MINAKATA Kumagusu, at the age of fifty-five, in 1922

IWATA Jun’ichi, at the age of twenty-five, in 1925

Introduction

The correspondence between Minakata Kumagusu (1867-1941) and Iwata Jun’ichi (1900-1945) from which the following five letters have been excerpted began in 1931 and extended to the year of Minakata’s death ten years later. These selections all date from the first few months of the correspondence, which eventually ran to 120 letters. I have chosen them rather than some later letters because it is here that the correspondents seek both to define the terms of their divergent approaches to the history of homosexuals in Japan and, through a somewhat lopsided dialogue on central principles, to find common ground. Iwata expresses himself deferentially to the much older man (though not without some pointed questions in the letter of 8/27/31) while Minakata, in keeping with his age and his great accomplishments, maintains a stern, often schoolmasterish tone where guiding principles are concerned.

Although Minakata’s letters did not first appear until 1991 and Iwata’s only in 2001, this correspondence that began 64 years ago marks in a real sense the beginnings—to be sure, in mutually pledged privacy—of a modern Japanese discourse on, not simply the history of homosexuals (some work had been published in this area, particularly with respect to Tokugawa literature), but basic theories, methodological, ethical, and existential, about what male homosexualities have been in the past in Japan, were at the time of writing, could be and should be. As this anthology no doubt confirms for the reader, there has been no lack of fictional and poetic representations of gay themes, characters, and images in both modern and premodern Japanese literature, many of them pleasantly sensual and celebratory, when they are not anguished and introspective (as is generally the case with Mishima’s writings in this area, alternately self-intoxicated and self-loathing). But while in the 16th to 19th centuries (in striking contrast to Europe and America in those times) there was a prolonged, playful discourse—perhaps more in the nature of a set of superficially invoked tropes—on gay vs. straight sex and associated feelings and lifestyles, in modern Japan, before the early Showa era (1926-1989), there had been no serious direct discussions on the subject, apart from a sparse and wholly imported medical literature that consigned same-sex relations to the realms...
of psychopathology or physical degeneracy.

The terms of the discussion in Minakata's and Iwata's correspondence, which were partially (and in comparable privacy) shared by such contemporaries as the novelists Inagaki Taruhiko and Endo Gahō, will strike most of us as partly very unfamiliar, even bizarre; partly familiar—the constant harking back to a distant Golden Age, for example, whether of medieval Japan or ancient Greece; and at times no doubt as all too familiar, as in the defensive-sounding appeals, reminiscent of Gide, to "lesser" races and other species. But we should not lose sight of the enormous obstacles which Japanese society posed in the early 20th century to candid, open reflections on their topic, as in considerable measure it continues to do. This less in spite of than because of the famed "tolerance" and efficient commodification of an amazing range of sexual practices and erotic fetishes from the 1920s to the present in Japan, none of which has been permitted in any significant way to interfere, ever, with either reproductive heterosexual marriage or smooth, defined as utterly homogeneous, interpersonal relations in the workplace, be it factory, corporation, or university.

How much do either Minakata or Iwata challenge these formidable barriers? On the face of it not very much, since they are writing in private and principally of things from the distant past. The dismissive contempt that flares up here and there in Minakata's letters, and less convincingly, if not downright cynically, in Iwata's, for contemporary "flagots who cruise the parks of Tokyo by night," even at the unseemly ages of 35 or 40; their agreement, again a bit too compliant on Iwata's part, to consider the "gaudy, flighty goings on" of homosexuals portrayed in Tokugawa literature as "impure," in distinction to the "pure," supposedly Platonic male bonds of the preceding Sengoku era, the Golden Age—these attitudes are likely to appear to present-day readers as offensively reactionary. And since they go on to discuss with evident gusto and in much detail these "goings-on"—much of the remaining correspondence is in fact consumed by minute descriptions of tools of the trade, places of assignation, etc.—the earlier consciousness is bound to strike us as also hypocritical. But we should pause to reflect here on the palpable need to find golden ages, exotic places (sometimes simply the "lower orders") and basic ethical justifications for homosexual feelings that we see abundantly in such early modern Euro-American writers on the subject as Whitman, Car- penter, Symonds, and Gide, as well as their distinct reluctance (with the notable exception of Whitman) to address contemporary practices.

Had I included here excerpts from a few early letters by Minakata written from America to friends back home in tones both amusingly raucous and desperately lonely (these letters have been studiously ignored by many admiring critics and historians until quite recently), it would have thrown into even starker relief his stern pronouncements below on the Pure Way of Men. But the letters included here are those of a 65-year-old man full of the experiences of an astonishingly multiform life, and the raucoius/sad letters omitted, those of a brilliant but very unsettled 20-year-old. Suffice it to say that the early letters, whose preservation, not to mention eventual publication (a process that is apparently still far from complete), is something of a miracle, deserve to be juxtaposed to the mature writings in some other context.

I leave this correspondence to speak for itself, and have provided only a bare minimum of notes, on the assumption that some readers will recognize many of the places, people, and periods referred to and others may not be too concerned with such details. But brief biographical sketches of Minakata (from time to time below, and throughout the notes, I have called him instead by his distinctive personal name, Kumagusu, in keeping with what seems to be a growing trend) and of Iwata seem in order here.

