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Persona: Conflicting Identity and Ideological Extremism in the Works of Mishima Yukio and Zinaida Gippius

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Persona: Conflicting Identity and Ideological Extremism in the Works of Mishima Yukio and  
Zinaida Gippius

By

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## Abstract

This project identifies and analyzes the relationship between radical ideology and identity formation, using the works and lives of Zinaida Gippius and Mishima Yukio as case studies. My thesis proposes a model of subject formation based on Lacanian methodology which I have called the “Persona” model. The Persona model demonstrates how authors like Gippius and Mishima utilize prescriptive ideology to restructure the symbolic order that determines their perception and reflection by the dialogic other. I use Lacan’s definition of the Other (A) as the overarching set of signifying meanings and rules in linguistic exchanges and examine how the author as Persona performs outside-in self-fashioning whereby they structure the outside world according to ideology informed by their own internal goals. I define the function of ideology in the Persona model as a remedy for perceived maladies of identification, one which serves to restructure the world and the perceptual order according to the author’s idealized conception of self. The author as Persona uses ideology as a road map for perception through which the other can reflect what Lacan calls the Ideal-I. My thesis looks at texts by and biographies of each author and explores the ways in which ideology seeps into the work as a method for assertion of author identity. I ultimately argue that through using the Persona framework to understand cases like Gippius’ and Mishima’s, the roles of ideology, identity, and public consciousness demand that the work be read as a vehicle for asserting subjectivity in the context of complex identity formation.

## Introduction

The role of author biography in literary studies suffers from Sisyphean discourse that volleys between completely amputating the author in favor of reader interpretation, to reading the narrative voice as the author's themselves. In "The Death of the Author," Roland Barthes argues that the reader's interpretation outweighs and even eliminates the author's intentions and that literature ought to be read as it is written "in the here and now" (145). Barthes writes that "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination," however this argument for divorcing author from work is complicated by examining authors who consciously fuse their identity and subjectivity with the work itself (148). In the cases of writers like Mishima Yukio and Zinaida Gippius, the work itself demands biographical acknowledgment and an inextricable fusion between narrative voice and author. The self-conscious references and ideological complexions of each author's narrative style permeate their respective literary works, rendering a divorce between author and work impossible. Moreover, in cases like Gippius' and Mishima's, the roles of ideology, identity, and public consciousness demand a reading that goes beyond the biographical; the literature ought to be read as a vehicle for asserting subjectivity in the context of complex identity formation.

Authors Mishima Yukio and Zinaida Gippius each enjoyed a level of notoriety in life and left a meticulously crafted legacy after death. Mishima Yukio (1925-70) was a Japanese author who lived during a period of structural change for Japanese society and literature. Zinaida Gippius similarly lived through a period of political turmoil in Russia; she was born in 1869 and died in 1945 while in emigration in Paris. While known for their writing, Mishima and Gippius are especially notorious for matters outside of their fiction and poetic writing. Their interactions with literati circles, literary criticism, public personas and appearances, and ideological

insistences colored perceptions of the authors both contemporaneously and posthumously. Mishima notably was an ardent Japanese nationalist, while Gippius advocated for a return and revitalization of traditional religion and spirituality. While both authors are considered to have extreme radical political<sup>1</sup> views, they also embody and infuse into their writing a spirit of contradiction that makes personal the issue of ideology. Both Mishima and Gippius exemplify a model of subject formation that I will hereafter refer to as *Persona*. The *Persona* model differs from *persona*; *Persona* considers both public perception as it informs the subject and the self-conscious accentuation of perceptive elements as they reflect subjectivity back onto the other. Ideology functions as a vehicle for reflection; similarly to how language dialogically structures the self, the role of ideology in *Persona* crafting is one which facilitates dialogic self-fashioning through reflection.

This project examines the works of Mishima Yukio and Zinaida Gippius as case studies of the *Persona* model and analyzes the way in which these authors utilize radical ideology as a medium for asserting identity. The *Persona* model as I have defined it derives from Jacques Lacan's construction of the self. Lacan's formulation of subjectivity is particularly useful in that it posits identity construction as a perpetual dialectic process informed by interactions with the other. This project will compare select works by Mishima and Gippius using the *Persona* model as a framework for understanding the ways in which identity is centered, constructed, and asserted through ideology. I will be using a working definition of ideology as a prescriptive framework of beliefs for structuring society. Terry Eagleton gives several salient definitions of ideology in *Ideology: An Introduction* (1991), the most pertinent of which is the "*promotion* and

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<sup>1</sup> Gippius' political views followed primarily from her theological views. She notably opposed the Soviet policies on religion. Her politics are often conflated with those of her husband, but much of her own writing on politics was predominantly concerned with freedom of religious expression. See Simon Karlinsky's "Freedom from Violence and Lies" for more on Gippius' political associations and the disagreement about her alignment between scholars.

*legitimation* of the interests of such social groups in the face of opposing interests” (29). I am primarily defining ideology as a *prescriptive* framework due to the conflation between individual and collective goals in the Persona model. I will first discuss each author’s respective biographies and the ways in which biography interacts with the work, then I will outline the Lacanian methodology which informs this project. Finally, I will discuss selected works, particularly those which are especially self-referential in order to illustrate the inextricable links between author and work and the ways in which the work ultimately serves as an assertion of identity. Although both authors have vast bodies of work, I have selected texts which make most obvious the function of authorship as an assertion of identity through ideological and thematic underpinnings.

Mishima Yukio, born Hiraoka Kimitake, is widely considered one of Japanese literature’s most controversial figures; despite his finely wrought prose, his notorious insistence on aesthetic purity and ardent political advocacy for a return to Imperial Japanese ideology made him a figure equally as famous for his public beliefs as for his work. Due to his long list of accomplishments and occupations (director, model, bodybuilder, author, and more) and his sensational death, Mishima is one of the most famous figures in Japanese literature. In 1970, Mishima attempted and failed to arouse a coup with a unit of the Japan Self-Defense Force, and ultimately committed *seppuku* (ritual suicide) with Morita Masakatsu, the lieutenant of his right-wing student militarist group and his rumored lover (Nathan 258). Mishima’s last words when he and Morita committed seppuku during their failed coup echoed sentiments from both his fiction and critical essays; before disemboweling themselves they exclaimed three times “*Tennō heika banzai*,” meaning “Long live his Imperial Majesty” (Nathan 279). Mishima’s vast corpus of work is nearly inextricable from his public character. His death and contemporaneous public

appearances, or often, performances not only contextualize the ideals he espoused in his fiction and critical work, but the confessional nature of much of his work insists on linking writer and writing.

Mishima's oeuvre in both work and life involves persistent references to themes such as eroticized death, beauty, contradiction, stoicism, and the conflict between spirit and body. In his 1972 article "Mishima Yukio and his Suicide," Yamanouchi Hisaaki writes that "Mishima's whole career was one of paradox built on an extraordinary tension between spirit and body, words and action, and artistic creation and commitment to the world" (2). Mishima's penchant for paradox has been well-documented by other scholars and biographers; Dick Wagenaar and Iwamoto Yoshio write that Mishima's works are "replete with grating conflicts, ideologies hotly contested, emotions in clashing opposition, in short, the aura of battle" (43). Mishima is also often read in comparison with the Japanese I-novel tradition, and although not all critics consider him a I-novelist in the strictest sense, all agree that his work is infused with a consciously confessional tone. The I-novel tradition is "a straightforward autobiographical confession by a hero who is none other than the author himself" and has an ultimately defeated hero in search of some kind of "peculiarly personal ideal or moral vision which is at odds with bourgeois standard of life" (Yamanouchi 3). Yamanouchi argues that despite influence from the I-novel style, Mishima's work goes beyond it, suggesting that Mishima's work is able to maintain an autonomy in a way "through perfect artistic method" that other Japanese novels lack (4). However, Mishima's examination of the conflict between spirit as symbolized by language and body suggests a self-conscious interaction with the work. By reading Mishima's work using the Persona model, this project aims to highlight the function of understanding his writing as an assertion of subjectivity and a resolution of perceived identificatory maladies.



Zinaida Gippius is best known for her early twentieth-century work which sought a “new religious consciousness” (Pachmuss 103). Gippius is most associated with the Symbolist movement in Russian Silver Age poetry; her poetry was concerned with subjects like mysticism, eroticism and death, and a pursuit of truth and God. For Gippius, as well as many other symbolists, the conflict between the body and the spirit also factors heavily into her work. In *Beyond the Flesh: Alexander Blok, Zinaida Gippius, and the Symbolist Sublimation of Sex*, Jenifer Presto highlights the way that Gippius eluded her identity as a woman writer, explaining that she “employed a genderless signature” and utilized masculine first-person grammatical markers in her poetry and “reportedly shunned all official affiliations with women writers” (143). Gippius’ most famous rejection of her identity was that she wanted to write poetry “not just as a woman but as a human being (*chelovek*),” asserting her preference for a genderless presentation (Pachmuss 17). Gippius wrote primarily poetry, but is also known for her plays, literary criticism, diaries, and letters, which were all published both in collections by Gippius before her death and posthumously compiled by Temira Pachmuss.

