essays that I discuss in this paper, Mishima made his most compelling argument in "Be as Conceited as Possible." He established a binary relationship between honesty and humility, and in so doing exposed the tie between dishonesty and conventional humility. Mishima successfully discredited the Japanese custom of habitually expressing humility and reflexively denying one's own achievements. Furthermore, Mishima shows his readers that Ishihara's and Okamoto's shockingly conceited statements are actually honest expressions of their true beliefs. Mishima argues for his own novel morality by trying to trump one moral value with another: Mishima knows that his Japanese readers prize humility, but he hopes that they value honesty even more.

All's Unwell

Mishima's final essay in *Lessons in Immorality* is "All's Unwell That Ends Unwell." The title is a pun, taken from the old saying "All's well that ends well," which Mishima cites in the opening paragraph of the essay.⁸⁴ He does not recant the boldly immoral statements that he's made through the series, though he does state that he fears that the essays have become lessons on morality.⁸⁵ Mishima frames his dilemma through a story about his maternal grandfather, whom Mishima "seems to take after."⁸⁶ Mishima whispered behind his grandfather's back that his grandfather taught Confucius without understanding him. Mishima's grandfather read moral texts, lost his government position to a scandal, and was rumored to be a lecher. Yournencar wrote: "The world of officials and educators from which Mishima came seems to have adopted the ideals of fidelity and austerity of the ancient samurai without always feeling obliged to follow them in practice – as the grandfather proved."⁸⁷ Mishima writes that he himself may "preach Confucius without having read him."⁸⁸ Thus, Mishima worries that he is simply teaching his own morality despite his initial intentions to promote immorality.

The opening to this essay is written in a very personal tone: Mishima makes puns out of two very familiar Japanese clichés, and he talks about his family and childhood. This is a very frank opening, and the reader feels that in this essay Mishima presents himself not as a famous author, or as a man about town, but as himself. The reader is excited by the chance to read what seem to be Mishima's true opinions. Mishima does not waste this opportunity discussing trivial matters: this essay is a discussion of the morality of all Japanese society.

In *Lessons in Immorality* Mishima frequently uses binary pairs to form simplified relationships which clarify his arguments. In “All’s Unwell,” Mishima compares Japanese and Western social and psychological morality. While the West has “that frightening curiosity called ‘morality’,” Japan has something entirely different.⁸⁹ For Mishima, “we Japanese are like plants. And, we’re rebuilding this country while imitating animals. But, the rules and moral guidelines that bloodthirsty animals build for their animal countries aren’t going to fit us well.”⁹⁰ The lines Mishima draws are clear: the Japanese are plants, and Westerners are animals. Mishima will use this analogy both to create humor, and to encourage his readers to think critically about postwar Japanese morality.

To show just how poorly Western morality fits the Japanese, Mishima argues that there is no point in teaching plants Western animal moral strictures to Japanese plants with homilies such as, “you shouldn’t sink your claws into a weakened rabbit.”⁹¹ And even if Mishima tries to provoke cabbages to attack rabbits, it won’t make any difference: “a cabbage hasn’t got claws to begin with, and it couldn’t possibly kill a rabbit!”⁹² To wit: the morality of the animal world, the West, is completely inapplicable to the plant world, Japan. Perhaps, to Mishima Japanese violence is as mindless as the violence that takes place when a tall tree shades out and destroys saplings.

But, for Mishima, Japanese society was changing and new species and varieties of life were appearing all the time. As an example of this kind of new life form, Mishima offers up the biker gangs (*kaminarizoku*) that were spreading at the time. For Mishima “they’re like cabbages riding motorcycles” but, he reminds us that a motorcycle can kill a

man.⁹³ So, while an animal can kill a rabbit, and a cabbage cannot, a cabbage on a motorcycle has animal-like lethal potential.

Mishima contrasts these biker gangs with samurai, saying that “both swords and motorcycles can be weapons. But, the difference between bikers and samurai appears when we consider which of these groups clearly thinks of these objects as weapons.”⁹⁴ A samurai understood that he held a weapon in his hands, and was able to place his murderous intentions in the weapon itself. Thus, samurai were not responsible for their own killing urges— the swords were. For Mishima, the weapon is the key in managing one’s killing urges. By being able to attribute his impulses to the weapon, a samurai could separate himself from his urges and live like a plant in a plant-like morality.

Contemporary gangs in Japan, however, do not have an object within which they can store their urges. Mishima doubts that a man’s murderous impulses in the age of atomic and hydrogen bombs can be placed in a “cold white button.”⁹⁵ For Mishima, “from the Nazi era on, there is no longer any relationship between the killer and the killing urge.”⁹⁶ The killer has no object which can represent these urges, and no moral system to support them. Mishima contends that the modern morality being instituted by Japan has no means for dealing with murderous impulses, and foresees difficulty for Japanese who are forced to conform to postwar Japanese morality. While samurai had bushidō, the modern Japanese have no morality to deal with their killing impulses.

In closing his discussion of the samurai and biker gangs, Mishima asserts that he is against rearmament and remilitarization. Eleven years after writing these essays, by his death in 1970, Mishima had become a well-known advocate of remilitarization,

rearmament, and reconstruction of prewar Japanese institutions. The assertion that he's against rearmament shows what Mishima's politics were like in 1959, and helps the reader better understand how Mishima's strong conservative political ideals developed in the years following these essays.

Returning to the essay, Mishima says that "I believe that plants have the urge to kill. It's more hidden in shadow, and buried deeper than an animal's. It may even be larger and stronger as well."⁹⁷ For Mishima, cabbages want to kill rabbits, but they just do not have the natural tools. And a morality made by plants for plants recognizes this fact. For Mishima, postwar Japan has adopted a Western-influenced morality. A morality made by plants for plants would be a morality made without influence of the West: i.e., the pre-Meiji bushidō-influenced Japanese native morality. However, in postwar Japan new species were emerging, and the old morality could not manage them. So "intellectually bankrupt politicians and teachers" started promoting a new morality, one that does not recognize killing urges at all.⁹⁸ The new morality lacks any means for managing these impulses, let alone using them. For Mishima, the 1882 Imperial Rescript to Soldiers and Sailors was the last great historical document that made use of the native Japanese morality which recognized the impulse to kill, and nothing like it would ever be promulgated again in postwar Japan. Clearly, this statement, in addition to his previous declaration of being against rearmament, is important to any scholar who has interest in understanding Mishima's politics.

As counter-examples to contemporary Japanese morality, which does not allow for killing, Mishima offers up Christianity and communism. Christianity, according to

Mishima, draws its strength from its martyrs, and that Christian morality is a morality built around “being killed.”⁹⁹ Christian morality recognizes man’s murderous impulse, and rewards death at another man’s hands through martyrdom. For Mishima, communist morality is built around revolution, violence, and death, and he believes that the appeal of communism is its “morality of killing.”¹⁰⁰ Both of these animal moralities acknowledge and have means for dealing with the murderous impulses of its people, and Mishima contends that the recognition of murder is just what makes these two moral systems so strong.