Minakata was born on the very eve of the Meiji Restoration in Waka- yama prefecture, a region of southwestern Honshu known for its mild climate, distinctive syncretic religions (along with many associated shrines and temples), and propitiously for Minakata's vocation as a naturalist—botany, etymology, and marine biology were to be his specialties—for its luxuriant vegetation and abundant sea life. His father made a sizeable fortune as an early Meiji entrepreneur and, until his death in middle age, was able to support Kumagusu in his wanderings within and outside Japan as an itinerant, independent scholar of a type not uncommon in 19th-century Euro-America, but virtually unheard of, then as now, in Japan. After an unpleasant and unsuccessful encounter with the nascent modern Japanese educational establishment (he attended the preparatory school for Tokyo University but failed the entrance examination, apparently due to poor math scores), Kumagusu fled Japan for America, partly goaded into this bold move by the threat of being designated the family heir (in place of a wayward brother) and, as an inevitable corollary, of being forced into an

I might quote very briefly from one of these letters just to give some inkling of how different they are in tone and content from the selections below. He begins a letter dated 9/9/1887 to his friend Sugimura Kōtarō by stating that "the behavior of these barbarians is not such as to satisfy the needs of my heart." He then goes on as follows: "You criticize me for writing of nothing but the Way of Prince Long-yang, a legendary figure associated with homosexuality in Chinese literature." But even if that is so, everyone has some little foolish, so permit me this one, which is also known as "the Way of Shinkishima (an old poetic name for Japan)," by which I mean the way to proceed when a handsome boy is spread out beneath you (there is a pun here with the poetic name for Japan and akido one, literally, when [or where] spread out). So long as they are not terribly ugly, I cannot help myself. And how can you, with your beautiful face, refuse to have people fall in love with you? I am not made of stone. To feel desire leads to affection, to act upon it leads to lust. To love and to be loved—is this not the Great Vehicle (lit., Ma- bajran) for traveling down the road of one's personal history? I simply cannot give up this pursuit." Quoted in (Shinkishima rokubon) Minakata Kumagusu (Kawade shobō shinsha, 1993, 123).
early marriage. He spent close to fifteen years in America and England studying natural history and biology on his own, though with infrequent interactions with established scholars which often ended in the sort of rancorous outbursts that would characterize his professional relations throughout his life. In England he studied and worked part-time at the British Museum, where he met both illustrious figures (such as Sun Yat-sen) and a few compatriots with whom he formed lifelong, if again “difficult,” friendships (e.g., with Toki Hōryū, the future head of the major temple complex on Mt. Kōya, which along with its founder, Köbō Daishi, has for a millennium or so been credited in wry poems and pseudo-histories with the “invention” of male homosexuality in Japan.

On returning home at the turn of the century Minakata continued to pursue his solitary career as a naturalist, now with a confirmed emphasis on what would be his specialty, the study of slime molds. With money doled out by his brother, all too parsimoniously as he obsessively observed many, he set up shop in the remote, mountainous regions of his beautiful native province. It was here that he also began to apply his great energies to his lifelong avocation as a scholar of Japanese religions, folklore and, so to speak, folk history. These interests soon brought him into contact with Yanagita Kunio, the founder of what the Japanese call micronagaku (often misleadingly translated as “ethnology”; in fact it has to do only with Japanese folk studies). Kumagusu differed often with Yanagita, frequently with characteristic vehemence, over methodologies and emphases, most notably over Yanagita’s studious avoidance of sexuality and eroticism—an area that clearly interested Kumagusu a great deal from early on. For our purposes it is important to stress that, as the letters below abundantly attest, Kumagusu did not keep his accounts separate where the fruits of his vocational and avocational pursuits were concerned. His work on mycology and marine biology is partly informed by beliefs, some of them traceable to well-established Mahayana cosmologies, in the interpenetration of all phenomena, both physical and metaphysical; and in the necessity for the naturalist of making intuitive leaps (even if, according to Leibniz’s aphorism, “Natura non fuit salus”). By the same token, in his folk-historical studies he gave a kind of credence to various religious and “superstitions” views and practices which one does not associate with scientists. As we can see in his letter of 8/20/31, perhaps the single most famous letter he ever wrote, he even seeks to find in basic biological principles (here, the life-reproduction-death cycle of slime mold) “scientific” grounds for certain religious doctrines (in this case, tantrism, according to his own, possibly idiosyncratic reading of the Nirvana Sutra). And in a formulation that appears to presage in part Georges Bataille’s more extended analogies in his L’Erotisme, he likewise often draws parallels, not always to be construed as implying cause and effect, between biological functions pertaining to all organisms (in Buddhist terms, “all sentient beings”) and various human behaviors, especially sexual. This habit of making bold encompassing analogies between the supernatural and human worlds on the one hand and his scientific observations of lower organisms on the other has led recent scholars of his work to invoke often the image of “the Minakata Mandala,” the mandala being a relatively late Mahayana type of pictorial icon representing the correspondences between the illusory, provisional orders of the human and certain supermundane worlds on one side and, on the other, the eternal, numinous order of the Buddhist cosmos.

The highpoint in Minakata’s public career came in 1929 when he was invited aboard the imperial yacht to present a lecture to the young Shōwa Emperor on slime molds and local sea creatures. As can be seen in the letter of 8/20/31, this occasion served to further crystallize his devotion to, not merely the memory, but the internally apotheosized spirit of the long dead Hayama Shigetaro, the great love of his life with whom he had had in his youth an all too brief relationship that ended with his departure for America. Concerning this relationship, as with Iwata in his letter of 8/27/31, there is much we might like to know, and not presumably out of simple prurience. But any further details that Kumagusu may have chosen to confide in other correspondents must await the publication of various rammed letters which are not yet available (none to Hayama himself has been preserved, to my knowledge).

The imperial “command lecture” elicited in the letter of 8/20/31 and elsewhere in his writing produced fervent expressions of awe and humility which create the impression of something close to Emperor-worship on Kumagusu’s part. This seems at odds with the dominant contours of his public career and private life, in both of which he emerges from the pages of the ever-proliferating biographies as an irascible battler against many of the orthodoxies of state and society alike. But as with Natsume Sōseki, the Meiji novelist who more than any other single figure paved the way for a broadly anti-establishment culture (before the rise of Marxism in the 1920s, that is), the imperial institution clearly meant something quite different for this man born in the very year of the emperor’s restoration to the seat of central state power (it was, of course, accompanied by the abolition of the old order) from what it meant to many of those whose special interests and power strategies came to agglomerate around this institution in later years. Whatever Kumagusu’s near-Emperor-worship meant, it did not preclude his throwing himself, in an almost self-destructive way, into the movement to oppose the consolidation of Shinto shrines and the abolition of countless small shrines rooted in local folk cults which was pursued by the state in the early years of this century.