There is remarkably little scholarship on Gippius, and a disproportionate amount of the existing scholarship focuses largely on her penchant for cross-dressing. Gippius, like Mishima, enjoyed and crafted a degree of contemporaneous infamy, both in Russian literary salons and the emigrè salons which she later took part in after leaving Russia in 1919. Gippius, in an effort to transcend rigid gender boundaries, would often dress as a male dandy or in exaggerated female costume, and was even rumored to be a hermaphrodite (Presto 8). Gippius, alongside her husband Dmitry Merezhovsky and others, asserted a notion of evolved Christianity which built on the “historical church” but centered the Holy Trinity in its conceptualizations of all aspects of interpersonal interaction (Pachmuss 108). Gippius’ rejection of duality and intense focus on a

trifold system reflects her issues with binaries, especially those related to gender. In all of her gender performances Gippius illustrates a general preference for ambivalence; her male persona is a dandy, a largely feminine character, while her parodic female persona is overexaggerated to the point that she resembles a female impersonator (Presto 145). As Mishima's issues between body and spirit are reflected in his obsessions with conflict and masculinity, so Gippius' religious ideology reflects her conflict with her identity, gendered and interpersonal.

In "The Function and Field of Speech in Psychoanalysis," Lacan states that "the subject's act of addressing [*allocution*] brings with it an addressee [*allocutaire*] – in other words, that the speaker [*locuteur*] is constituted in it as an intersubjectivity" (*Écrits* 214/258). Lacan utilized structural linguistics and the formulaic dialectics of speech to metaphorically explain subject-object relations, and subject formations as a result. In this particular example, Lacan uses the structural linguistic notions of speaker and assumed addressee to explain the way in which the subject assumes an other. For Lacan, any act by the subject assumes an other, and the other and subject practice reflection on one another to configure identity. In the model of the Persona as exemplified by Gippius and Mishima, the Persona figure as subject not only assumes an other as addressee but consciously crafts one by means of ideology. The ideological crafting of the other ensures perception and subsequent reflection on the subject's terms; the other in the Persona model is crafted to reconfigure the subject in order to resolve specific identity issues. In examining Gippius and Mishima as figures of Persona, an additional step arises in Lacan's formulation of subjectivity in which the subject crafts the other by means of ideology, and subsequently utilizes that other to reflect and force recognition of idealized selfhood.

## Methodology

In his chapter “The Persona as a Segment of the Collective Psyche,” psychologist Carl Jung addresses the nebulous concept of persona, referring first to its etymological meaning derived from masks worn by actors. Jung ultimately defines his notion of persona as “a mask of the collective psyche,” and “a compromise between individual and society as to what a man should appear to be” (351). The persona as mask provides an appropriate example of the *public persona*, which in this context is more aptly considered a *performance*. Although Jung recognizes the role of the other in public-facing identity formation, his concept of persona as merely a mask does not address the underlying issues of identity negotiation that are clear in Lacan’s mirror stage theory. Jung’s concept of persona is useful, however, in understanding the role of an assumed collective in identity formation, but Lacan’s reflective linguistic schemata provide the missing link necessary for understanding how Persona functions by utilizing ideology to recraft the collectivized other and subsequently refigure self-identification. While Lacan never suggests a functional model for Persona as is formalized here, his general schemata for identity formation and reflective interaction between the self, other, and the Big Other can be extrapolated to illuminate my Persona schema. The Persona schema that I am proposing involves an idealistic recrafting of the presumed Big Other, the symbolic order, by means of ideology as a vehicle to engineer the reflection by the other to reveal the Ideal-I.

This model of the Persona differs from those of the standard notions of public persona and narrative voice in that the Persona as it pertains to subjectivity involves a dialogic process that begins outward and moves inward, and then is self-consciously reflected into intentionally crafted depictions of the world and self. The Persona reverses Lacan’s notion of the mirror stage; the subject starts with outward perception and moves inward. By restructuring the outer world

and its rules and strategies, what Lacan refers to as the “Other” and will be referred to here as the Big Other [Other(A)], the subject of Persona ultimately restructures the self. Through this engagement with perception and reflection, the Personic subject performs a sort of outside-in self-fashioning, *whereby they structure the outside world according to ideology informed by their own internal goals*. The subject of Persona determines specific perceived maladies, issues with their own identity in need of resolution to achieve completeness and materialization of what Lacan refers to as the Ideal-I. I am using the word maladies for the Persona context to emphasize the conflict assumed by the subject in recognizing potentially unfavorable elements of identity. In his model of subjectivity, Lacan asserts that each person undergoes an initial stage of identification in infancy, which he refers to as the “Mirror Stage,” which is “the transformation that takes place in a subject when he assumes an image” (76). Lacan attributes neuroses and various madresses to a failure to negotiate what the “Ideal-I” of the mirror stage with the later objectification “in the dialectic of identification with the other.” (76). Lacan posits a symbolic order of relation between the subject and the other as “a dialectic of intersubjectivity,” wherein the subject’s address assumes the other “as absolute,” to “act accordingly with the other...by making himself an object in order to deceive the other” (40). Lacan uses this schema to demonstrate the psychoanalytic basis for paranoia, but the model of Persona likewise follows a similar pattern. In the Persona framework, the other is collectivized, and encapsulates the objectification of the subject; the subject sees themselves as both the true and deceitful other simultaneously. The subject in this framework assumes the perspective of the other to perceive the self. In this sense, the ideology espoused by the Personic subject acts as a prescriptive vehicle for perception according to the particular maladies and identity issues the subject desires to correct to achieve the completeness of the Ideal-I.

Lacan alternates between different “others” in his seminars and papers, and insists that the other cannot be conceived merely as what is outside the subject. The working idea of the other that will be used in this analysis is that of the Big Other as “the locus in which is situated the chain of the signifier that governs whatever may be present of the subject...the field of that living being in which the subject has to appear” (*Seminars* 203). The notion of the Big Other as an overarching set of signifying meanings and rules in linguistic exchanges best encapsulates the notion of Big Other as the vehicle for perception and reflection in the Persona model. The lowercase dialogic other represents the reflective being with whom the subject enters into discourse. The other in Lacan’s model of subject formation is assumed and, although not always external in the strictest sense, created by means outside of the subject. The other in the Personic model is created *by* the subject and crafted into a reflecting medium (dialogic other) for optimal self-fashioning according to ideology.

The Persona can be formalized by adjusting Lacan’s formula of superego as phallic metaphor, split by metaphorical castration (Fig. 1). The point of the Persona formalization is the totality (although illusorily unified), while it is split by a reflective mirror. The Persona model is

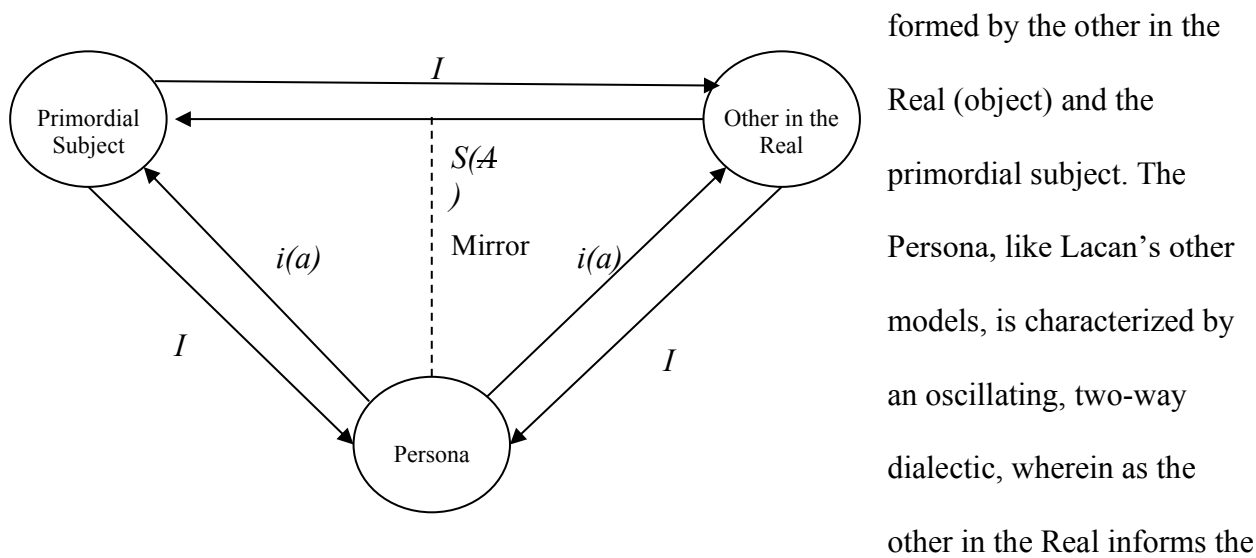


Figure 1

subject, the subject likewise inflicts itself upon the Other, all fractured by reflection. Lacan's definitions of metaphor and metonymy are particularly useful for understanding the Persona model; the Personic subject effectively makes oneself into a metonymic being through *displacement* and replacement, and likewise uses metaphor in the Real to *substitute* for subjectivity in the Imaginary. In practice, the Personic subject replaces the internalized *gestalt* self-image with an external image. Lacan asserts that internal/external sources of subjectivity are not to be understood in diametric opposition, as Freud suggests, but that each formulation of subjectivity involves a combination of internal/external sources. The Persona model takes Lacan's idea to the extreme; simultaneously imposing the internal on the external, as a means of reflecting the reconfigured external to craft the internal.