Mishima states that contemporary Japanese morality is not murder-focused, but suicide-focused. For Mishima, contemporary crime in Japan resembles suicide, and the motivations for most murders are, ultimately, the products of misplaced self destructive impulses. Mishima’s discussion of suicide here is very interesting to the post-1970 reader. He writes that

Maybe it’s out of cowardice, but I cannot agree with the philosophy of suicide. If you’re going to kill yourself, wouldn’t it be better to kill someone else, or be killed? This is why we have other people; this is what the world exists for.¹⁰¹

Mishima’s stance vis-à-vis the other is reminiscent of the stance he takes in “Conceited,” which is that the other exists solely to serve the purposes of the self. For Mishima, other people are only there to remind him how great he is, and to kill him when the time comes. He also uses hyperbole here as a rhetorical strategy, expressing an extreme version of his argument: the primary *raison de etre* for other people is to kill you. By forwarding an exaggerated and unpalatable concept like this, Mishima makes his central argument, that Japan needs a morality that can manage killing urges, seem more reasonable.

Mishima's belief that the best death is in a meaningful battle with another over an ideal is very similar to the complex emotions towards death expressed by Mishima in his serious 1956 novel *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. After living in wartime under the threat of immanent destruction, how does one face the world when the promised bombs never drop? In *Kinkakuji* Mishima's protagonist, Mizoguchi, cannot accept that the Golden Pavilion has survived the war unscathed. For him, the war was going to give the Golden Pavilion the kind of glorious demise that Mizoguchi thinks beauty needs. The pavilion is unscathed by war, and Mizoguchi, oppressed by its seemingly permanent beauty, burns it to the ground. When Mishima writes "...wouldn't it be better to kill or be killed," he hints at his own frustration that he missed out on a glorious death in war. For Mishima, World War II was the end of the bushidō-influenced Japanese society that he so loved, and his last chance to die his idealized heroic death in battle. Contemporary Japan was at peace, and a peaceful world provides Mishima no outlet for his idealized "kill or be killed" ethos.

Following his thoughts on murder over suicide, Mishima puts forward this as his own personal "educational rescript":

The urge to kill is hidden deep within every interpersonal connection – between parents and children, siblings, spouses, lovers, and even between friends. And the most extreme form of suicide is killing yourself after every other man, woman, and child on earth has died, and you are left alone. But, as long as there is one other person on the planet, you should either kill them or be killed. We need to kill or be killed – this is the fate of man, this is what gives value to our lives. This is my personal rescript on education.¹⁰²

This is one of the most hyperbolic, immoral, and provocative statements Mishima makes in the entire series. Also, by using the word "rescript," Mishima evokes the language of

the Meiji emperor, and hints at the rhetoric he uses later in life as an active conservative political writer and as the self-styled general of his private army, the Shield Society (tate no kai).

In previous essays Mishima railed against established societal norms. He asked students to rebel against their teachers, he admired a man who left an old lady in the middle of the road, and he got high school girls drunk. But, until this essay, Mishima has not said anything nearly as provocative as “humans should kill each other.” He is asking his readers to re-examine one of society’s most pervasive taboos. His argument in favor of murder is not compelling, nor is it intended to be. Mishima wants his readers to recognize the human impulse to kill, and to reconsider postwar Japanese morality. Once again, Mishima uses ambitious hyperbole to make his antisocial arguments more palatable to the reader. While he may not be arguing for a rearmament and remilitarization of the Japanese state, he is asking for a rearmament and remilitarization of the Japanese spirit.

Before ending “All’s Unwell”, Mishima steps back and comments upon the series as a whole. First, he states that *Lessons in Immorality* is just as shocking as the gossip and crime news published “on page three of the paper.”¹⁰³ And his essays will remain controversial as long as readers continue to pay so much attention to evil and evil-doers.

Mishima knows that the sensational nature of his essays’ subject matter profoundly affects the way in which *Lessons in Immorality* will be received by readers. By asserting that his series is as shocking as “page three” journalism, Mishima also acknowledges the possibility that, as long as his readers are distracted by villains and evil,

his essay series will be pigeonholed as similarly sensationalist literature. Thus, while he does discuss serious philosophies and ideas in *Lessons in Immorality*, Mishima recognizes that its provocative subject matter may prevent his readers from taking its arguments and philosophies seriously. Tucked away in the final paragraphs of “All’s Unwell,” this passage makes it clear that, to some degree, Mishima may have considered these essays to be more than just simple profit-making “entertainments.” It’s clear that these essays provide insight into his personal philosophies because, in the very next paragraph, Mishima asks: “Why is it, unfortunately, that evil always looks so beautiful?”¹⁰⁴

For Mishima, evil is beautiful because we are removed from it, and our ability to see the beauty in evil is a sign that we may soon be able to see the “forms of the gods themselves.”¹⁰⁵ Mishima derived this philosophy from the teachings of the third century Neo-Platonism philosopher Plotinus. Particularly, Mishima focuses on Plotinus’ idea that man desires that which is unlike himself. Because the intellect drives the individual to attempt to embody ideals, or “gods” for Mishima, the individual is filled with desire for the other. Because man sees beauty in what he desires, and desires what he is not, a man sees beauty in that which he is not. So, a good man will see beauty in both the ideal of good, but also in evil because he is neither completely good nor completely evil. So, just as Plotinus’s man strives to embody his own ideals, Mishima’s aesthetic sensibility is one in which man desires that which he is not. Mishima’s man sees beauty in evil and other things that are unlike himself.

At the same time that Mishima was writing this essay he was working on one of his most popular plays, *The Black Lizard*. The play, which centers on the appeal of evil, is about a female master thief who loves youth and beauty, and a detective who loves crime. The thief is as close to a goddess of evil as one can get – she robs, kills, and taxidermies beautiful young men and women. And the detective is a good man, who is so intrigued by evil that there is not even space in his heart for the thief who is the embodiment of that ideal. Mishima is in top form in writing an appealing embodiment of evil; most playgoers worship and then mourn the death the beautiful goddess of evil. The play launched the career of the diva Miwa Akihiro, has been staged frequently in Japan, and has earned international recognition.

The closing of the essay is warm, and familiar. Mishima dons the mask of a bartender sending his customers home for the night, and compares the individual essays in the series to “cocktails.”

All of the cocktails I served you tonight in my bar have shocking titles, but I don't make any of them with bad liquor. I haven't mixed any methyl alcohol into them, so you're not going to go blind. I just wanted to show you that, with my bartending skill alone, I could make good liquor taste like a product of black magic.¹⁰⁶

Considering Mishima's death, however, the last lines are foreboding: “I've gotten tired too, I think I'll close up shop. I'll just stay here behind the bar, and sip on methyl alcohol for a bit. I'm different than you though, so you don't need to worry about me going blind.”¹⁰⁷ While Mishima recommends that his readers leave suicide, murder, and evil behind, he is going to stay in the bar and experiment further. Either Mishima is telling the reader that his going blind is unimportant, or that he is immune to his own iconoclastic

notions. After all he has written to denigrate humility, it is unlikely that any reader would believe that Mishima is saying he is not worth worrying about. Rather, Mishima believes he is immune to his immoral advice because he has the strength to resist his own rhetoric, or because he knows it all to be hollow cynical posture. Here, Mishima presents himself as Wilde's provocateur Wotton, by "never say[ing] a moral thing, and never do[ing] a wrong thing. [His] cynicism is simply a pose."¹⁰⁸

These light essays, written from 1958 to 1959, seem to be primarily playful social satire, but they also foreshadow Mishima's late-period traditionalism and militarism. While often light in tone and content, lines like these last few, and essays like "All's Unwell," make *Lessons in Immorality* valuable to Mishima scholars. Here, Mishima gives the reader a glimpse of how he thinks of himself in relation to the shocking postures he takes as an artist. He believes himself to be immune to the dangerous influence of his own provocative philosophies, claiming that he "won't make himself go blind experimenting with methyl alcohol."¹⁰⁹ But 2013 readers familiar with Mishima's political evolution will no doubt question this assertion.