Of Kumagusu’s private life, little can be said here, as I have not read much and what I have read often seems opaque or contradictory. To be frank, surrounding these matters about which he himself chose to confide
in a few correspondents like Iwata, such as the constant resentment of his brother centered on money matters and remarks on the tribulations of being a husband and a father, there appears to be more than a faint odor of unfairness, hypocrisy, at times something close to cruelty. Where his wife is concerned, in a text now known as his "curriculum vitae" (it was actually written in a letter to a friend to whom he complained of being forever misrepresented) Kumagusu declares in an oddly boastful tone that he had never had any "carnal knowledge" of women until he married her when he was forty; moreover, that since that time he has only "done it" from time to time, and even then, aside from procreation, only "for purposes of statistical comparison," as he never fails, he adds, to note down (in Greek) the positions employed. (His remarks on his conjugal relations to Iwata in the R/2073 letters are similarly boastful, though in this context also slightly defensive.) More telling, and chilling, is the observation to a childhood friend in one of the letters from America to the effect that through relations with handsome boys (specifically, in what he describes as the ethically proper frontal position) he has learned "tender feelings" fo-nasakuyi, and that these feelings are what enable him to so much as look at a woman "without whacking her." Allowing, as I have suggested one should with these early letters, for his youth (he was twenty) and his devotion at the time of this writing, this startling remark, together with numerous other obiter dicta on the subject of women, leaves little room for doubt that Kumagusu was something of a misogynist. Of his children I know nothing beyond whatever can be deduced from his frequent complaints of having to provide for them because of his brother's stinginess, to which he attributes his son's growing insanity in early adulthood, a condition that appears to have lasted for the rest of his life.

While for all his solitary and anti-establishment stance Minakata was far from unknown in his lifetime, his present great fame in Japan was achieved posthumously, mainly in the last twenty years, following on the publication of the second edition of his complete works (the first, published some twenty years previously, was neither complete nor edited with basic scholarly honesty, the editors having taken it upon themselves to delete many of what they viewed to be intemperate remarks about famous people and hallowed institutions). The numbers of books, articles, public lectures, even middlebrow TV talk shows devoted to Minakata, especially over the past decade, are staggering. Not surprisingly, his abiding preoccupation with the history of homosexuality in Japan, as well as other cultures, is a topic that has only emerged from the critical closet quite recently. Although the phenomenon of Minakata's explosive popularity clearly owes to various complex factors in recent Japanese intellectual life, it is safe to say that his many articles and letters on homosexuality played little role in the earlier stages of the "booms." By now, though, this significant portion of his work—a recurrent figure in the "Minakata Mandalas," so to speak—is being treated by a variety of scholars and critics. It is too soon to tell what the dominant lines of interpretation will be. (So far they seem to run the gamut from the debatable strategy of endless metaphorization, that is, assertions to the effect that these interests articulated in so much of his work are essentially displaced expressions of a general discontent with the strictures of modern Japanese society and its bourgeois values, to perfidious affirmations, backed up by copious references to Foucault, of Minakata's struggle to "make himself and his world Gay"—a word that he did not, of course, know, and a quality that the critics who adopt this approach seem to have reified into an all-embracing conceptual construct with apparently little to do with something so mundane as homosexual love and relationships.)

However the reception of this aspect of Minakata's work may develop, the greater availability of his own writings on the subject (in editions well annotated for a contemporary readership that might otherwise find his semi-premodern prose and copious allusions forbidding) is bound to contribute a major chapter to the still slender volume, for so long simply a closed book, of serious, direct discussions of same-sex relationships (in this case exclusively male, I need not add by now) and the culture arising from them in Japan.

Iwata Jun'ichi was born in 1900 in the port city of Toba, Mie prefecture. In his youth he studied painting and drawing with the noted illustrator Takehisa Yumeji and, briefly, at a couple of art academies. Coming from a well-off merchant family, he appears to have worked at the family business only sporadically, and was able during his foreshortened life to pursue at leisure his life's avocation, research on the literature and history of homosexuality in Japan. Beginning in 1930, he published in the magazine Hanzai-gaku ("Criminology") a series of articles on the representations of homosexual relationships in various periods of Japanese history, later revised and published (posthumously) as Nanshoku-ku ("On Man-Love/Lust"). Minakata Kumagusu, having noticed with interest one or two of these articles, entered into a correspondence (through the intermediary of a mutual acquaintance) that lasted until the older man's death in 1941. While Iwata gave some time to a study of local folk beliefs and customs, his lifelong labors were devoted mainly to research, especially of a bibliographical nature, on literary and historical sources related to male homosexuality from the classical (Nara and Heian) period down to the early 20th century. Much hampered by the suspect nature of his subject from the point of view of various forms of censorship, both official and self-imposed by the publishing establishment, he only managed to publish a preliminary
version of his bibliography in the midst of the Second World War, a work that was later revised and re-published through the efforts of his close friend Edogawa Rampo, Iwata's rather short historical essays, characterized by a scrupulous adherence to "authentic" sources, progressed only up to the Tokugawa period before his untimely death near the war's end. (One gathers from stray remarks by Iwata that the enormous quantity and diversity of Tokugawa materials impeded his progress in dealing with this era.)

In addition to the extensive correspondence with Kumagusu, Iwata exchanged some 200 letters with Edogawa Rampo throughout his adult life. Unfortunately, the two men burned most of these before Iwata's death out of concern for their own privacy and that of others mentioned in these letters. Iwata's social position and financial security appear to have allowed him, not only to pursue his scholarly avocation, but to engage, in a very clandestine manner, in various forms of what would have been considered anti-social conduct. In a brief, deeply ambivalent reminiscence that appeared recently, his son relates how Iwata accomplished the astonishing feat of dodging the draft (by feigning both mental and physical illness) in the midst of the burgeoning militarization of the mid-30s. In addition to confessing to a very "icy feeling" on reading some of his father's writings about an "unorthodox type of sexual desire" that he himself "cannot comprehend," the son goes on to conclude his reminiscence with a stark account of the regular beatings and other forms of physical abuse that he and his sister suffered at the hands of their father. He also alludes in general terms to the routine neglect (it would in any case have been considered unremarkable in Iwata's society at that time) with which his father treated his mother, who was chosen by her mother-in-law, he tells us, through a roll of the dice.