While Mishima and Gippius' anxiety regarding identity and its sources in their work reflects Lacan's notion of identity formation through the mirror stage, by reimagining the and

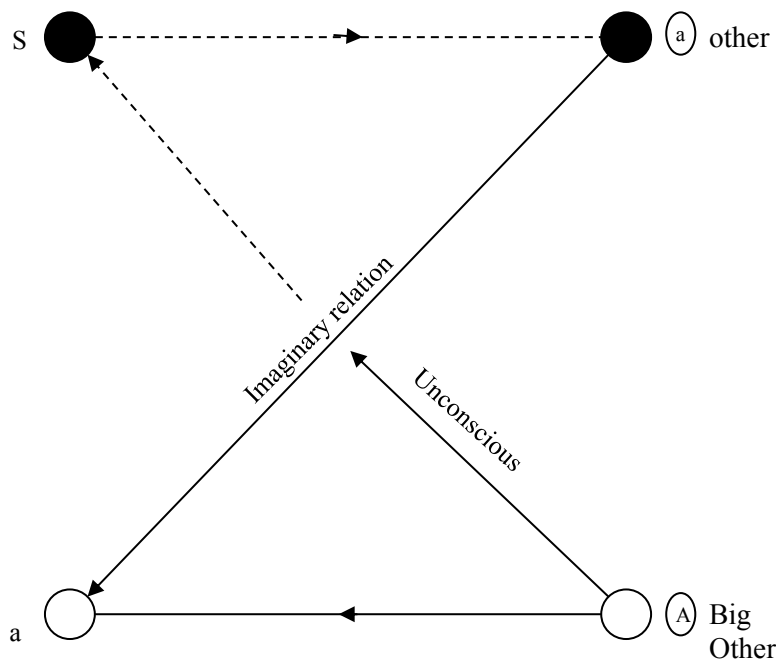


Figure 2

recreating the self in their writing, both authors' participation in this negotiation requires adding an additional element to Lacan's schema. Lacan formalizes the relationship between the subject, the ego, and the two others (a and A) as Schema L (fig. 2). In this schema, the subject/ego "S"

projects itself onto the other “a” through the signifying chain. Lacan considers three orders of communication and intersubjectivity: “the real, the imaginary, and the symbolic,” and asserts that the projection of the subject (id) onto the other happens through the realm of the symbolic, or the unconscious (*Écrits* 38). The other “a” projects itself onto the ego (a) through imaginary relation, while the Big Other (A) projects onto the subject through both the unconscious and imaginary relation.

In the case of Mishima, Gippius, and the writer as Persona generally, the subject (S) projects itself in the realm of imaginary relation onto the Big Other (A) using ideology in order to affect change unconsciously (symbolically) in the other (a<sup>1</sup>) which in turn projects onto the ego (a) and so on (Fig. 3). In “Schema P,” the Big Other (A) is utilized by the Personic figure consciously to symbolically recraft the other in the ultimate pursuit of recrafting the self. The

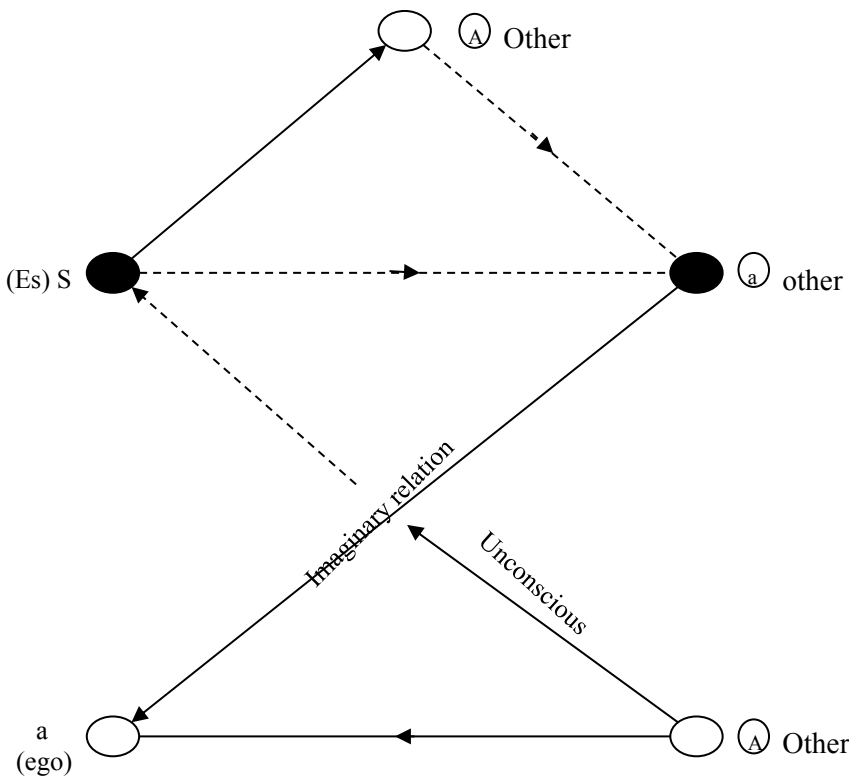


Figure 3

recrafted Big Other can be thought of as a sort of “roadmap” for perception; it gives the other a key for perceiving and subsequently reflecting the subject. What differentiates the author as Persona’s interaction with both their own subjectivity and that of the other in

their writing is that they consciously reconstruct the stakes of the Big Other according to ideology in alignment with distinct self-conscious maladies. Mishima recognizes flaws or issues in his own construction of identity, and uses ideology (Big Other) to remedy these in the other to ultimately reflect back onto himself. Likewise, Gippius projects her issues with gender into her religious ideology, and ultimately utilizes this ideology to create an other distinct from herself and capable of reflecting the Ideal-I back in identity formulation.

The Persona as a formulation of subjectivity involves substituting ideology for a general social order. The Personic author, in practice, utilizes ideology as a language, a methodology, for carrying out the two-way oscillation between internal subjectivity and external objectivity. In the cases of authors Zinaida Gippius and Mishima Yukio, the vehicle of ideology facilitates the process of reflection; the author as Persona uses ideology (Other) to craft the other (a) and subsequently reflect the idealized other to refashion the self into the Ideal-I. The following sections will examine how reading texts by Mishima and Gippius according to the Persona model enriches understanding of these works as complex negotiations of identity.

#### Mishima Yukio

Mishima Yukio is often regarded as one of postwar Japan's most prolific and controversial literary figures. Mishima was a novelist, actor, model, bodybuilder, social critic, playwright, and had many more credits leading up to his shocking suicide in 1970. Mishima's work and personal life embody several contradictions; in his autobiographical novel *Kamen no kokuhaku*, translated in English as *Confessions of a Mask*, Mishima confessed to having homosexual desires, and later, married and had children with a woman, Yoko. Mishima's biographer and former translator, John Nathan, describes his relationship with his wife as an "essential conventionality," and that Yoko provided him an opportunity to feel "anchored in respectability," despite his



shocking stories and public persona (143). He carefully crafted a public persona based on contradiction, through his public relationship with his wife and acknowledged homosexuality. Mishima first emerged on the Japanese literary scene at age sixteen, yet later in life rejected his position as an author, wishing instead to be considered a warrior in death (Nathan 273). Mishima's notorious fanatic patriotic ideology stemmed largely from his valorization of martyrdom and its historic role in Japanese warfare; Mishima famously posed for photographer Shinoyama Kishin as Saint Sebastian, and in *Confessions of a Mask* cited a painting of the martyred saint as his first ejaculation (Nathan 95, 267). Mishima's fervent stances on art, politics, death, and literature are woven throughout his work as well as his meticulously crafted public persona.

Mishima was born Hiraoka Kimitake in January 1925 to parents Hiraoka Azusa and Hashi Shizue. Mishima's illustrious family background informed much of his early idealization and romanticization of Japanese history. His male paternal relatives primarily worked as bureaucratic administrators, and his paternal grandmother, Natsuko, who had a great hand in raising Mishima, came from a lineage of *samurai* and high-ranking members of the Shishido fiefdom (Inose et. al. 34). Natsuko's ancestry shaped much of the mythology Mishima employed in his works, and even in his earliest school compositions Mishima wrote with an air of authority seemingly inherited from his illustrious roots (Inose et. al. 39). Forty-nine days after his birth, Natsuko took the infant Mishima from his mother, Shizue. Natsuko was both mentally and physically ill, but doted on the likewise sickly Mishima, instilling in him a sense of aristocratic lineage that informed much of his work and persona (Inose et. al. 44). John Nathan characterizes Natsuko as greatly influencing Mishima's longing for the past, writing that by dwelling on "her profound dissatisfaction with herself and her wildly poetic longing for a distant past, an elegant

past, a past of beauty, she can be said to have afflicted him with the ‘romantic agony’” (27).

Natsuko also introduced Mishima to theater and literature and would bring him to *kabuki* plays at an early age. In the Lacanian sense, Mishima’s fraught relationships with both his mother and grandmother complicate the identificatory mirror stage, by which the infant comes to recognize self-hood through recognition of the m(Other). Mishima’s preoccupation with lineage and history in his work reflect both the influence his grandmother had on him and his desire for legitimization through a means outside of himself, which would eventually come from ideology.