"All's Unwell" is a fitting end to the series: it is Mishima at his most iconoclastic and bizarre. In this essay, Mishima is absurd and provocative. He argues that murder, which destroys the individual, and warfare, which destroys whole nations and societies, are essential to life itself. And while I would have liked the final essay of the series to have more humor, "All's Unwell" has a very friendly tone which makes readers feel as though they are reading Mishima's personal thoughts, and not just his posturing. From the discussion his grandfather in the opening paragraph, through the very warm closing

metaphor of Mishima as a bartender, readers end this series feeling that they have done more than read some hastily penned trivial essays; they have been in the company of a funny, intelligent, and troubled author who has a lot to say about the world. Mishima's serious writings encourage readers to mourn the early suicide of "Mishima Yukio, the genius author." But, essays like "All's Unwell" show a different side of Mishima, and allow readers to mourn the death of "Mishima Yukio, the man."

Conclusion

While *Lessons in Immorality* has been largely disregarded by Western scholars and readers, I believe that it is an important piece of the Mishima canon. Because this work targets a wide audience, Mishima introduces the reader to his serious philosophical and aesthetic concerns through different rhetorical strategies than in his complex novels. These writing techniques are largely comic in nature, making the work both fun to read and thought provoking. “All’s Unwell,” for example, clearly outlines the nature of Mizoguchi’s obsession with Kashiwagi in *Kinkakuji*. The weak, impotent, and aimless Mizoguchi is fascinated by the strong, intelligent, and iconoclastic Kashiwagi – in the same way that the good reader of “All’s Unwell” is intrigued by lurid tales of immorality and evil. The same youthful and unswerving loyalty to one’s ideals that drives the very disturbing *The Sailor who Fell from Grace from the Sea* (Gogo no Eikō), motivates the absurdly comic, and extremely dangerous, Mr. S. from “Slurp Your Soup.” Mishima shows his reverence for Saikaku and Japanese literature in “Go Drinking,” and his worship of the youth is central to “Disrespect Your Teachers.” And in “You Should Be as Conceited as Possible,” Mishima attacks the hypocritical contemporary Japanese person who would rather lie and bow to society, than honestly acknowledge his own merits. This essay clearly shows how Mishima conceived of himself as an author, and what ideologies affected his conscious construction of his public image.

Also, and this is of equal if not greater importance to readers and scholars, in this “entertainment” we can see Mishima at play. In *Lessons in Immorality* and not in *Confessions of a Mask*, or *The Sound of Waves*, the reader delights in Mishima’s humor.

Readers laugh and smile as they journey into and through Mishima's convoluted moral and psychological universe.

Donald Keene wrote of Mishima that "perhaps the laughter also reflected his willpower rather than genuine mirth. One of his Japanese acquaintances told me that Mishima laughed only with his mouth, never with his eyes."¹¹⁰ And from those anecdotes which fail to fly above the realm of mere foolishness, such as the music room prank in "You Should Disrespect Your Teachers," it seems possible that Mishima may have been a man who laughed with his mouth and not "with his eyes." However, the inspired moments of these essays, such as the principal in the pit and the adventures of Mr. S, stand out as singular moments of transcendent hilarity. They hint at the possibility that Mishima's humor was not simply an affectation, but an expression of "genuine mirth."

Feminist author Germaine Greer said of Ernest Hemingway in a 1971 *Rolling Stone* interview that Hemingway "blew his head off. He sold himself a line of bullshit, and bought it." "All's Unwell" hints at the similar possibility that Mishima came to believe the "bullshit" he expressed in this series and in later works. The philosophies that may have existed at first as antisocial posturing to shock readers and sell weeklies, novels, and plays, came to influence Mishima's fundamental beliefs which may have contributed to his suicide. The last lines in "All's Unwell" certainly encourage readers and scholars to take these essays as more than mere "entertainments." After all, the ideas and philosophies expressed in these essays are the "methyl alcohol" that Mishima stayed up to sip on in the bar, long after he'd turned off the lights and sent all of his readers home.

¹ Mishima, *Bungeidokuhon*, 284.

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- ² Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 2-4.
- ³ Shūeisha, “A Brief History,” Web.
- ⁴ *Syūkan Myōjo*, Issue 15
- ⁵ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 40.
- ⁶ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 102.
- ⁷ Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*, 304.
- ⁸ Ibid.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Mishima, *Bungeidokuhon*, 284; Mishima and Kominz. *Mishima on Stage: The Black Lizard and Other Plays*, 33-34.
- ¹¹ Mishima Literary Museum, Web.
- ¹² Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Volume 1: Fiction*, 1189.
- ¹³ Nathan, *Mishima: a Biography*, 104.
- ¹⁴ Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Volume 1: Fiction*, 1189.
- ¹⁵ Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature of the Modern Era, Volume 1: Fiction*, 1190.
- ¹⁶ The Paris Review, *Interviews, Graham Greene*, Web.
- ¹⁷ Roughly, “miscellaneous essay,” the genre itself “begs not to be defined too closely” (Chance, *Formless in Form*, xiv). According to Chase, the zuihitsu is a genre which whose “usefulness and prestige in Japanese literary history come from ... flexibility.” Zuihitsu ranges from fragmentary works to those works which were consciously constructed in the style, and are not as “formless” as one may think.
- ¹⁸ Cohn, *Studies in the Comic Spirit in Modern Japanese Fiction* 15-6.
- ¹⁹ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 287.
- ²⁰ Keene & Rimer, *The Blue-Eyed Tarōkaja: A Donald Keene Anthology*, 209.
- ²¹ Yournencar, *Mishima: A Vision of the Void*, 25.
- ²² Ibid.
- ²³ Keene, *Landscapes and Portraits, Appreciations of Japanese Culture*, 206.
- ²⁴ Mishima and Kominz. *Mishima on Stage: The Black Lizard and Other Plays*
- ²⁵ Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, 60.
- ²⁶ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 9.
- ²⁷ Keene, *World Within Walls: Japanese Literature of the Pre-Modern Era*, 188.
- ²⁸ Okuno, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*. Tokyo, Kadokawa Bunko, 339.
- ²⁹ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 9.
- ³⁰ Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, 51.
- ³¹ Okuno, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*. Tokyo, Kadokawa Bunko, 339.
- ³² Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern*, 83.
- ³³ Ibid, 80.
- ³⁴ Ibid, 90.
- ³⁵ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 286.
- ³⁶ Ibid, 286.