In Kumagusu's letter of 8/20/31, after establishing for the record the "normality" of his own marital relations, he declares that "even in the age when the warrior code was so strongly in force that ... older samurai would risk their lives to protect boys entrusted to their care, the sharing of a heterosexual conjugal bed was (as in ancient Greece, governed by a similar ethic), the universal rule. This is very much part of the Pure Way of Men." And very much part of industrial-capitalist Japan, one might add, long after the disappearance of so-called Bushido. We should not lose sight of the toll taken on middle-class gay men and women in contemporary North America and Northern Europe by the cruelly binary approach to choice of sexualities, in terms of the sacrifices exacted from the nurturing, parentally inclined among them as well as true bisexuals. But such hardships pale beside the spectacle presented by the lives of homosexuals in modern Japan, whether actively practicing (as was surely the case with Iwata) or committed to an ideal of a sublimated, spiritualized "Pure Way" (as was, I believe, the mature, though not the young, Kumagusu) and most especially, to the very limited extent we can know anything about them, presented by the lives of their spouses and children.

**MORNING FOG**

**Correspondence on Gay Lifestyles**

From Iwata Jun'ichi to Minakata Kumagusu,
August 16, 1931

**T**oday I was honored to receive your epistle through the courtesy of Mr. Nakagawa Tarō of Tokyo. I am at a loss for words to express the gratitude and awe I feel that in the midst of all your work you should be so kind as to write to a young upstart like me.

I should begin by begging your indulgence for my future importunings, as I hope to learn a great deal from you. Judging from the concluding remarks in your letter, I realize how very busy you are with your research, and in order to spare you copious correspondence, I am resolved to convey to you only the most vital points on which I wish to request your help. Indeed, even to raise various questions in my first letter would seem exceedingly self-serving of me, yet I am bold enough to beg your forbearance while I detain you so briefly with a few petty questions.

I am extremely grateful that you have read my "History of Man-Love" (Nanshoku-shi) and have been kind enough to offer your suggestions. It is a great joy to be instructed concerning matters on which I was insufficiently informed, and others that I was not aware of at all. Since I shall in any case be revising the whole work from start to finish, at that stage I intend to incorporate the materials you have brought to my attention through

1. The original text I have used for this and the following letters is Minakata Kumagusu namahoko-daii, Haugawawa Kōsō and Tsukikawa Kanen, editors (Yasaka Shobo, 1991). Minakata Kumagusu's first letter, the one that initiated this correspondence, was addressed to and transmitted by a mutual acquaintance, Nakayama Taro, a well-known scholar of folklore and folk history. I have chosen not to include it as it is not written directly to Iwata, and most of the major points it makes are reiterated in subsequent letters.

2. Nanshoku-shi was the general, working title for a series of articles on the history of homosexuality in Japan which Iwata had recently begun to publish in a popular, somewhat sensationalistic magazine with the pseudo-scientific title of "Crematory" (Humureshiji). They were subsequently collected together and published under the title of Nanshoku-shi.\"
various emendations and additions. Furthermore, there are over fifty items I can think of right now that I wish to, rather that I must know about. I will make every effort to direct my inquiries so as not to interfere with your research, but I wonder if you might consent to oblige me in this matter. [Iwata goes on here to address one particular criticism that Kamagawa made of his account of the assassination of Hosokawa Masamoto, expressing at length both great shame and fulsome gratitude.]

In my work on man-love, I have always striven to distinguish strictly between homosexual love and homosexual desire. Where the whole category of "beautiful friends" has been concerned, since historical and literary sources are amply detailed in their accounts, it is hard to distinguish between love and lust; but I have tended to assume that all relationships between friends so described are characterized by purity. As for the role historically played by age and age discrepancy in defining these relationships, I have not made this an issue, partly having in mind the example presented by contemporary Tokyo faggots. For instance, it is a fact that among those cruising Asakusa Park under cover of night there are old men who, as the so-called "Koya sextagonarians," seek out sex in which they play the passive role with men in their thirties and forties. (The faggots call the passive role "receiving" and the active role "delivering"). It would be interesting to write about their habits in detail, which would no doubt bring to light a lot of things no one knows much about now. But there has recently been a spate of reportage on the subject, all of it based on rumor and hearsay and highly fragmented. In reaction to this the Tokyo faggots, who look askance at me as if I were the sole source of this misinformation, seem to have grown very wary of cruising around Asakusa Park (for which they have a special name, "A. Krap"). Needless to say, I could hardly write anything along these lines under my own name—I fear the faggots' reaction more than the censors—and so have refrained from pursuing this project. In any case, I have consistently classified relationships between "beautiful friends" as homosexual love and all those that are not as homosexual desire. Thus I was delighted to read in your letter today of the distinction you make between the Pore and the limare in The Way of Men.

On one of my visits to Tokyo I heard from Mr. Nakayama about the category of "superior spouse/inferior spouse." or cross-class Saisons.

1An old term used generically, though it refers specifically to monks on Mt. Koya, for men middle-aged and beyond who continue to practice homosexuality.

2A slang term for the "faggots" associated with Kato, like gangsters of the same age, often takes the form of reversing a word's syllables (in this case the word for park, Kame, becomes komame, an effect that can sometimes be mimicked by spelling the English translation backwards, as here).