Traditionalist aesthetics and subversions of such, especially those related to Japanese theater are scattered throughout Mishima’s work. Mishima’s deep concern with beauty and aesthetics permeates his work and his life. Yamanouchi writes that Mishima’s suicide was not only political but was “also rooted in what may be called his personal and aesthetic motives” (2). John Nathan also recognizes the importance of aesthetics in Mishima’s political ideology, noting that Mishima had determined that the emperor was the sole arbiter of Japanese culture (232). Mishima’s concern with aesthetics influenced his public appearance, especially his political activity. Walter Benjamin writes that “all efforts to aestheticize politics culminate in one point. That one point is war,” and Mishima’s militarized group *Tate no kai* (Shield Society) aptly illustrates Benjamin’s argument (121). Nathan discusses how members of *Tate no kai* were not ultimately politically aligned, but that Mishima’s real pleasure in the group came from the “training” months where he listened to one of the “cadets playing the Japanese flute music used in court music and Nō dances” (231). Mishima’s ultranationalist ideology was linked largely with aesthetics, as well as with masculinity and eroticism.

The key tension which ties together all of Mishima’s works, as well as his personal and public life, is that between erotic desire and death, and his infusion of reactionary ideology into

his work and life further demonstrates his valorization and fetishization of a heroic, patriotic death. As a child, Mishima was plagued by illness and was rejected from enlisting in the army (Nathan 54). His childhood illness is often regarded as a source of his later obsession with strength and masculinity, as well as his reactionary valorization of *bushidō* code, the traditional set of values held by *samurai* warriors. In his first published short story, “*Hanazakari no Mori*,” or, “A Forest in Full Flower,” Mishima describes a woman being ravaged and killed by a sea god, describing her death as “the pure mindlessness of a collapse, accepting all and becoming nothing” (Nathan 42). “*Hanazakari no Mori*” was serialized in 1941, when Mishima was only sixteen, yet this theme of erotic death remains a central thread throughout all of his later work, as well as his own death.

Mishima’s death in 1970 epitomized the way in which his work, ideology, private and public life, all informed one another through the key principles of eroticism, death, and beauty. In the same way that his treatment of each element fused together, Mishima’s personal life and work functioned in a feedback loop of psychosexual self-fashioning. Mishima’s work and life, as examined here through his short story and film of the same name “*Yūkoku*,” and his essays in *Taiyō to tetsu*, exemplify the paradoxical relationship between objective and subjective truth in his writing. Mishima fuses his identity with his own work to fashion a persona based around a layered and dualistic realism characterized by perpetual interaction between the self and the outside world. Mishima aestheticizes both history and nation in his work in an effort to restructure the Big Other, ultimately providing an ideological method of perception by which he can reflect himself as the Ideal-I. By centering disembodiment as a key principle of erotic, ecstatic death, Mishima approaches his own identity with an acknowledgment of his effort to write himself and to depict a self-consciously subjective realism. Mishima employs these themes

in order to rectify what he considers to be his identificatory maladies by providing ideology which restructures his identity in the eyes of the other.

Mishima's example illustrates a chicken and egg paradox, wherein it is unclear whether Mishima's work influenced his life or his life influenced his work. However, he undoubtedly utilized the notion of subjective, individual truth in his writing to fashion himself in a certain way. In his 1965 long-form essay *Taiyō to tetsu*, or, *Sun and Steel*, Mishima describes the conflation of his self with writing, explaining that "in the average person, I imagine, the body precedes language. In my case, words came first of all; then – belatedly, with every appearance of extreme reluctance, and already clothed in concepts – came the flesh," illustrating the way in which he considers his own selfhood inextricably tied with the act of writing (5). Mishima goes on to say that "in the first stage, I was obviously setting reality, the flesh, and action on the other side," further demonstrating the way in which he considers his self-fashioning to be surreal in some way (9). Due to his frequent childhood illnesses, Mishima developed an obsession with bodybuilding, which illustrated his desire to rebuild himself both physically and through his writing.

In *Taiyō to tetsu*, Mishima begins the essay by musing on the nature of "*watashi*," which is the first-person singular pronoun used in Japanese, the "I" (8). Mishima explains that the "*watashi*" he will consider is not that which is associated with himself: "*sore wa genmitsu ni watashi ni kizoku suru yōna 'watashi' de wa naku*," specifically using the verb "*kizoku*" to refer to a sort of jurisdiction or possession by the "I" of the "*watashi*" (8). He goes on to characterize the "*watashi*" of interest as one which is neither purely internal nor flowing outward, harkening back to Lacan's conception of subjectivity as neither wholly interior nor exterior but rather an oscillation between reflection and internalization. Mishima notes the relationship between the

self, the body, and the external world, explaining that the kind of “*watashi*” he is describing is deeply bound up with “*nikutai*,” the flesh or body (9). He goes on to express his need for a “*nikutai no kotoba*,” or a language or dialect of the body (9). These opening passages of *Taiyō to tetsu* immediately express Mishima’s anxiety surrounding negotiation between the body, his ideal form of selfhood, its expression, and public perception. These few sentences in particular reflect Lacan’s notion of the disagreement between body and the Ideal-I of the initial figure of *gestalt* recognition, and in this confessional essay form, Mishima expresses the nature of anxiety associated with misrecognition and the feeling of incompleteness.

Furthermore, in *Taiyō to tetsu*, Mishima illustrates the “split” in his identity and his issues with language fulfilling more of his sense of selfhood than physical body. Mishima writes that in his first stage of development, “*watashi ga jibun o kotoba no gawa ni oki*,” meaning that his self (*jibun*) was placed on the side (*gawa*) of language, or words (*kotoba*) (12). On the other side of this dialectic Mishima illustrates is “*genjitsu, nikutai, kōi*,” or “reality, the fleshly body, and action” (12). Mishima characterizes his alignment with the realm of language as opposed to that of the flesh as “*meihaku*,” meaning clear or obvious, referring largely to his sickliness as a child in opposition with his early literary acumen (12). By associating “*genjitsu*” (reality, truth) and “*kōi*” (action) with the physical body, Mishima demonstrates his discomfort in the realm of the Real, preferring instead to craft his own version of reality through language. Mishima goes on to explain that the fear (*kowa*) associated with this misidentification with the body naturally leads one to invent (*kakōsuru*) an “ideal” body and subsequent reality: literally “should-be body,” or “*arubeki nikutai*” (13). Mishima claims that this “should-be body” must be created without the “ideological contamination” (*kannenteki fushoku*) of language or words and that it ought to have characteristics of “*zōkeibi*” and “*mugon*,” a beauty of form and silence, muteness respectively

(13). Despite this acknowledgement of his own need for a flesh without language, Mishima writes that the only reasonable use for the “corrosive function” (*fushoku sayō*) of language is the service of pursuing this beauty of the ideal body and truth (13). Mishima goes on to conclude that this desire to pursue idealistic fleshly beauty is his motivation to write.

In his rumination on the split between the physical body and the internal mind and its language, Mishima illustrates the classic Lacanian notion of negotiation between the fragmented physical body and the Ideal-I. Mishima distinguishes the language of the fleshly body (*nikutai no kotoba*), calling it a “second language” (14). Mishima uses these English words in the text, emphasizing the foreignness of the physical to him and creating a jarring separation between the *kotoba* (language) of the text and his internal state and the *kotoba* of the fleshly body (*nikutai*). The visual dissonance between the Japanese and romanized characters highlights Mishima’s conflict between internal and idealized identity. Mishima’s conception of his own selfhood, like Lacan’s, relies on a dialectic between the external, physical reality, and the internal, which is formalized like a language. Mishima likewise situates language in his formulation of identity as the necessary vehicle for achieving his ideal sense of self. The form which Lacan calls the “Ideal-I” is the specular image which is “precipitated in a primordial form, prior to being objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (*Écrits* 76). Lacan considers the Ideal-I to be contrary to the subject’s reality, due to the simultaneous function of the primordial Ideal-I to both create an anchor of “mental permanence” and cause lifelong alienation. Mishima illustrates this discordance between the ideal-I and the alienating power of language; Mishima considers himself isolated (*kotō*) within both his body and use of language (49). Lacan’s idea of subjectification relies on an assumed other; likewise, Mishima’s distinct alienation comes from a

lack of understanding from the other, which he demonstrates by writing about this physical and mental isolation.

As illustrated in *Taiyō to tetsu*, Mishima considered the alienation between the Ideal-I of action and flesh and the internal subject precipitated on language and writing to be his distinct malady. Mishima's youth was plagued by various physical maladies, and he considers this inability to identify with the ideal fleshly body to be an ailment both physical and spiritual. Mishima acknowledges in *Taiyō to tetsu* that to overcome this malady he must write with the ultimate goal of pursuing fleshly beauty and idealistic truth. Mishima attempts to resolve this tension and identificatory malady by developing a distinct ideology which connects death and eroticism to a higher pursuit of beauty and truth. This valorization of the beautiful erotic death furthermore informs Mishima's nationalistic ideology. By configuring himself as a traditional and hypermasculine Japanese warrior figure and conflating death for country with death for beauty Mishima adopts an symbolically ordered ideology which serves as a lens for his perception and subsequent reflection by the other.