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- ³⁷ Ibid, 287.
³⁸ Ibid.
³⁹ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*. Tokyo, Kadokawa Bunko, 339.
⁴⁰ Ibid.
⁴¹ Ibid.
⁴² Ibid.
⁴³ Stokes, *The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima*, 122.
⁴⁴ Okuno, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*. Tokyo, Kadokawa Bunko, 337.
⁴⁵ Ibid
⁴⁶ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 287.
⁴⁷ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 287
⁴⁸ Ibid.
⁴⁹ Ibid.
⁵⁰ Ibid.
⁵¹ Ibid.
⁵² Ibid, 15.
⁵³ Ibid.
⁵⁴ Ibid, 16.
⁵⁵ Ibid, 17.
⁵⁶ Ibid.
⁵⁷ Ibid, 16.
⁵⁸ Ueda, *Modern Japanese Writers and the Nature of Literature*, 247.
⁵⁹ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 86.
⁶⁰ Ibid, 87.
⁶¹ Ibid.
⁶² Ibid.
⁶³ Ibid.
⁶⁴ Ibid.
⁶⁵ Ibid, 88.
⁶⁶ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 89.
⁶⁷ Keene & Yamaguchi, *Chronicles of My Life: An American in the Heart of Japan*, 143.
⁶⁸ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 62.
⁶⁹ Ibid.
⁷⁰ Ibid.
⁷¹ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 62.
⁷² Ibid.
⁷³ Ibid, 63.
⁷⁴ Ibid.
⁷⁵ Ibid.
⁷⁶ Ibid, 64.
⁷⁷ Ibid.
⁷⁸ Ibid.
⁷⁹ Ibid.

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- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 63.
⁸¹ Ibid, 64.
⁸² Ibid.
⁸³ Ibid.
⁸⁴ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 282.
⁸⁵ Ibid.
⁸⁶ Ibid.
⁸⁷ Yournencar, *Mishima: A Vision of the Void*, 15.
⁸⁸ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 282.
⁸⁹ Ibid.
⁹⁰ Ibid.
⁹¹ Ibid.
⁹² Ibid.
⁹³ Ibid.
⁹⁴ Ibid, 283.
⁹⁵ Ibid.
⁹⁶ Ibid.
⁹⁷ Ibid.
⁹⁸ Ibid.
⁹⁹ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 284.
¹⁰⁰ Ibid.
¹⁰¹ Ibid.
¹⁰² Ibid.
¹⁰³ Ibid.
¹⁰⁴ Ibid.
¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 284-5.
¹⁰⁶ Ibid.
¹⁰⁷ Ibid.
¹⁰⁸ Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 13.
¹⁰⁹ Mishima, *Fudōtoku Kyōiku Kōza*, Chūō Kōronsha, 285.
¹¹⁰ Keene, *On Familiar Terms: A Journey Across Cultures*, 163.

You Should Go Drinking, Even with Men You Don't Know

The great 18th century novelist Ihara Saikaku wrote a book called *Twenty Cases of Unfilial Children in Japan* (Honchō Nijū Fukō). Though it is based on the Chinese work *Twenty Four Exemplars of Filial Piety* (Èrshí Sì Xiào), it is a collection of tales about children who are horrible to their parents. By and large, the original Chinese pious tales are contrived, dull to read, and make me uneasy. On the other hand, stories about truly terrible children are a joy to read. Even though I'd thought I was pretty terrible to my mother and father, after reading Saikaku I lost confidence in myself as bad son. I can't imagine that I could ever be as horrible a child as the characters in Saikaku's stories. Reading, I would often think: "Good lord. There's filial impiety, and then there's *filial impiety!*"¹ The stories put me in an odd mood: comparing myself to the characters in them, I thought that I'm actually pretty good to my mother and father. And, after all, the first step to being a filial child is to think of yourself as a child who is good to his parents! Books like Saikaku's are valuable, in that they end up encouraging moral behavior. Taking Saikaku's lead, I hereby launch my *Lessons in Immorality*, parodying our Japanese moral education.

This is a pretty clichéd way to start a story, but... one night on a weekend some time ago, a friend from work and I were walking the backstreets of Ginza.

¹ In these stories children beat their parents, rob them, talk them into murdering strangers, and act altogether horribly.

On our walk, three really eye-catching girls appeared before us. They wore matching long sleeved exercise shirts, matching tight pants, and they had three different hairstyles – all fashionable. They wore lots of jewelry too; each of them was decked out in necklaces and all kinds of jangling bracelets. They were seventeen or eighteen years old, about the same height as each other, and they were wearing their makeup in the most up-to-date urban style. But they didn't look gaudy, they had lively expressions on their faces, and each girl was attractive in her own way. You would expect these girls to turn some heads in Ginza. Seeing young girls in Ginza was a refreshing surprise, and before I knew it I'd turned my head a full 180 degrees to look at them. They turned to look at us too, and I heard them mention my name. When I'd gotten an eyeful, I turned back around and we made our way down the street. They followed loudly behind.

My friend and I stopped in front of our restaurant, and I called out “goodbye” to the girls. They responded “awwww, how boring,” and disappeared. My friend could hear my muttered complaints during dinner, and he consoled me by saying: “Don't worry, this is Ginza. And in Ginza, if you see someone once, you're bound to see them again.” And, just like he said, we ran into them after dinner in Ginza.

Sure enough, there they were on the other side as we made our way across a busy Ginza intersection.

“Ah, we meet again.” I exclaimed.

“Where are you going?”

“To a rockabilly café. Want to come with us?”

“We’d love to!”

They innocently bounced along with us. I was feeling pretty excited; I’m particularly fond of people who look completely innocent. We all introduced ourselves. Ms. A looked like the actress Shiga Akiko from a little while back. She wore eyeliner under her eyes, and had attractive features. But she occasionally put on a bored expression that just didn’t fit her age. Ms. C had a long face like a middle aged woman. Ms. B was the cutest. She looked just like my first love, and she was a bit absent-minded. I didn’t know the first thing about them, but it seemed like she was under the bad influence of her two friends, and was doing everything she could to mimic their behavior. They were all in their second year of high school.

We were a little disappointed to find out that the café didn’t have a rockabilly band that night. Instead, they had a jazz band led by a famous drummer. I let the girls in on a inside information about him: he was actually the lover of an actress who had just recently exploded onto the scene.

“Really!?! Even though he’s that uncool? Just what kind of guy is Ms. X into?”

“What’s your type?”

“I’m all about looks, of course.”

“With a man it’s not his face that matters, but his heart,” I replied.

“Well, there’s one other thing too, isn’t there?”

A poked C and they laughed sharply. Ms. B followed suit, even though she didn’t understand. I was taken aback, and looked over to catch my friend’s eye.

Our table was making too much noise, and during a break in the music the emcee made an announcement. “Ladies and Gentlemen, members of the audience are being a little too vocal in their appreciation of the performance. Out of respect for the artists and your fellow audience members, please remain quiet during the show. On behalf of the establishment and the performers, thank you for your co-operation.” Ms. B pouted her adorable lips in puzzlement.

“That’s not cool. This is a place where people just come to ‘freeze’ out, and then they go and make annoying announcements like that.”

The boys in the seats ahead of us heard this and said, “She said “freeze” out. Pfft.” Ms. B had meant to say ‘chill’ out. She heard the boys, and blushed bright red – even embarrassed she was still cute.

“What did you girls do after we split up earlier?” I asked.

“We swam the Ginza sea, dodging the lures of drunks trying to get us on the line,” Ms. A replied.

A bit later, Ms. A took interest in the arm-hair coming out from under my cuff. She said, “My, you’re hairy, aren’t you?” and started plucking away. Ms. B and Ms. C joined in

too, plucking quickly in an effort to keep up with Ms. A. It was refreshing how they showed no hesitation or subtlety in acting on their impulses to satisfy their curiosity. There was no need for me to say anything to them.