3An apparent neologism (presumably to be read as shina/fon), in a subsequent letter Kamagawa discards having coined it.

which he ascribes to you. At the time he gave as an example the story of how the Lady Isami Shikibu, while on a pilgrimage to the Kamo Shrine, was amused by serving as a common grass-cutter in the midst of a rain storm and the next day invited him to her lodging, where she took him to task for this. I believe that such liaisons have been formed by homosexuals too. (In general, libidinous tendencies that exist within homosexuality can also be found in homosexuality as well, indeed, seems, and if, in seeking to write contemporary fiction about love and sex between men, one has to choose to emphasize the characters' psychological states—rather than dwelling on some extraordinary aspect, such as Saikaku's tales of the averaging of one lover with another—the result would probably resemble novels about heterosexual sex and love. I have in fact thought I'd like to write a homosexual novel, and yet I hold back. Still, lately I have been harboring such designs and feel that, if it were written in a certain form, it could end up being a rather innovative work.)

Some years ago (I am now thirty-two and married), I liked boys, especially lower-class boys, but relatively clean-cut types, unlike what has been related in the pages of "Criminology" about certain prominent politicians. English, I think, whose raunchy predatory exactions have a more direct line to and down their legs, etc. Rather, I was often amused by picking up good-looking working-class boys of clean habits and, without actually doing anything with them, simply give them money and have with pleasure at their happy faces. (Looking back, I realize that my motives were not altogether philanthropic, and that there was no sexual feeling on my part.) It has occurred to me that these feelings of mine might be related to your category of cross-class liaisons. (On the other hand, if this were so, I ought to have felt myself to be in the woman's role; as this was not the case, it would seem that with respect to such attractions homosexuality presents something of a mystery.)...

Iwata goes on here to mention a few more examples of "cross-class" liaisons (in Kabuki) plays and a premodern collection of short fiction.

Historically, most of those who have been moved to commit suicide on the death of their lord's or their close friend's should be counted as homosexual lovers, an assumption that the relationship had not been tainted by homosexuality. (Perhaps we may assume that these relationships began with only one partner being passionately in love while the other, at first embarrassed by this unexpected passion, was then gradually led into reciprocal feelings. I've gathered that in ancient Greece they liked their boys as young
as possible and that the older partners did not care at all about the boys' feelings, avidly seeking only their own pleasure, but is this true?... [He briefly raises here a question about a legendary close male friendship in China that is described in "The Spring and Autumn Annals." ]

If it is true that the pre-modern Japanese practice of following one's lord or close friend in death originated in ancient times somewhere in the southern provinces, then perhaps what we find in the Sengoku era is an institutionalization of the outward form of this custom without any awareness of its affective content. ... Or is it possible that even in that era men followed each other in death out of conscious homosexual love? All of this is rampant speculation on my part, as I have not found a shred of evidence to support it. But do you yourself, sir, have any thoughts on this matter?

I am still very ignorant about the history of homosexuality in Japan. I know nothing, for example, of that aspect of the long history of the Mt. Koya monastery, nor of that on Mt. Hiei; and I even lack the means to pursue the (not so ancient) history of the monastery at Ueno. Hopeless! These are of course all institutions that must be chronicled, in accurate detail, in any history of homosexuality in our country. And yet I remain ignorant even of the biography of the Ueno temple's founder, Tenkai Sôtô, especially the particulars of his sexual pastimes, and have not even managed to lay eyes on his treatise "On Beautiful Boys."

I beg you to consider this the auspicious beginning of a relationship between us. Please feel free to enlighten me with as many communications as possible, whenever you have time. And please help me to bring to fruition the labors of what is to be my lifelong avocation. ... [He mentions here his present preoccupation with legends and folk tales, i.e. as distinct from proper histories and works of "classical" literature, and the particular difficulties posed by such material.]

Here I've scribbled on and on and with the brushiness of youth warped your eyes with a string of self-serving observations, in what should have been only a brief letter of self-introduction. Please do not think too ill of me. I had hoped to pay you a visit soon but, having detected in your letter that this would not now be welcome, I have given the idea up. In lieu of meeting face to face, I beseech you to continue to bestow on me your esteemed teachings whenever you have time to write.

Letter from Minakata Kumagusu to Iwata Jun'ichi,
August 20, 1931

Yours of August 16 arrived at 7:30 this morning. Just then someone had come bearing a strange animal from the seashore and I had to spend a lot of time making observations while it was still alive, then preserving it in alcohol. And so I have only just now read your letter, and here proceed to reply. ...

As you mention in your letter, pure love (the Way of Men [nandô]) and impure love (sex with men [monshakô]) are different matters. Among Japanese writings (fiction included) I know of only one type that treats of pure love. That is, since such love concerns only the relations between true friends as friendship is defined by the "five ethical relationships and the five constants," there is no need to go outside the context of this discourse to explain what I mean by true love. (What passes for "friendship" nowadays, casually forming acquaintances on the basis of mutual calculations of self-interest, is not worthy to stand beside the other four ethical relationships. There is nowhere to be found in the opportunistic friendships of the present day the kinds of loyalty shown by Tokugawa Hidetada, who on the strength of a firm commitment made in his youth, entertained anew Tamba Nagashige after he was vanquished at the Battle of Sekigahara; or by Naoya Shigetoki, who remained true to Uesugi Kagekatsu to the very end.) Also, although this is not directly related to the issue you raised in your letter about age limitations [for traditional same-sex relationships], throughout the Sengoku period (as Bakin and others have observed), samurai did not in general perform the rites marking the attainment of their majority until the age of 24 or 25. That such men-boys, known as ówakârâ, in a designation similar to that of "tanned women" [fushimaya], were considered desirable in this era, we know from the writings of Kyôden and others and one even finds pictorial illustrations of them. Arai Haukêki tells us that Hojô Ujirô had not have his son Tsunamari (a famously beautiful boy who distinguished himself as an officer at Kawakoshi and other battles) come of age until 23 or 24. (Among the Greek philosophers it was not uncommon for men to grow old together, cohabiting into their fifties and sixties.) And we know from Saikaku, Kiseki et al. that in the realm of impure love, there were many profligates who pursued across old enough to be their fathers.