Mishima's 1961 short story "Yūkoku" or "Patriotism" foreshadows his eventual method of suicide, and the different layers of realism, as well as his infusion of his idealized self into the story indicate his desire to rebuild himself through erotic death and his own writing. In "Yūkoku," Mishima describes a lover's suicide between Lieutenant Takeyama Shinji and his wife Reiko. The story takes place during the February Incident of 1936, where a radical group of soldiers attempted a coup d'état, assassinating many government officials (Stalker 806). Mishima's Lieutenant Shinji was not a part of the rebellion and is subsequently ordered to execute the members of the rebelling group, his close friends. Rather than choose between killing his friends or betraying the Imperial Army, the Lieutenant commits seppuku with his wife, who

slits her throat after watching him die. “Yūkoku” functions as both a prophetic schematic of Mishima’s eventual “fanatic’s death,” as well as a manifesto of his infatuation with erotic death (Nathan xiii). In the story, the Lieutenant’s suicide letter reads “*kōgun no banzai o inoru*,” translating loosely to a prayer for the longevity of the Imperial Army (92). Mishima and Morita’s last words also referenced Imperial Japan but instead invoked “his Imperial Majesty” (Nathan 279). In “Yūkoku,” as well as his own ritual suicide, Mishima embodies two of the central principles that Honda Shūgo outlines in “*Geijutsu, rekishi, ningen*.” (Art, History, and Humanity) that of literature as “self-determining,” and “tak[ing] history as its object” (Honda 5, 7). By simultaneously infusing his work with the self and the self with his work, Mishima creates a paradox of realism from which he crafts a distinct and historical persona through the locus of erotic death. The story itself involves historical realism in that Mishima reveals an interior perspective on an infamous historical event, but it also centers itself within the present and future due to its fusion with Mishima’s self and his eventual suicide, demonstrating his merging of work and self.

“Yūkoku” epitomizes Mishima’s penchant for depicting erotic death and bodily detachment; in the penultimate scene before the lover’s suicide Mishima describes the Lieutenant and Reiko’s “final act of love” (152). Throughout the scene, Mishima detaches Reiko and the Lieutenant from their bodies, initially narrating the scene by writing “*chūi no me no miru toori o, kuchibiru ga chūjitsu ni nazotte itta*” (158). Geoffrey Sargent translates this line as “Wherever the Lieutenant’s eyes went, his lips would faithfully follow,” indicating the way in which Mishima places emphasis on the Lieutenant’s body parts, as though they are controlling themselves (159). In the original text, “*me*” (eyes) and “*kuchibiru*” (lips) act as the syntactic agent to the verbs “*miru*” (to see or look) and “*nazoru*” (to follow, used in the text with *te iku*’s



past form, which indicates continuous movement). Mishima immediately begins the scene between Reiko and the Lieutenant by distancing their actions from their internal desires, and relegating agency to the flesh itself. Mishima utilizes this distancing effect throughout the sex scene, primarily through this focus on body parts as well as passive verb constructions. For example, he later describes Reiko's movements through her body parts, likening them to occurrences in nature. These descriptions are often grotesque in their disembodiment; Mishima describes Reiko's vagina as "*kage no shidaini koku atsumaru bubun ni, ke wa yasashiku binkanni muretachi*" translating to "in the part where shadows gradually gather and thicken, the hair stands in a gentle, sensitive clump" and as "*kaorinotakai hana no kogeru yōna nioi wa,*" meaning "an odor like fragrant flowers burning" (160). The syntactic agents of this particular sentence are Reiko's "parts," odor, and hair rather than Reiko herself, indicating the way in which Mishima distances his characters from their sexual actions. In giving agency to Reiko and the Lieutenant's body parts, Mishima creates a theme throughout the story where the body acts on its own, indicating an instinctual, almost divinely automated response to the promise of death.

Mishima employs this same distancing effect in the scenes leading up to Reiko and the Lieutenant's deaths. As he describes Reiko and the Lieutenant preparing for their ritual suicide, he reveals the Lieutenant's fantasies about his own death. Mishima writes that the Lieutenant feels a "*fushigina tōsui,*" or a "strange intoxication," or feeling of rapture when looking at his wife as they prepare for death, and that the Lieutenant imagines he will be showing his wife something she's never seen, his "*senjyō no sugata,*" or, "battlefield figure" (188). This description of the Lieutenant's fantasy foreshadows Mishima's portrayal of the ecstasy of death, and specifically that of martyrdom. Mishima goes on to describe the Lieutenant's feeling of ecstasy as he imagines his wife observing his suicide, writing "to have every second of his death

observed by his wife's lovely eyes was to be wafted to death upon a fragrant breeze" (189). Here again, Mishima makes Reiko's eyes (*me*) the syntactic agent of the passive verb "*mitorareru*," to look after or attend to. In using these constructions, Mishima characterizes Reiko and the Lieutenant as being acted upon, rather than performing the actions themselves. By placing the agentive focus on their body parts rather than their characters, Mishima further widens the disconnect between human spirit and flesh in the story. In doing this, Mishima portrays the movements of Reiko and the Lieutenant's bodies as objective in their automation. By reducing his characters to body parts while simultaneously emphasizing the erotic fantasy of death, Mishima characterizes this form of erotic death as primal and inevitable. Moreover, the critical detachment of these scenes illustrates the issue of alienation from action. By alienating his characters from their actions, Mishima prioritizes writing and language over action in the same way he does in *Taiyō to Tetsu*.

In the final scenes of "*Yūkoku*," Mishima further advances the disconnect between body and spirit, and body and agency, while simultaneously foregrounding the eroticism of the couple's deaths. As the Lieutenant disembowels himself, Mishima utilizes the same distancing tactics which he used in the prior sex scene: passive constructions and synecdoche through objects as agents. Mishima describes the Lieutenant's intestines as "*shiranageni*," meaning unknowing, unconcerned; "*hajikederu*," which means to bounce or burst out, often used in connection with youth and vigor; and "*kikitoshite suberideru*," meaning slipping out in a joyful, exuberant way (208). In these sentences, Mishima similarly centers the action on the Lieutenant's intestines, writing that they are "slipping out" and "overflowing" from their "*aruji*," or "master" (208). Mishima thus removes the Lieutenant's agency in this scene; his intestines act on their own. Moreover, the lighthearted movements of the intestines as they exit the

Lieutenant's body indicate an ecstasy in death, one which Mishima later describes as "*sōretsu*," meaning brave, heroic (210). This simultaneous heroism and eroticism in the Lieutenant's death exemplifies Mishima's desire to refashion his own persona into that of a warrior; Mishima long valorized samurai, and upon being rejected from military service had yearned for a soldier's martyred death (Nathan 179). As Mishima had expressed his discontent with his own anemic body through his writing and his real-life weightlifting, he utilized his writing to prophesize his new identity as a martyr and strong ideological hero. Mishima connects the erotic martyr's death to his nationalistic ideology in order to restructure the Big Other and to ultimately insist on a mode of perception which renders his reflection by the other in accordance with that imagined as the Ideal-I.

In the 1966 film version of *Yūkoku*, Mishima directs and stars in the film as the Lieutenant. In the early scenes of the film, shots of Mishima as the Lieutenant are superimposed onto Reiko, who sits with her eyes closed, ostensibly thinking about her beloved husband (2:51). The ghostly figure of the Lieutenant moves his hands around Reiko's face, and then disappears (2:55). The shot changes, and the overlaid Lieutenant approaches Reiko as her face, with her eyes closed but fluttering, is overlaid across the scene (3:04). While these early shots in the film foreshadow the gruesome ending, they also immediately introduce the conflict between body and spirit which characterizes both the film and Mishima's own identity issues. Moreover, the Lieutenant's back is turned to the camera, while Reiko's eyes are shut. Mishima prohibits the viewer from obtaining any early identification with the characters by keeping both actors closed off to the camera, rendering them merely bodies. By using these overlay techniques and alienating the viewer from the actors, Mishima immediately depicts a visual disconnect between body and spirit reminiscent of the Lacanian mirror stage which divorces the subject from the

complete body. Like in *Taiyō to tetsu* and the *Yūkoku* text, Mishima not only recognizes but highlights the anxiety caused by alienation between the spirit and the body.

As the film goes on, Mishima stages the final act of lovemaking between Reiko and the Lieutenant on a white platform against a white background, decorated only with a tapestry that says “*shisei*” or “devotion.” The Lieutenant faces the wall, while Reiko gazes up at him; only Reiko’s face is visible to the camera (8:42). As the camera pans in on the couple, Mishima cuts abruptly first to the Lieutenant’s eyes, and then subsequently to Reiko’s (9:02). At this point in the film, this is the first time the Lieutenant’s eyes have been directly visible to the camera. Throughout the preceding scenes, his eyes were obscured by his hat or his back was to the camera. In this moment, Mishima depicts an act of identification between Reiko and the Lieutenant, who have up until this scene been spiritually distant from one another. This scene illustrates Lacan’s notion of identification through the other aptly. Mishima indicates through both the lack of eye visibility in prior scenes and the abrupt close-up on the Lieutenant’s eyes that identification is possible *only* through connection with the other. After cutting back and forth between the Lieutenant and Reiko’s eyes, Mishima cuts again to the two swords sitting in the corner of the room (9:24). The swords connect eroticism to imminent death, but also indicate the presence of the Big Other, which in this case is Mishima’s nationalist ideology, in the formation of identity through connection with the other. Throughout the full scene of Reiko and the Lieutenant making love, Mishima focuses the camera on small pieces of each actors’ bodies: hands, hair, necks, eyes, and so on. This focus reflects the disembodiment from the original text, but the visual representation of this alienation from the body also serves to alienate the viewer from the position of voyeur in the scene. In the middle of the sex scene, Mishima cuts to a shot of the Lieutenant in his uniform, again pulling his hat down over his eyes and saluting (11:01).