After leaving the café I invited them to the Suntory Bar. It would have been nice if they could have tagged along quietly. But large raindrops started falling, and the girls were in a panic patting at their heads to keep everything in place. They were worried about ruining their carefully constructed coiffures. Inside, we stood at the bar and Ms. A and Ms. C smoked and ordered drinks. Ms. B avoided both alcohol and cigarettes.

“Do you girls have boyfriends?”

“No, not at all.” But, the way I saw it, at least Ms. A and Ms. C had something to them that betrayed my initial impressions of them as innocent girls. I felt a little let down when I realized this. I didn’t have any bad feelings about them, but there was something I just couldn’t put my finger on. A seventeen- or eighteen-year-old girl with makeup under her bored eyes while walking around with her chest puffed up with pride: there was something about the opposite attitudes being mixed here, an attitude of pride and an attitude of boredom, that made me sad. I looked at her profile while she smoked, and I felt pity for her. We adults don’t just thoughtlessly worship youth, we also fully appreciate its pathos.

Around then, Ms. A started to smoke in an odd way: she stuck two cigarettes together, and lit the end of the second one. She could hardly pull any smoke through, and B and C sat

watching her intently. At last the second cigarette began to lose its shape, lean, and it looked like it was going to fall.

“Oh, that’s no fun. It’s gone limp. I guess I overworked it.”

Ms. A’s innuendo made Ms. C break out laughing, and Ms B laughed along to keep up, all the while looking like she didn’t get the joke.

Just then my disappointment in them reached its peak. Right in front of my eyes, the bartender, making no attempt whatsoever to hide it, let complete disdain show on his face. He put on a sour look, and from then on he wouldn’t give me a decent response even if I was ordering something from him. The girls’ behavior was spoiling my evening and my mood.

After leaving the Suntory Bar, we stood in the drizzling rain and shook hands good-bye.

“Is it okay if I don’t take you home?”

“No problem!”

But when I shook hands with them, either Ms. A or Ms. C, I’m not sure who, ran their index finger along my palm. It tickled, and I let out a surprised laugh. This was no good. This kind of behavior was that of a low woman. No matter how much she thinks she’s joking, this is a woman’s code for “let’s have sex.”

When I got home, I fell into a reverie. Of all of us out in Ginza that night, wasn’t the dumbest and most ridiculous one actually me? They made a great deal of effort to look like

bad girls, but they were really just innocents. They were nice women in their late teens putting on a show.

This interpretation of the evening was a form of sweet paternal condescension, and I tucked it away in my heart with a smile.

Deep in Your Heart, You Should Disrespect Your Teachers

Deep in his heart, any student worth a damn thinks that his teachers are idiots. Any student who doesn't disrespect his teachers won't amount to anything – this is absolutely certain. But please consider what “deep in your heart” really means – this is essential.

“Youthful rebellion” (otona ni taisuru rejisutansu) is a phrase that's getting bandied about a lot these days. And I hear young people all over spouting sayings like “all adults are corrupt,” “you can't trust grown-ups,” and “don't be fooled by the older generation.” Statements like these were coined by Ishihara Shintarō, and now they've become commonplace. And since his little brother Yū has started running riot as an icon of the young generation, adults have gone completely silent. It seems as though they've been overcome by him. My teenage readers, you have Yū to thank for your feeling that God's on your generation's side. It's almost as though young people don't give a passing thought to adults anymore. But, precisely because of this attitude among youths, adults are sharpening their claws: now, quiet-seeming adults are beginning show their real power. Open your eyes and take a good look around. While most of the adults who appear in Yū's movies are cowards and weaklings, no real adults are up on that screen. The real adults are the board of directors at the movie studio. The people backing and profiting off of Yū's movies aren't his teenage fans, but movie moguls, who are adults.

In this, my second essay, I promote the immoral idea that “deep in your heart, you should disrespect your teachers.” I want to propose a strategy for youthful rebellion against adults. I picked teachers simply because the overwhelming majority of them are adults. My young readers think that their teachers are a little odd. That’s good. Even when my generation was younger we thought teachers were a bit off – they were absurd and out of touch with contemporary society. There were some teachers who foolishly tried to be hip and keep up, but they were even more detestable for their efforts. So, in fact my generation looked down on our teachers too.

Once, the strict headmaster of the Gakushūin middle school was quietly strolling around the grounds, when all of a sudden a suspicious gun barrel poked out from a bush. “BANG!” – the gun flashed. The headmaster panicked and fled, but another gun emerged from a different bush and pointed at him. “Bang!” – again another shot rung out from the brush. The headmaster ran here and there in confusion, trapped. And, just as he thought he’d finally broken free from the ring of fire, he flopped into a meticulously prepared pit. The “guns” had looked real, but were just air rifles. Boys had hidden in the bushes in pairs: one aimed the air rifle, while the other stomped on a firecracker to make the gunshot sound.

In *The Classroom of Terror* (Bōryoku Kyōshitsu), which came out about ten years ago, and other movies like it, there are scenes of students throwing baseballs against blackboards. And, this is supposed to shock the audience. But in my day, a student threw a

knife into the blackboard right by the teachers back! Now, *that's* shocking. So, it's not as though teaching has become a life-threatening profession only recently.

As an example of a more innocent prank, I'll tell you about one that involved a classmate of mine –we'll call him "K." K was a bit slow, and during music class while the teacher was writing staff lines all the way from one end of the board to the other, the boy sitting next to K, "M," started teasing him. First, M put his hand in his jacket, made his fingers into the shape of a pistol, and in a frightening voice said this right into K's ear:

"Hey! Take off your jacket or I'll shoot."

"Ah! Okay, I'll do it right away."

"Hurry up!"

"Wait, please don't shoot. I don't want to die..."

He took off his jacket.

"What the hell! Take off your shirt too!"

"All right, all right, I'll do it!"

"Take off your pants too, or I'll pull the trigger."

"Okay... just please wait a moment."

The teacher finished his leisurely work at the board, clapped his chalky hands, and turned around. All along the goal of the prank had been to have the teacher turn and see one boy in his undershorts in a sea of uniformed students.

The defining trait of childhood is cruelty. And no matter how sentimentally we view a boy, he is endowed with a plant-like cruelty. Kindness can only grow along with the development of adult cunning.

Anyhow, it seems as though I've gone off on a tangent. Teachers exist to be surpassed by their students. It's not as though teachers know everything. One particularly troubling aspect of their ignorance is that they themselves are no longer young: they've graduated from the concerns of youth, and their miserable early years are half forgotten. And it is impossible for them to re-live it.

As far as the troubles of youth go, well, my younger readers know more about that than teachers do. Forgetting is what makes life livable. If somehow there were a teacher who could understand you and sympathize with your troubles, he'd be so entangled and confused by the contradictions between adults and children that he would certainly kill himself.

And, if I consider my own experience, really, the issue of how to live my own life was a personal problem. I read books, thought, and puzzled over this problem alone. I learned very little from my teachers that could have helped.

A student's desire to be understood by his teachers is weakness. Teachers try to educate. They give instruction. They impart knowledge. They try to understand. That's fine just the way it is because that's their job.