The terms you refer to in your letter, "deliverer" [bachi] as applied to the lover, and "receiver" [bôeki] for the beloved, are direct translations of

1 A paragraph has been omitted here in which the author congratulates Iwata for having corrected a common misconception of the events surrounding the assassination of Hôzô Masamoto in the Tokugawa period.

2 As set forth by Momosuke and other Confucian philosophers: in addition to friendship, the relationships between parents and children, ruler and subjects, husband and wife, and seniors and juniors.

3 Tokugawa Hidetada was the successor to Ieyasu, hence the second Tokugawa shôgo. Uesugi Kagekatsu was an important daimyô in the Sengoku and early Tokugawa periods whose shifting allegiances played an important role in the establishment on a lasting basis of the Tokugawa regime. Whatever the disagreements (and in some cases, simply the author's views) on the subject of their relationships with particular boys-les from their early childhood, to ascribe such bonds (and to point a lifelong commitment to them) to illustrous figures in this era was part of a standard biographical scenario.
Western terms and presumably of recent origin. As for the terms “superior spouse” and “inferior spouse” that you mention, they occur in Oka Kanes’iro’s “Gozō mamoji” and were not coined by me. Indeed, there have been from ancient times many examples of this sort of cross-class relationship between men, such as that between the kinsmen Chinese realm and a young common boatman whom he favored above all. . . . During the Warring States period in China such incidents became famous throughout the land and served as precedents for later episodes of this nature. Among analogous anecdotes from our country, there is one about how the Kamiguki Hidetoshi kept stealing glimpses of the young Emperor Go-Yorai and for his sins came to a violent end, though the truth of this is doubtful. . . .

From a somewhat later period there is a tradition that the young Prince Konoe Nobunori (the fourth child of the aforementioned emperor) was so exceedingly comely that Fusushima Masanori, Date Masamune, and Todo Takakatu, among others, made use of such pretext as tea ceremonies to be in his presence. While from today’s point of view it may seem unbelievable, we have no reason to suppose that in any of the historical cases I have mentioned here, whether that of the ancient Chinese king or Prince Konoe, these admiring men flocked to beautiful boys with specific designs on their derrieres. To put it in terms readily understandable today, for all those men who shower expensive presents and money on this or that renowned geisha of Tokyo, there is not one in a hundred who dreams of ascending her mount Venus. Surely, it is rather “but a single word from those lips” they have sought, and if they have been rewarded with so much as a single short verse on paper, this is something they will treasure for a lifetime. To view the expectations of such admirers otherwise is foolish, much like the recent observations of foreign visitors who equate geisha with whores.

On pursuing the late Qing dynasty work entitled Pinko hajisai, concerning romantic attachments between the pretty boy apprentices of the Peking opera troupe and their male patrons, one finds that they mainly exchanged elaborately worded letters; what is mentioned beyond that is only a mutual passion for elegant conversation and tasteful pastimes. It is true, though, that this work also treats of disgusting low types who go after barbers’ apprentices, the sons of laundresses and the like, and describes how they ply the boys with drink and proceed to take liberties, complete with ugly scenes of flying excrement, prolapsed anus, etc. Even in ancient Athens there were illustrious men of high birth who, having gained introductions to beautiful boys and entered into lofty dialogues and poetic exchanges with them, would then carry them off to a certain island where they would sequester them and in extreme cases, descend to gang rape. We see, then, that in many times and places both the pure and the impure ways have been concurrently pursued, as is only to be expected given the coexistence of these two types in the world; and it is further apparent that in some cases both pristine and serdil behavior have been practiced by the same individual.

As for examples in Japan of the sort of Lew conduct with lower-class boys that you mention in your letter, besides the carryings-on with sandalbearers that I referred to previously, there have been extreme cases such as Miyoshi Nagamoto of Awa whose hiring of a handsome era boy as a page was denounced as a harbinger of the collapse of the state. And in Yamaoka Akigama’s Rekomonji, it is related that Hanazono Udaemon Arhibo (a son of the Emperor Go-Sanjö), I believe, whose status was changed to that of a commoner) would look for an opportunity when no retainers were present to order his ox-driver into the carriage and hastily deign to have him. In present-day Paris it seems to be not uncommon for gentlemen to violate their young chauffeurs inside the car. (While the aforementioned episode related by Akigama may be fiction, one imagines such things often happened.)

A few years ago, in 1920, after repeated invitations from Toki Hôryû, the abbot of Mt. Kôya and a friend from my years in London, I made my first visit in thirty years to the Kongôshô temple, taking along a painter of this region named Kawashima Sôhô who had won first prize in that year’s local exhibition. . . . While we made our way to the abbot, mainly for my sake, ordered to be taken from storage and hung before us several paintings brought back from China by Kôbô Daishi. Among them was a large scroll depicting Dainichi Nyorai [Mahâvairocana]. The face was that of a twenty-four- or twenty-five-year-old man, his face of a rosy peach-tinted hue so brilliant (a color achieved, according to Sôhô, through the use of powdered coral) that even after more than a thousand years this Dainichi Nyorai appeared to be alive. There was none of the facial hair normally
depicted in such images and his limbs, both arms and legs, were preternaturally long. Now this is something that would not be apparent to Japanese viewers, but what had been depicted here was clearly the figure of a eunuch (Japan, as you know, never had eunuchs).