This shot cements the connection between eroticism and ideology, emphasizes masculinity, and serves as a further reminder of the Big Other and its role in the formation of identity for each character.

In the penultimate act of the film, the Lieutenant commits *seppuku*. Mishima opens the chapter with a wide shot of the Lieutenant standing in only a loincloth with his sword in front of him, while Reiko kneels and hands him his uniform (14:15). In this shot, Mishima subverts the prior staging in previous scenes, where Reiko faces the camera while the Lieutenant's back is turned. Although the Lieutenant's eyes are still concealed by his hat, Mishima reveals his full body to the camera. This staging indicates a fantastical identification with the Ideal-I, formulated by reflective identification with both the other, Reiko, and the Big Other, nationalist ideology as indicated by the Imperial uniform cap. Mishima portrays his desire to achieve the *gestalt* completeness of the Ideal-I, but rather than just merely attempting to achieve identification through discourse with the other, as Lacan lays out, Mishima utilizes the Big Other, ideology, as a medium for recrafting the self as subject. Mishima's Lieutenant character faces the camera in masculine glory, his entire body displayed for the reflective other, Reiko. The micro-reflection in the film illustrates the way in which the subject in the Persona schema utilizes the Big Other in discourse with the other to reflect an idealized self. The Lieutenant uses the legitimacy of the Imperial uniform to portray himself as strong and masculine to his wife, who reflects this idealized self back to him.

As the Lieutenant commits *seppuku*, Mishima jumps between shots of the blade cutting into his skin and close-up shots of Reiko as she cries (18:32). When the Lieutenant disembowels himself, Mishima closes the shot on his face; although partially obscured by the hat the Lieutenant's face contorts with orgasmic pain (18:41). Mishima again cuts between the crying

Reiko and the Lieutenant as he dies. Reiko bears witness to the Lieutenant's death, but by focusing on her face Mishima emphasizes the necessity of the other in the Lieutenant's process of identification. Like in the original text, Mishima connects the eroticism of death with the goal of identification with a strong, masculine warrior figure, but in the film provides a visual element of reflection. By focusing on Reiko, Mishima exemplifies the role of the other in the formation of the Personic subject identity. Rather than simply a two-way discourse where the subject and the other reflect onto each other in a desire to achieve the completeness of the Ideal-I, Mishima's Lieutenant as subject uses the Big Other ideology of patriotic duty to recraft the other, Reiko, into one who will reflect a masculine, dutiful identity back to him. In cutting between the characters of the film in this way visually, Mishima emphasizes the role of the other and the Big Other in crafting the subject as Persona.

While Mishima exhibits the drive to achieve the refashioned Ideal-I through crafting the other through ideology in the original text, the film version of *Yūkoku* provides a visual understanding of the flow of reflection and refashioning in the Persona schema. Most notably, the discrepancies between shots of Reiko and the Lieutenant's faces, and the ultimate replacement of the Lieutenant's face with his uniform hat reveal the essential role of the Big Other in the Persona schema. As the Lieutenant dies, Reiko grabs at his shoulders from behind. He plummets downward onto his face, and at this moment his hat finally falls from his head (20:02). Mishima depicts the dying Lieutenant from above; even without the hat his face is still obscured. Although the Lieutenant has achieved a form of embodiment, it is one dependent entirely on the Big Other, patriotic ideology as symbolized by the uniform hat. Moreover, by casting himself as the Lieutenant, Mishima makes a further case for his goal of identification with this masculine warrior figure. The medium of film also presents a more literal reflective

action, and so the *Yūkoku* film is an apt representation of the way in which the Persona schema relies on discourse with an other, in this case, the audience, to reconstruct the identity of the subject through the vehicle of ideology.

In “Sun and Steel,” Mishima acknowledges his tendency to depict this “theme of estrangement of the body and spirit,” and indicates that much of his writing followed from an attempt to negotiate the relationship between the two in his own life (19). Mishima equates his desire to strengthen his body and overcome his childhood illnesses through weight lifting with drive to “change from a being that created words to one that was created by words” (111). Through this notion of “creation by words,” Mishima demonstrates Honda’s conception of realism as inevitable through self-fusion, and ultimately brings the world of his writing into his life, both personal and public. By invoking the historical framework of ritual suicide in both his short story and his actual death, Mishima writes and acts himself into a tradition of martyrdom in the Japanese historical and literary canon. In “*Yūkoku*,” Mishima invokes the *shinjū* tradition, meaning double/lover’s suicide, common throughout historical works of Japanese literature and theater, especially *Nō* and *Kabuki* plays. This martyr’s suicide is also pertinent in the postwar period; during WWII approximately five thousand men had died completing kamikaze or suicide bombing missions as part of the Japanese wartime defense (Stalker 991). The notion of sacrifice for a higher cause permeates Mishima’s work, just as it influenced his death. In “*Yūkoku*,” Mishima connects a higher ideological cause, loyalty to the Imperial Army, with eroticism, while simultaneously distancing his characters from their actions through passive constructions and synecdoche. In this way, Mishima conveys a hypnotically inevitable tendency toward erotic martyrdom, and by framing Reiko and the Lieutenant’s actions as involuntary and occurring through the body’s agency, he portrays erotic death as a primal drive. Mishima ultimately

connects erotic death to a higher ideological concept in order to reconstruct his own identity through affiliation with the masculine warrior tradition that situates his Ideal-I.

### Gippius

Zinaida Gippius, like Mishima, incorporates alienation between body and spirit as well as an interest in the eroticism of death into her work. These themes seep into her public appearances and ideological stances as well; Gippius' preoccupation with conflict between the body and the spirit is evident from her diaries, letters, and gender performances. Similarly to Mishima, Gippius demonstrates a fixation with her own identity and her negotiation between contradictory elements. Her poetry is frequently self-referential and serves as an assertion of identity, often through critique of femininity. In tandem with her public performances of gender, Gippius' work functions as a complex negotiation between an unfavorable and forced identity; she reveals a desire to refashion herself as subject through her work. In this way, Gippius exemplifies the Persona model. She utilizes ideology to recraft perceptions of her by referencing her convictions about religion, gender, and the body in her poetry. Gippius determines that gender and binary perceptions of such are maladies in need of resolving, and like Mishima, she absolves herself of these maladies by prescribing an ideal method of perception and reflection through her writing. Through this self-referential poetry, Gippius crafts an other who is able to perceive her through the ideological lens she proposes.

Gippius developed a notorious reputation in Russian and émigré salons, and she later incorporated facets of her representation into her poetry. Mitrich's (Dmitrii D. Togolsky) caricature portrait of Gippius (fig. 4) depicts the poet in profile, casting a vast shadow behind her. The portrait emphasizes her narrow frame, spindly limbs, and oversized hair; in one hand she holds a lorgnette, and in the other a spider is dangling. The portrait epitomizes Gippius'



reputation as a demonic woman, and the inclusion of the spider further reinforces her sinister appearance. Olga Matich refers to the spider in this portrait as “typifying the femme fatale...captur[ing] its victims in its sticky web,” illustrating the way in which Gippius’ contemporaries portrayed her as dangerous and deceitful, specifically in relation to her femininity. Mitrich’s portrait not only depicts Gippius as sinister, but as more feminine than other artists do; Matich specifically references the Leon Bakst portraits which depict Gippius as a masculine female dandy (172). In *Beyond the Flesh*, Presto notes Gippius’ propensity for motifs of weaving in her work, and connects this to the feminine labor of weaving and Gippius’ tendency to insist on parodic representations of femininity (146). Gippius frequently characterizes femininity as sinister, revealing her conviction that femininity, and especially the female body, is a malady in need of remedying.

Gippius infuses her complex and ambiguous public reputation into her work in a way that signifies her awareness of her identity and its inevitable fusion with her writing. Gippius utilizes these criticisms as a method of writing herself out of what she considers to be identificatory maladies. Like Mishima, Gippius expresses issues of identity both in her public life and in her



Figure 4

writing. In her 1905 poem “*Ona*,” or “*She*,” Gippius reflects her own self-hatred bound up in issues of identification with gender and the body. Gippius describes a frightful creature to whom she is bonded, one who is causing her to slowly die due to their unity. Throughout the first three stanzas of the poem, Gippius describes the creature using words that indicate her utter disgust with the creature, such as “*nepovotliva*,” lascivious, lustful, “*kolyuchaya*,” prickly, spiny, “*protivno-jguchaya*,” repugnantly

or repulsively thorny, and a “*zmeya*,” a serpent (5-10). Although she uses these words to express her repulsion, the specific words Gippius chooses are also reminiscent of the characteristics her contemporaries chose to highlight in their portraits and caricatures of her. For example, Olga Matich illustrates how portraits of Gippius focus on her skeletal figure, her roles as a provocative femme fatale and a sinister, devilish female dandy, as well her ambiguous gender. Matich explains how Bely “reinforces the deadly image” commonly shown in depictions of Gippius through a “focus on [her] vampiric, bloodthirsty mouth,” through his comparison of Gippius and “a human-size wasp,” which Matich then likens to a serpent (178). Gippius’s own description of this hellish creature mirrors descriptions of her reputation by her contemporaries, suggesting not only that Gippius acknowledged these facets of her identity, but emphasized them as well.