But, young readers, trying to be understood, and lashing out and lamenting when no one understands you, is just weakness brought about by self-indulgent over-dependence. First, you've got to have enough backbone to say to yourself "Teachers... hah. Like they could ever understand me!" And, "I'll study, sure. But I'm not going to help you figure me out." This, younger readers, is what I'm trying to tell you.

The adult world is a dog's world filled with sadness and suffering. And, teachers stink of that world. If there was a teacher who didn't give off that scent, well, he's probably just some mama's boy from a rich family. The cuffs on most teachers' suits are worn out, and they are dyed white from chalk dust. Deep in your heart you should look down on them as strange bums. After all, the right to have complete and utter disdain for another person's life and lifestyle is a privilege of youth.

Students should pity their low-salaried teachers; they should have sympathy for them. These people called "teachers" are the weakest of all adults. This is certain. The adults that my young readers will meet after they leave school are a thousand times worse than the scariest teacher.

If you think this way, you'll pity your teachers, disrespect them, and take from them only the knowledge you need. When it comes to the big questions in life, children and adults are exactly the same, and have the exactly same ability to find the answers. Just resolve to figure out your problems on your own.

The only student who can truly disrespect his teachers is a student who's got guts. I think he's got to be the kind of kid who prepares in advance to put up a fight, even though his enemy is much stronger than him. This kind of attitude is the precursor for greatness.

"Teachers are great. They know everything, and they're absolutely perfect" – I worry about the future for students who think this way. On the other hand, there are egotistical troublemakers who act out and disrespect their teachers on the surface, without any deep convictions. I think I'd be correct to call these kinds of kids nothing more than a bunch of cowardly and spoiled brats.

You Should Slurp Your Soup

In hoity-toity etiquette courses, instructors solemnly admonish their students on manners, stating that “you must absolutely not slurp your soup” (sūpu wa keshite oto o tatete sutte wa ikemasen). Their students are used to a different set of manners though. They grew up slurping their miso soup, and downing the last gulp of their tea noisily. So etiquette teachers have to force these Western manners onto their students.

Incidentally, women, are the ones who are most easily influenced by these superficial rules of etiquette. And, because they are so inclined to judge things based solely on appearance, in women’s magazines you’ll read confessions like this:

Well, I had a boyfriend I liked. But something happened the first time we went to dinner. The potage arrived, and out of nowhere my boyfriend starts slurping away like he’s in some kind of ramen shop! The moment he slurped that soup, I immediately felt a physiological hatred for him. From then on I detested him completely.

You can find passages like this in confessional columns, with titles like “a series of letters on the subtleties of the psychology of love.” I don’t think that this is subtle female psychology, or anything of the sort. I think this is just plain vanity.

I don’t think that the directors of etiquette courses are particularly deserving of respect – if you’ve seen one you’ll understand. They simply know about Western manners. They aren’t of any particularly strong character, and they don’t help elevate their student’s way of thinking. But women get influenced by teachers like this, and right away they think of

men who slurp their soup as savages. But if we're talking about barbarians, aren't the people who eat with dangerous weapons, knives, the real barbarians?

The reason I happened to bring up slurping soup is that, amongst the men I admire, two of them slurp their soup with tremendous noise. Both of them have travelled abroad extensively, and I wonder what would happen if they got together to eat at some fancy restaurant in a European city. If they were to slurp their soup together, oh that would be a sight to see. And slurping their soup loudly doesn't do a thing to prevent them from being counted amongst the smartest men in all of Japan. But that's not all. When I see them slurping their soup without any care for their surroundings, I think that if I could just drink my soup in the same way I might become just as smart as they are.

But this isn't just limited to soup. Right before my eyes, a medieval drama scholar I know once set his meat on his knife, and ever-so-delicately raised it to his lower lip. I gleefully watched him shovel the meat into his mouth. Acts like this are noble and good deeds - if for no other reason than that they thrill people, and make them scared that the prankster may cut his lip someday.

A man's greatness does not depend at all upon a thing like etiquette – etiquette is a vulgar and base concern.

Picture a hushed and expensive restaurant. Now, in the middle of this restaurant, a man suddenly makes a terrible noise while slurping his soup: “schluuuck, schluuuck” (zū zū

zū). This is social courage. The finer things in life are thought of as fine because everybody agrees upon it. So, a man who goes against the masses, saying that “though the millions of you go that way, I will go this way,” is thought of as being unrefined. Slurping soup is the foremost proof that a man is not a social sheep.

Going to watch a baseball game and playing golf are both pastimes for social sheep, and a social wolf has no need for them.

Ms. N is a star pupil of my *Lessons in Immorality*. So, when her boyfriend, a young man I'll call Mr. S, shamelessly slurped soup in restaurants, she actually felt proud. She was happy, and deep in her heart she told herself, “This guy has potential. One of these days, he's going to become a great man.”

“Once, rather surprisingly, he invited me to a Chopin concert. When I went with him to the concert though, he stomped on a firecracker in the middle of the quiet theater! The crack brought the crowd to its feet, and we had to run away.”

He scorned everyday manners and kindnesses, but one day he took the hand of an old woman with a bent back whom he'd never seen before, and led her across the road. “Oh my, thank you so much young man, you're so considerate, really how kind you are,” she sputtered. But, when they came to the middle of the street, and this was a street dense with traffic, he let go of her hand and hurried away. The old lady's hips gave out beneath her, and she ended up

in a heap in the middle of the street, chanting the Buddha's name. Fortunately, her prayers were louder than the screeching car horns and she escaped the situation without getting hit.

When Mr. S got sick, he headed off to the movies, carefully picking out a theater showing a quiet and sincere romantic film. He took a seat right in the middle, and in the middle of the show let off about twenty tremendous sneezes, one right after another. The audience broke into laughter, the film's carefully constructed melodrama was spoiled, and his cold was cured.

On certain mornings, he went around from police box to police box, took off his hat, and gave deep bows to the officers on duty. But, he did this without saying a word, and walked away in silence. The officers were all suspicious of him, and decided that Mr. S was a communist agitator using a new social disruption technique.

Once, Mr. S went out to a park that had a pond filled with birds. He floated a box of paper scraps on the surface, set it on fire, pushed it out into the middle of the pond and ran away. But the birds were surprised, took off, and shit right on his head.

Ms. N stayed with Mr. S through all of these misadventures, and had even witnessed some of his misbehavior with her own eyes. But all she could do was think, more and more, that he was becoming a unique and great man. After all, he couldn't possibly be a social sheep.

But then, one day, someone forced Mr. S to take a psychological exam, and had him committed. When this happened, Ms. N was severely disappointed. She felt the power of a flock of sheep who had forced a wolf into a pen. Another ‘pen’ that social sheep possess is the prison. So, as far as teasing the sheep goes, you’d better stop at just slurping your soup and not even think about going further than that.

Readers, this is the state of the arts in Japan today. So, if any music gets played today, even if it happens to be louder than easy listening music played for sheep in restaurants, it certainly doesn’t come close to the noise made by a wolf slurping his soup. For me, anyhow, I’d pick the sound of a wolf slurping soup over music played for sheep. Now, slurping soup might not be exquisite music, but it is an unceasing echo of “I’m not a sheep.” Slurping soup is a kind of courage, it’s a kind of resistance, and a kind of social agitation – it is a meager example of the things that a person cannot be without.