In China there were various kinds of eunuchs: those who were mainly used as supervisors in the women's quarters . . . and others who were retained by their lords chiefly for their sexual pleasure. In ancient Persia and other countries it was common for kings to have the sons of vanquished enemy rulers castrated and use them for their pleasure. The beauty most favored by Alexander the Great was not a woman but a eunuch. And the Emperor Nero, so despondent at the death of the Empress Poppea that he was on the verge of taking his own life, discovered in the face of a youth named Sporus the very image of his departed consort. Having had him castrated and transvested, he placed him among the women at court, then proceeded to stage an elaborate ceremony to proclaim the boy empress, at the end of which he openly kissed him to the cheers of the assembled public. . . . The sensibilities and innermost feelings of this [conjugal] type of eunuch were completely different from those of women, on the one hand, or of professional courtesans on the other. (Up until about the time I was born, that is, roughly the beginning of the Meiji era, in India and adjacent countries there were close to 100,000 eunuchs of this general type, each regional group of whom was presided over by a “king” [sic]. They would take husbands to whom they became permanently attached, and in their dress, adornment, and etiquette conducted themselves exactly like women. Given seats of honor and assigned particular roles at various ceremonies, they were well rewarded, such that some of them became quite rich. During their lifetimes it proved impossible to establish whether they were men, women, asexual or hermaphrodites; and so in that sense they posed problems for those societies.) In addition to eunuchs, at the height of the Roman Empire there was a category of people half-male, half-female who were valued by libertines more highly than any other type, so it was said, partly because of their extreme rarity. These were the true hermaphrodites. In addition, there were many sub-categories of receptive male homosexuals.

To describe the true nature of the aforementioned three categories [i.e., in Chinese, Indian and Western antiquity], not to mention women’s nature, is exceedingly difficult. How much more difficult is the task in the case of our country, where none of these types exist today. Indeed, as can be seen in such texts as the preface to *The Cypriotean Garden, Being a Conspicuous of Men-Sea,* by the Melia era (1764-1771) the practice of training young Kabuki actors to play exclusively boy-lover [wakashô] roles had been discontinued. Hereafter onnagata [actors who specialize in female roles] would also play such boy-lover roles as those of Hitari Goempachi and the page-boy Sen’kichi. Today, in the absence of any contemporary models, it would be extremely difficult for you or anybody else, I think, to write fiction about homosexual love which could convey even so much as a pale reflection of the Pure Way of Men.

Three years ago, around October 18, I believe, I set out from home with Umematsu Shigeru . . . who had come to visit from Tokyo, for the Iimpo Forest Preserve in Hidaka County of this province. On the third day Mr. Umematsu returned to Tokyo in order to take part in an imperial ceremony. (I later heard from the villagers of Kusshiro, all of whom had come out to watch him cross the rope bridge suspended over the Hidaka River, how, having advanced with extreme care, when he looked down through the meshes of the rope at the swift torrent far below, he could not help stopping in his tracks for a spell.) I stayed on to sketch local funguses. I had originally intended to examine 200 samples and call it quits, but with no prospect of returning to such a remote mountainous region in my old age, I decided to take 300 samples and stayed on into the winter. The temperature went down to 5° and remained that cold day after day. The waterfall froze solid in mid-air, exfoliated like the tongues of Fudo’s flames in a painting . . . Besides myself there were five forestry department officials staying in the government lodge. And there was a cat that when first offered some bonito flakes looked at them and ran off, but once a few had been stuck into his mouth would come around begging for them. Having turned up one day as a solitary kitten, he had never learned the ways of the world. On calm days he would go down to the river in the valley where he caught and ate a small fish called hit. Since he had never seen a female, he had no sex drive. Once in a while the inhabitants of the lodge would masturbate him, which he found so strange that he let out a freakish yowl. Every morning he got up and went to look around the kitchen, where he sat down beside the blazing fireplace. There he would warm himself at the fire, not moving even when he began to be scooted. While there are tales of how such as Duke Lu-Yang of China and Kiyomori in our country tried to beckon back the setting sun, I have nowhere else seen a cat that plays with fire . . .

Forty-four years prior to this visit (therefore now forty-six years ago), having become feverish and sickly during my stay in Tokyo, I had returned to Wakayama. Since my father was born in Hidaka county and we still had

1 There is a long passage omitted here [Namako shoin, Shokun no sono].
relatives scattered around the region. I went wandering in these parts as a way of recovering my health. At the time there lived in Kita-Shiroya the wealthy family of a country doctor named Hayama. There were then five sons in this family, the oldest named Shigetaro and the next oldest Hanjirō. (The etymology of the name Hayama as you probably know, can be conjectured to derive from its association with the word hayama [a settled mountain slope] as it occurs in the poem "Below the peak of Mt. Tsukuba/though the hamlets flourish/and the mountainside is thickly overgrown_NONE of this has kept me/from falling deeply in love.) On a little hill near the Hayama residence stood a shrine to the "Shiroya Prince," one of the ninety-nine so-called "prince-shrines" strung out along the way from Kyoto down through the Kumano region. It is a very old shrine mentioned in "The Imperial Progress to Kumano" and has long been popularly known as "The Prince of Beauty." Thanks to this, perhaps, the five Hayama brothers, most especially the two oldest, were devastatingly beautiful. While I was still living in Tokyo, Shigetaro, the oldest brother, with my encouragement had come up and, intending to enter Tokyo University, enrolled in a preparatory school (called Dokura Gakujuku or the like) that boarded students in Honjo Miguichi. The principal was an austere man of the old school who forbade the wearing of socks and enforced a regiment in which students endured their cold quarters clad only in padded robes. In the fierce winter of that year Shigetaro, having just arrived from Wakayama, caught a cold that spread to his lungs, and had to be hospitalized at the University. Afterward, he went home to Wakayama, at which point I came to stay with his family. As spring turned into summer, we traveled around together to such local spots as Nakayama Hot Springs. At that time, a lot of students who had gone from this region to study in Tokyo were back for vacation. Given the state of Shigetaro's health, they joined me in persuading the family that in his stead his younger brother should enter the University; and when the time came at summer's end for the students to return to Tokyo, I made a point of coming back to the village to make sure that Hanjirō got off to Tokyo on time. After staying over one night I accompanied him to Wakayama, where the next day I sent him off to Tokyo with the other students. Later I requested of Seki Naeshiro (a former Diet member now in the House of Peers) that he do what he could for him and, through Seki's good offices, did all I could to assure the success of Hanjirō's studies.