Gippius’ characterization of the creature in “*Ona*” illustrates her inability to negotiate her own identity, and the frustration and disgust that arise as consequences of this inability to comprehend identity. In addition to the repulsed language used in the description of the creature, Gippius characterizes the creature as inextricably tied to her, ultimately revealing that the creature is in fact her soul. Gippius writes “*I umirayu ya ot etoy blizosti/Ot nerazryivnosti eyo so mnoy*,” “And I am dying from this proximity/from inseparable closeness, her with me” (3,4). Gippius goes on to describe her frustration in being unable to access or penetrate (*dostula*) the creature as she stays silent (*gluxa*). Gippius ends the poem with the line “*i eta strashnaya – moya dusha*,” “and this dreadful thing is my soul.” Gippius’ final identification with the abject creature that has been slowly killing her indicates her disgust with her identity and the alienation she feels between her body and her soul. The characterization of the creature in “*Ona*” is also decisively feminine; Gippius uses the female third-person pronoun “*ona*” in both the title and as the identifier for the creature. By associating the abject creature with femininity, Gippius reveals her

disdain not only for femininity, but for the feminine aspects of her own soul. Gippius characterizes femininity in “*Ona*” as a weighty (*tyajkaya*) and unwieldy (*nepovorotliva*) burden which is slowly killing her. This characterization both reveals Gippius’ disgust for the feminine, but also her extreme anxiety toward any sort of binary gendered identification, especially one based on the body. By characterizing femininity as abject in this way, Gippius indicates her perception of womanhood and the body as her ultimate malady. Gippius’ alienation between her body and soul results in her tendency to use her writing to sublimate the body, especially her female gendered body.

Gippius further reflects her complex gender identity in both her poetry and her carefully crafted public persona. Gippius was quite well known for her “uncertain sexual identity,” her celibacy, her erotic love triangles, and the various and ever-shifting characters that she would play in the public eye (Matich 163). In her chapter on Gippius, *Transcending Gender*, Olga Matich explains the ways in which Gippius flaunted her celibacy through fashion, by wearing “virginal white,” and braiding her hair in a peasant style that “signified her virginity,” while also frequently dressing the parts of both a “decadent femme fatale” and a “female dandy” (166, 171). Matich describes Gippius’s public identity as “an eclectic collage of seemingly incompatible fragments,” and “a decadent subjectivity consisting of contradictory elements,” thus illustrating the ways in which Gippius intentionally and physically exhibited a presence of uncertainty (171). Gippius underscored this identity of contradictions and uncertainty most notably in her fondness for gender ambiguity; she often dressed in male clothing, typically used the masculine form of the lyrical “I” in her poetry, while also signing her poetry with her female name. Matich also includes caricatures, criticisms, and portraits of Gippius, in order to illustrate her reputation amongst her contemporaries. Gippius is characterized through Mitrich’s 1907

caricature, which portrays her as a sinister, shadowy, almost ghostly figure, and Bely's "visual portrait" of the poet, which describes her as "the skeleton of a seductress," with a "breastless bosom," who "deftly captivat[es] Satan" (177). These representations of Gippius epitomize her contemporaries' view of her, while simultaneously highlighting the ambiguity she presented to the public.

Gippius' penchant for androgyny originates not only from her philosophical issues with binary oppositions, but also from her distinct disdain for the feminine. In *Beyond the Flesh*, Presto describes Gippius' predilection for wearing a dandy's monocle or a lorgnette as symbolizing her association with both the "male dandy" and "bourgeois femininity" (164). Although issues between the spirit and body are quite common in the Russian Symbolist canon, Gippius' are especially complicated due to her identification with the androgyne and rejection of femininity. Presto writes that Gippius "refused to engage in the type of creativity that the French feminists have referred to as *écriture féminine*, or the writing of the female body, opting instead to employ the masculine voice in her verse and to identify femininity and the female body with the perverse" (8). Gippius often signed her poetry and letters with the unmarked (masculine) signature "Z.N. Gippius," and rejected speaking and publishing opportunities that were specifically marketed toward women writers (Presto 143). Although Gippius displayed a clear distaste for femininity, she also displayed herself as hyper feminine, to the point of parody, in salon spaces. Presto connects Gippius' taste for parodic hyperfemininity to poems such as "The Seamstress" "*Shveia*," which incorporate imagery of traditionally feminine crafts, particularly weaving, and argues that despite her interest in these subjects "she evinces a tendency to position the feminine self as object, rather than subject, thereby distancing the feminine self from the speaking subject that she positions as inherently male" (148). In this sense, Gippius demonstrates

awareness of the split gendered subject and negotiates how her identity can be reconciled from the byproduct of these binary oppositions.

Gippius' 1903 poem "*Pauki*" or "The Spiders" encapsulates her conflicts with gender, reputation, and the creative act. Despite "*Pauki*" preceding the Mitrich caricature by several years, many of the motifs that Gippius includes in the poem align with those illustrated by her contemporaries. Moreover, "*Pauki*" illustrates Gippius' immense disdain for femininity and her own implication in it. In "*Pauki*," Gippius describes being surrounded by four "relentless, tireless" (*neutomimiy*) spiders that sit in each corner of her narrow (*techniy*) world (1). She describes the four spiders as "cunning, fat, and dirty" (*lovki, jirny i gryazny*) and writes that they always "weave, weave, weave" (*pletut, pletut, pletut...*) (2). The spiders each spin their own web, finally spinning a tremendous (*ogromniy*) one that covers the speaker (3). In the final stanza, Gippius writes:

*"Moi glaza – pod pautinoy.  
Ona sera, myagka, lipka.  
I rady radostyu zberinoy  
Chetyre tolstyx raika"*

[My eyes – under the spiderweb/it's gray, faint, sticky/And glad, happy, animalistic/Four fat spiders] (Gippius, *Zavitaya Kniga*, 90.)

In this final stanza, Gippius describes being consumed by the web of the four sinister spiders. This final submission to the spiders reflects Gippius' concern with her identity and her fear of being lost in definition. Gippius' inclination to transcend gender as a writer and avoid the *écriture féminine*, is ineradicable from the normative categories of "female poet" and "female topics/labor" in early 20th Century Russia. In "*Pauki*," Gippius subverts and criticizes the notion of femininity by depicting the weaving spiders as fat, cunning, and sinister. The word she uses for spiderweb, *pautina*, is a feminine noun as well, and thus the speaker's anxiety in the poem about being subsumed by the web reflects a larger anxiety about being subsumed by femininity.

Presto also connects Gippius' fears in "*Pauki*" to an anxiety about writing itself, and argues that "the speaker's horror or anxiety in the presence of the spiders' creative labor or *trud* points to the author's anxiety about the creative process" (155). By interpreting the anxiety of "*Pauki*" as anxiety about the creative process, it becomes clear that Gippius, like Mishima, intends to *write* herself out of her the malady she considers to be female identity. Gippius equates the creative labor of the spiders with that of her own literary creation and expresses anxiety about the relentlessness (*neytomimih*) of this labor. Moreover, by connecting this anxiety about creative labor to that about her narrow (*tesnoii*) world (*mire*), Gippius indicates that she views her poetry as a remedy for the world's ailments. This harkens back to Gippius' overarching purpose in poetry of invoking God and desire to use poetry to emphasize her spiritual ideology.

In her 1907 poem, "*Troynoe*" or "Threefold," Gippius expresses her desire for a spirituality which centers the Holy Trinity, and likens God's interaction with humans to that of a poet's creation. Gippius concludes the poem by writing "*tolko ob dumaet Bog: O cheloveke. Lyubvi. I smerti,*" meaning that "God only thinks of: man, love, and death" (Pachmuss 104). Gippius urges other poets, as well as herself, throughout the piece to believe in this "*troynaya pravda,*" the "threefold truth." Gippius' invocation of God in the poem reflects her ultimate drive in poetic expression: to reevaluate human interaction with God and spirituality. Pachmuss writes that Gippius' poetry reveals "that special love for beauty, that antimony between the poet's religious impulses and simultaneous blasphemy," and this association between beauty and spirituality reflects a mimetic desire similar to that of Mishima (15). By not only drawing out these connections between beauty, religion, death, and sublimity, but projecting them onto her fellow poets, Gippius reveals her own ambivalent sense of identity reliant on reflection from the other. Gippius' fixation on conflict and binaries recalls Lacan's notion of dialogic subjectivity,

insofar as the subject asserts identity through reflection by the other. However, like Mishima's, Gippius' work cannot be merely contained in the dialogic addresser/addressee binary, as she utilizes her ideology of spiritual revitalization to craft an other which is ultimately capable of reflecting back her Ideal-I. Given the Persona model, Gippius' incorporation of spiritual ideology functions as instructions for perceiving according to the three-fold, ambivalent identity she espouses.