Be as Conceited as Possible

If there was no conceit in our world, there would be no fun. A boy convinced that he's the handsomest in all Japan spends every day overwhelmed by happiness. A woman who thinks she's the most beautiful in Japan spends her days floating on air. We're all vain; after all, everyone owns a vanity mirror. Allow me to offer up an example from my experience as a novelist. When I write a novel about a boy who is handsome beyond compare, one young male acquaintance after another asks me if he was the model for the character. And when I write about an impossibly beautiful woman, female friend after female friend comes forward thanking me for basing my character on her.

People who can't be conceited about their looks can shift their conceit to their face, their notoriety, or to anything else. Sick people have their own kind of vanity; horribly ill people in sanitariums find joy in telling each other about just how badly off they are. And criminals are completely consumed by pride. Behind the false remorse expressed by a criminal for his serious crime there lies over-weening pride.

A long time ago, people used to appreciate the benefits of conceit, and knew full well how to put it to use. *The Hagakure: The Book of Samurai (Hagakure)* may be an old and stiff explanation of the way of the samurai, but it puts forward the following about conceit: "Valor, one of the highest ideals for the samurai, is really just pride that one is the greatest

warrior in all Japan.” And, “Samurai must develop pride in who they are, and be prepared to die bravely.”

There are many cases where humility is fruitless. And most of the people in this world who are praised for their humility are really just hypocrites. There is a professor who refers to himself as “just an elderly professor,” or “a lowly teacher of languages” in his work. Who really believes that this is true humility? There’s a hypocritical idiom that “the stalk will droop as it bears grain” (*minoru hodo atama no noruru inaho kana*). It’s only natural that the more grain it bears, the heavier the head will become. What we should do is change this idiom to “the stalk droops because of its grain” (*minoru yue atama no noruru inaho kana*), thereby allowing people who are satisfied with their lofty position in society to safely affect false humility.

Conceit is just an amusing illusion, but we need it in order to live. Because it’s an illusion, conceit doesn’t need to have any basis in reality. Because it’s completely subjective, conceit doesn’t need the opinions of others. Of course, the opinions of others can help support conceit, but they never go beyond mere support. For conceited people, others exist solely to feed their own vanity.

If we were to remove vanity from romance, oh what a sad thing it would become. Rochefoucauld wrote that “the reason lovers can spend so much together and not get bored is that, from start to finish, all they do is talk about themselves.” If you talked about yourself

with strangers the way you do with a lover, I promise you that you'd drive them crazy.

Moreover, regardless of what kind of couple they may be, all lovers think of themselves as the star-crossed Romeo and Juliet. Not even in their dreams would they imagine themselves to be really just a "mended lid for a cracked pot" (warenabe ni tojibuta).

Conceit has its good points, and when compared to a vain person a show-off looks pathetic. For starters, a show-off lies endlessly. He brags about vacation homes he doesn't have, claims to have graduated from Keiō University even though he never finished elementary school, and he puts on airs like he owns many cars when he doesn't even have one. Lies like these are quickly exposed. A show-off is even more pathetic at the moment that his lies have been exposed. You see, a show-off is always acutely aware of what he does not have, so he stretches himself thin trying to cover up what he lacks. A vain person is crisp and dry, while a show-off is soft and soggy.

Conceited people are overtly proud because they truly and deeply believe in whatever they're proud of, whether they have grounds to or not. A person who is conceited without any ulterior motives is particularly enjoyable, and impossible to hate. After all, he isn't a liar. But, on the other hand, almost all humble people are liars. For example, that famous actress who passed away last year used to say, "Oh, I'm not very accomplished – actors are apprentices for life." She kept saying this right up until her death. She was a famous actress, whose name was known in every corner of the earth. And, furthermore, she

knew just how famous she was! But when she had to introduce herself in public, she did it with a wavering voice and with the demeanor of a schoolmarm from the countryside: “Hello, my name is Jane Doe, and I’m a student of the avant-garde acting style.” I hate this covert pride. The most overtly, and enjoyably, conceited person in today’s literary world has got to be Ishihara Shintarō. There is something about his conceit that makes people happy. In this way, Shintarō is similar to artists like Okamoto Tarō. Okamoto Taro has even boasted in public, “I’m a greater artist than Picasso.”

But, people without good sense, as always, are taken in by feigned humility. Thus, an actress will say things like: “I’m still an amateur, thank you so much for your guidance and patronage. Really, you all give me too much. The only reason a nobody like me has been able to become a star is thanks to all of you. Every night I clasp my hands together, thanking all of you from the depths of my heart. And I’ve never even once slept with my feet pointing in your direction. [Who is this for? Who even cares about what direction she points her feet in when she sleeps?] Thank you all so much. Really, thank you.” If she walks around putting on an attitude like this she’ll be able to protect her popularity in the film world. People will say, “despite being so young, she’s really something.”

Politicians, and other people in the business of shaking hands with the senseless masses, often have to wear the mask of humility and feign obsequiousness. But even though it’s similar feigned obsequiousness, politicians can’t possibly keep up with actresses.

But, I don't want to keep on wasting time talking about these secrets of worldly advancement. What I really want to talk about is our emotional health, and show that if you are conceited, you'll never experience any psychological difficulties.

Most women's mental distress is born from the following kind of scenario: a woman walks down the street, and she sees someone wearing the same dress. This is where her anxieties are born, because this other woman is more beautiful, and the dress suits her better. And if a woman experiences this two or three times, anxieties are certain to take hold of her psyche. If she is conceited enough to say to herself "What's she thinking? she's impersonating me, and it doesn't even look good on her," then incidents like these won't trouble her at all.

A man's anxieties are born out of stresses in the office. Looking at a co-worker, a man thinks: "he's way more capable than me, he's going to climb the ladder faster than I will, and he's definitely going to get promoted to section chief before me." This kind of thinking leads to an inferiority complex, and will poison a man from the inside. He has to be vain enough to think, "That S.O.B? – who does he think he is? He should make tea from my toenails, then he'd be half the man I am." If a man can think this way, he'll be okay.

I'm not talking simply about confidence. Confidence is burdened with the inconvenient requirement of reality. Not just anyone can have true confidence. But, vanity is built only upon one's emotional frame of mind – right now you can be vain if you want to be.

Rather than thinking “why is my nose so flat?” a woman should think: “My nose has got a kind of cute shape to it. And anyhow, over in America, aren’t surgeons busy shaving down ladies huge noses?”

I suppose, after all, that this kind of vanity needs the input of others. Flattery is vital, and supports this sort of pride. This is why we need society and other people.

All's Unwell that Ends Unwell

They say “all’s well that ends well” (owari yokereba subete yoshi), but I won’t let my series of *Lessons in Immorality* end on a high note. I managed to start each of my essays with lip service to immorality, but do a complete reversal in their conclusions. I have the bad habit of turning these essays into *Lessons in Morality* (dōtoku kōza). It looks like I have a little bit of my maternal grandfather in me – he used to teach Confucian philosophy. When I was a boy I used to whisper behind his back that “Granddad’s just like a whiskey priest: he reads and teaches Confucius, but he doesn’t understand him!” If you were to accuse me of being a man who preaches Confucius without having read him though, well, that’s not true.

In Japan, by and large, we don’t really have anything resembling that frightening curiosity called “morality” that they’ve got in the West. To use a metaphor: we Japanese are like plants. And, we’re rebuilding our country while imitating animals. But, the rules and moral guidelines that bloodthirsty animals have in their animal countries aren’t going to suit us well. Picture someone telling a plant that “you shouldn’t sink your claws into a weakened rabbit.” It’s absurd – a cabbage hasn’t got claws to begin with, and couldn’t possibly kill a rabbit! So, let’s say a writer like me comes along and plays devil’s advocate, and I instruct all my readers to “sink their claws into weakened rabbits.” In the end, it amounts to nothing more than someone commanding cabbages to do the impossible! So, it’s pretty clear that in

modern Japan, telling someone to “kill” and telling someone “don’t kill” have become equally pointless.

Recently, however, all sorts of new plants and unique and rare species of life have sprouted up from our Japanese soil. There are carnivorous plants that resemble venus fly traps. There are plants that look like the bastard child of a plant and animal coupling. And, like viruses and bacteria, I can’t tell whether some of these strange things are plant or animal. In the middle of all of this, we’ve even ended up having singularly unique animals appear, as though by the product of some spontaneous mutation. In a manner of speaking though, even groups like biker gangs are, at heart, a kind of plant. They’re like cabbages riding motorcycles. But, when it comes to rabbits, well, a cabbage on a motorcycle can run down and kill a rabbit.

It’s amusing to compare the biker gangs of the today to our samurai of yore. Depending on how they’re used, both swords and motorcycles can be weapons. But, the difference between bikers and samurai appears when we consider which of these groups clearly thinks of their objects as weapons. Because the samurai had no doubt that a sword was a weapon, they were able to safely put all of their killing urges into the sword itself. And, by attributing all killing urges to the sword, the samurai were able to comfortably give themselves over to living in a plant-like morality. This is what gave birth to our legends of

swords that kill regardless of the intent of their owner, swords like the famous Muramasa which needed to draw blood once it was removed from its sheathe.

The gangs of today, whether they're bikers, punks, or gangsters, are all without an object to put their killing urges into. However, when I lament our lack of weaponry in modern Japan, I'm not arguing for reinstatement of the military. But, even if I favored Japanese re-militarization, the modern army is armed with weapons like the new atomic warheads that can be fired out of a cannon, or the cold white buttons used to detonate hydrogen bombs. Can someone really put their killing urges into a little button? From the Nazi era on, there is no longer any relationship between killers and their killing urges.

While we're on the subject – I do believe that plants have the urge to kill. It's more hidden in shadow, and buried deeper than an animal's. It may even be larger and stronger as well. And our old plant-like morality (*shokubutsuteki dōtoku*), was conscious of this. But, as I mentioned before, all sorts of new organisms are appearing in Japan today. And, naturally, it's gotten to the point that some of them are uncontrollable using a plant-like morality. And that's why intellectually bankrupt politicians and teachers are creating and promoting all kinds of new morals. But, all of their new moral philosophies fail to directly address the killing urge itself, or present any kind of moral philosophy we can use to think of the killing urge. And that's why these new moralities are completely useless. On this point, I'd like to say that the Imperial Rescript was the last shining moment in the old plant-like morality that

was built around the urge to kill. But, we'll never again be able to recall that bright moment from our past.

Christianity was able to get all that power because of the strength of the martyrs. That's the power of a morality of being killed. And the power of Communism is rooted in revolution. It is a morality of killing.

And, now, is it just like Ōe Kenzaburō says? Is the prevalent morality a morality of suicide? All of today's crimes resemble suicides. If we trace back a criminal's killing urges today, we find they all share the same origins: a self-directed killing impulse. Of course, there was a philosophy of suicide in ancient Greece as well.

Maybe it's out of cowardice, but I cannot agree with the philosophy of suicide. If you're going to kill yourself, wouldn't it be better to kill someone else, or be killed? This is why we have other people; this is what the world exists for. The urge to kill is hidden deep within every interpersonal connection – between parents and children, siblings, spouses, lovers, and even between friends. And the most extreme form of suicide is killing yourself after every other man, woman, and child on earth has died, and you are left alone. But, as long as there is one other person on the planet, you should either kill him or be killed. We need to kill or be killed – this is the fate of man, this is what gives value to our lives. This is my personal rescript on education.

So, in these *Lessons in Immorality* I've put evil in its many forms on stage, along with many look-alikes for evil (warubito rashiki mono). And I've introduced all kinds of villains, and many characters who only appear to be evil. And these essays will stay as popular as the page three crime reports in the news papers, as long as man stays interested in evil, and evil continues to catch our eye. After all, wouldn't any one of us be surprised to come upon some cute girl on a train, absorbed in a mystery novel about a man who kills fifteen people, one after the next? And why is it, unfortunately, that evil always looks so beautiful?

But, and this is a reassuring fact, evil is only beautiful if we are removed from it. If we were dropped right into the middle of evil itself, I doubt we'd find it at all appealing. Maybe the fact that evil looks beautiful to us is an omen that we'll one day be able to see the forms of the gods themselves. As humanity advances, and we continue to see all kinds of evil around us, I don't believe we see evil as it is. It's just like those books for children that come with red and green glasses. Now, these books are filled with strange patterns that are fuzzy and unclear. But if the child puts on the red and green glasses, a clear image jumps out from the mess. Well, if we look at evil wearing "beauty glasses" (bi no megane), we are able to see the beauty of evil from the jumble and confusion. This is a philosophy I took from the Roman philosopher Plotinus, and fitted to suit myself.

Well... it's time for us to part. That irksome song "The Mirror of Love" (Ai no Kagami), is echoing down the alleys of the red light district. "Go back to your home, go home." It's time to get up from your stool, and leave this dim bar for your bright houses.

All of the cocktails I served you tonight in my bar have shocking titles, but I don't make any of them with bad liquor. I haven't mixed any methyl alcohol into them, so you're not going to go blind. I just wanted to show you that, with my bartending skill alone, I could make good liquor taste like a product of black magic.

I've gotten tired too, I think I'll close up shop. I'll just stay here behind the bar, and sip on this methyl alcohol for a bit. I'm made of different stuff than you though, so you don't need to worry about me going blind.

Anyhow, good night.

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Appendix



Fig. 1

From “You Should Go Drinking With Men You Don’t Know.”

Text reads: “Mishima Saikaku.”

Lessons in Immorality, Chūō Kōron, 9.



Fig. 2

From: “Deep in Your Heart, You Should Disrespect Your Teachers.”

Text reads: “You should have pity on your teachers.”

Lessons in Immorality, Chūō Kōron, 15.

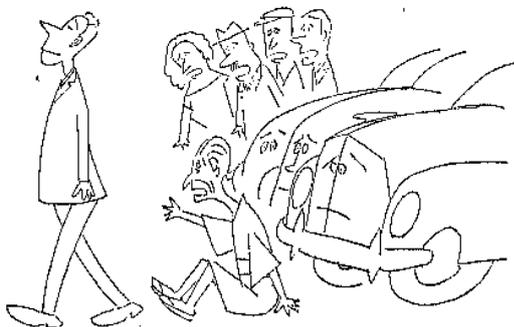


Fig. 3

From: “You Should Slurp Your Soup.”

Lessons in Immorality, Chūō Kōron, 87.



Fig. 4

From: “All’s Unwell that Ends Unwell.”

Text reads: “Well, good night.”

Lessons in Immorality, Chūō Kōron, 283.