Gippius illustrates her preoccupation with the Holy Trinity both in her poetry and her diaries and correspondences with her contemporaries. Gippius considered the notion of the Trinity to be applicable in all aspects of life and extrapolated the idea of a three-fold God into a general rule for interpersonal relationships. While she formulated her relationship with her husband, with gender, and with several friends and other writers according to these rules, she also expressed a clear anxiety around the prevalence of binaries in everyday life and spirituality. For Gippius, these binaries were incompatible with her notion of spirituality and the ideal effect it had on her identity. Gippius' issues with gender and sexuality tie directly into her spiritual ideology. In a 1905 letter to journalist and critic Dmitry Vladimirovich Filosofov, Gippius writes repeatedly about the mysteries (*taina*) surrounding the numbers two and three (Pachmuss 64). Filosofov, Gippius, and her husband Dmitrii Merezhkovsky lived in a triple union for fifteen years, albeit a celibate one (Matich 197). Gippius' marriage with Merezhkovsky too was purely fraternal; Matich describes their marriage as a "lifelong ideological partnership devoted to a socioreligious cause" (166). Gippius rejected sex generally and wrote about having no "procreative feeling," which Matich suggests is a euphemism for homosexual desires (195). Gippius considered the ideal individual to be the androgyne "who is capable of experiencing the mystery of the 'two' in the sexual act" (Pachmuss 24). In her collection of Gippius'

correspondences, Temira Pachmuss synthesizes Gippius' "metaphysics of love" as having three central ideas: "the idea of [man's] androgyne nature, the idea of spirit and flesh being united in him, and the idea of his likeness to God" (25). In Gippius' idea of an ideal romantic relationship, the masculine and feminine elements inherent in each individual would align perfectly. Gippius' struggle with her female identity originates in part from her convictions about the superior nature of three-fold spirituality, but she also considers the three-fold method and a revitalized spirituality to be a "cure" for escaping the binary definitions which plague her.

Gippius' concept of metaphysical androgyne love illustrates Lacan's notion of the subject dependent on the assumed other for formation. Like Mishima, Gippius expresses anxiety regarding "wholeness" of identity; however, while Mishima's comes predominantly from an alienation of mind from body, Gippius' negotiation is centered around interpersonal, especially romantic, relationships. Gippius too engages with the conflict between spirit and body, but often insofar as it relates to interpersonal relationships. Lacan describes the mirror stage of identification as the moment where "the specular *I* turns into the social *I*," the stakes of which "[tip] the whole of human knowledge [*savoir*] into being mediated by the other's desire" (*Écrits* 79). In the 1953 lecture "The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis," Lacan asserts that "man's desire finds its meaning in the other's desire, not so much because the other holds the keys to the desired object, as because his first object(ive) is to be recognized by the other" (*Écrits* 222). Lacan characterizes all interpersonal communication as dependent on this dialectic of recognition, one which Gippius reflects in her own negotiation of identity. Gippius not only desires recognition by the other, but absorbs the other into her own creation of self in an effort to sublimate what she considers to be undesirable gendered identity. By fusing masculine and feminine elements in her public presentation as well as in her writing, Gippius



propagates her theories of platonic love and androgyny in order to reflect her ideal identity. This fusion illustrates how the Persona model relies on the subject utilizing ideology to propagate a way of perceiving and reflecting according to that which most effectively resolves what the subject considers their primary maladies.

Gippius' religious ideology thus can be understood as a vehicle for restructuring the Big Other. In the same way that Mishima utilizes nationalism and valorization of masculinity as a method of perception which will render him reflected by the other as his Ideal-I, Gippius uses her spiritual principles to resolve the tension between her perceived and ideal identity. Gippius uses her spiritual ideology to restructure the Big Other, the symbolic order, and insist on a method of perception which rejects binary oppositions and gender fixedness. Gippius insists on this method of understanding gender and binary conflicts in her work to prompt the other to reflect a non-gendered, ambivalent identity. Like Mishima, Gippius emphasizes issues of identity and contradiction in her work in an effort to assert identity on her own terms. By using ideology to restructure the Big Other, Gippius provides a roadmap for the other to perceive and reflect her idealized identity.

In her 1905 letter to Filosev, Gippius articulates her anxiety about the spirit of individual identity (*lichnost*) being lost in the romantic pairing. She writes that the type of unity she has proposed, an alignment between the two perfectly masculine and feminine personalities, will bring one closer to a connection or convergence (*sblijenya*) with God. In her 1901 poem "*Elektrichestvo*" (Electricity), Gippius expresses the anxiety inherent in pairing as well as the potential elevation that can occur from properly aligned pairing. In the poem, Gippius describes two intertwined wires, which she characterizes as "yes" and "no," "*da' i 'net*" with their ends (*kontsy*) not yet connected (*spleteny*). She describes the wires as waiting (*jdet*) for resurrection

(*voskresene*), and when they finally connect the wires undergo death which leads to light: “*i smert ix budet - svet.*” “*Elektrichestvo*” encapsulates Gippius’ anxiety about loss of identity in binary pairings, while simultaneously expressing her hope for something productive and revitalizing as a result of the death inherent in the loss of identity in duality. The poem describes two opposing elements, the “yes” and “no” wires, losing their individuality as they die and become light. In this way, Gippius expresses the same ideal process she writes about in her 1905 letter to Filosofov; the death of the individual identity is acceptable only insofar as it furthers God’s light.

Gippius’ ideal death of individual identity in the service of God’s light in “*Elektrichestvo*” reflects her ultimate spiritual principles and the ideology by which she restructures the Big Other in service of reflecting and asserting her subjectivity. Gippius propagates an ideology by which binary elements are perfectly matched to one another to eliminate the conflicted binary piece in favor of an idealized third identity. By insisting on the pursuit of God and liberation from binary identity conflict by striving toward the Holy Trinity, Gippius resolves her own self-determined malady. “*Elektrichestvo*” exemplifies the ideological roadmap that Gippius asserts for perception of her by the other as viewer or reader. Gippius implies that by rejecting binary oppositions and understanding her identity rather as a merging of such oppositions the other, and subsequently the subject who receives this reflection, will experience an enlightenment and resurrection (*voskresene*). The conceptual death (*smert*) and future transformation into light (*svet*) of the two oppositional wires in the poem reflect Gippius’ desire to obliterate her own identity in favor of an idealized one.

Gippius ultimately incorporates critiques of binary identity, especially the feminine, into her work in order to conceptually refashion the symbolic order of understanding gender and

interpersonal relationships. By proposing an alternate symbolic order, a recrafted Big Other, Gippius provides to the dialogic other a vehicle for comprehending her own identity, which is effectively reflected back to her. The self-referential aspects of Gippius' work suggest not only her conflict with identity, but also her impulse to rewrite and refashion herself through her work. Like Mishima, Gippius considers aspects of her identity to be problematic and develops specific ideology to resolve the way in which the other perceives and subsequently reflects her identity.

### Conclusion

In examining the intersections between lives and works of Zinaida Gippius and Mishima Yukio, the proposed model of Persona as an outside-in reconfiguration of identity reveals the way in which ideology can be used to recraft the stakes of the Big Other to provide a reflection of the Ideal-I through the dialogic other. Gippius and Mishima's examples maintain the importance of reading literature in tandem with biography insofar as biography informs the work. Both authors exemplify an inextricable link between their writing and identity, and this link is not only conscious but deliberate. Mishima and Gippius utilize their writing as a vehicle for asserting subjectivity in the context of perceived identificatory maladies. Notably both authors incorporate the conflict between body and spirit, especially as it relates to gender, although to different ends. In Mishima's case, masculinity represents an unobtainable completeness between spirit and body; Mishima characterizes his Ideal-I as a stoic, traditionally masculine figure who dies for a higher purpose. Gippius expresses extreme conflict with her female body and repeatedly presents femininity as abject in her poetry. Although her Ideal-I is not gendered in the same way that Mishima's is, Gippius similarly configures death for a higher purpose as an escape from identity conflict. Moreover, Gippius' Ideal-I functions as a form of completeness which merges binary oppositions into a new form of identity rather than a traditionalist configuration of binary gender.

Both authors render conflict itself as a primary object of their work and public performance, personalize conflict and opposition, and utilize ideology to resolve and situate the self within contradiction.

The conflict between body and spirit in the works of Gippius and Mishima directly relates to assertions of identity; therefore, divorcing the work from author biography renders the major themes of the works obsolete. Gippius and Mishima deal with identity as the central object in their works, and when read in tandem with their biographies the issues of authorial identity cannot be ignored. Mishima and Gippius are especially notable cases due to their respective radical ideologies which are evident both in their biographies and work. By incorporating ideology into their works, Mishima and Gippius illustrate the Persona model insofar as they use ideology as a prescriptive medium for perception and subsequent reflection. Gippius and Mishima employ ideology to restructure the Big Other, the symbolic order by which the other perceives and reflects the subject according to that which will most absolve their own personal maladies. Mishima's insistence on traditionalism and nationalism provides a lens through which to fashion himself as a patriotic and masculine warrior figure in the eyes of the other, while Gippius' three-fold spiritual ideology empowers an understanding of gender outside of binary conventions.

The Persona model ultimately makes the case for reading texts while acknowledging how they are potentially informed by author biography and identity. The Persona model encourages examining how particularly self-reflective writers like Zinaida Gippius and Mishima Yukio incorporate ideology and biography into their texts and reveals the function of this writing as assertion of subjectivity both in spite of and to resolve conflicts with identity. In cases like Gippius and Mishima's, where their respective ideologies and reputations are as famous as the

texts themselves, the Persona model is especially crucial in determining the intersections between identity and work.

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