For a time I remained in Wakayama, but there was unpleasantness in my family and I decided to go to America. (We were at the time considered one of the two major merchant houses of Wakayama. A year ago, my father having thought it best for my younger brother to marry a daughter from some prominent family in the neighboring province, a lovely, gentle bride was indeed found for him. He was, however, an innately dissolute man, fond of loose "professional" women and spurned the bride so carefully selected by my father, running around indulging himself until he was brought home and made to repent... But in the end he could not be persuaded to stick with an arrangement he did not like, and his relationship with my father went from bad to worse. At this juncture my father indicated an inclination to break with him and establish a new household together with myself, the second son. I heard rumors that a wife was being sought for me. Should that come to pass, I reflected despondently, I would never be able to pursue my studies as I had planned and would end up rotting away as a provincial money-grubber.) Once I'd made my decision to go to America, I was determined to go up to Tokyo to inquire about ships and sail as soon as possible. But first I went to Hidaka to take leave of a few of my relatives there.

It was the very end of October when I spent one night on the second storey of Dr. Hayama's residence, where all of a sudden a great commotion broke out. In response to my inquiry I learned that the doctor's wife, who had by then produced five sons (ranging in age from nineteen down to three) was well along in another pregnancy and had this very day shown signs of being ready to give birth. Well, I thought to myself, there would be little chance of sleep tonight, and I opened the window to gaze out over the sea. Silvery waves were breaking on the tiny island, no more than a shoal, known as Katsuojima; the shore breeze blew softly through the pines; and over the sea shone the moon, half-hidden from view by the foliage. This night would be my last opportunity for the foreseeable future to enjoy the natural beauties of this part of the world. With a heavy heart I wondered about the countless experiences, both interesting and difficult, I would have in the unfamiliar lands I was off to before that distant day when once again I might gaze at this scene... and before I knew it, it was four o'clock in the morning. Just then another commotion arose all over the house: for the first time a girl had been born into this family. With the arrival of the baby, every hour I remained, I realized, would cause an added burden to the household, and so I hastily made my farewells and set forth through the all-encompassing mist that was as yet unseared by the sun's rays. Shigetaro accompanied me as far as the embankment along the Hidaka River (to the very spot where the "Pure Princess" of Dateyä's fame is said to have removed her robe, hung it on a tree, and transformed herself into a snake). As the old adage goes, "even if you accompany your..."
dear friend on the first thousand years of his journey to say farewell, it is still farewell, and so I restrained him from coming any further with me. As we moved off in opposite directions we both kept turning around until we could no longer make each other out in the distance, and were finally parted.

After that I went to the capital whence, after two months of frantic activity, I embarked from Yokohama on "The City of Pekin" (a large ship for those days) for San Francisco. By the time I returned from England, after more than fourteen years of vicissitudes abroad, my parents were no longer in this world, the friends of my childhood now had children of their own, and many to whom I had been close had departed for places unknown. As for the aforementioned Hayama family, the eldest son, having for a time been restored to health, entered Osaka Medical College as a top-ranking student, only to suffer a recurrence of his lung disease within a year and return home where, two years later, he died. The second son, who was sixteen when we parted, lived to the age of twenty-six, becoming a first-class student at the medical school of Tokyo University—also, endowed as he was with the affability of the spectacularly good-looking, "first class" where women were concerned. But just after the Sino-Japanese War, he too fell ill and died. The third, fifth, and sixth sons (this last born while I was abroad) had all proved likewise to be excellent students and had all died as well before reaching thirty, leaving only the fourth son alive.

While abroad I found that American schools were inferior to ours, and the American professors, as might be expected, not worthy of comparison to Europeans. Moreover, I am a person of strong, undiluted opinions and, as I would not yield to the Americans, quarreled with them often. In the end I gave up on schools and studied on my own, reading at libraries and conducting my own field observations.

Once back in Wakayama, since there was nobody at all for me to be happily reunited with (as the wise old poem puts it, "Ah, my native place! Anywhere else you look/pear blossoms in bloom") I went off to Kachiaura in Kumagaya, thence to Nachi, which at that time struck me, just back from England, as more primitive than Kyöto or Shikoku, but where in any case I established my retreat. All year round I wore only a thin yokata with a piece of rope for a sash and tramped around the fields and mountains, my sole possessions being a microscope, pencil, water colors and paper, and my younger brother issued me an allowance of twenty yen per month. I proceeded to spend a long time in these parts, a time that was both lonely and full of delights.

During my sojourn abroad and then my years in Kumagaya, by day or by night, I never forgot for a moment my two friends who were now dead and gone. The images of these Hayama brothers, as well as of my parents, had always been with me, always at my side. Although no words were uttered, they gave me suggestions through what is known as mind-to-mind communication. When in my work I sought out the spots they had suggested to me, I usually found rare specimens. Relying on this process, I spent five or six years wandering through extremely remote, secluded mountains and valleys. The process involved the spontaneous workings of my "subconscious," as it is called, there in the midst of those desolate surroundings.

It sometimes came to me in the form of reversed writing, at other times specific physical phenomena actually materialized; but in either case, the result was that I discovered things I could not otherwise have imagined finding. It is clear from such accounts as are to be found in [W.H.] Myers' writings on paranormal psychology that similar occurrences have happened to foreign naturalists, so I do not consider my experience singular. Whenever I meet people who are skeptical about this sort of thing my only response is to smile, and to pity them for having only read of these matters in books and not experienced them for themselves. [Kumagusu proceeds to reminisce here about two encounters with the Hayama family over the decades since he returned from abroad, the first very brief, the second, which has taken place fairly recently, a true reunion with the surviving members of the brothers and sisters he first met so long ago. At the beginning of his account of this reunion there is a characteristically lengthy digression concerning another figure from his past who happens to reappear briefly in his life on the occasion of his visit with the Hayamas: a prominent scholar of Taoism named Tsunagi Jikisyo (the grandson of a Buddhist temple abbot renowned in Kumagusu's youth as a kind of spiritual mentor to a surprising number of men who went on to distinguish themselves in business and politics, the details of which he also lingeringly over in a way that seems typical of his amicable preoccupation with conventional "success stories"). The translation resumes here with the digression about this scholar.]

Twenty years ago Professor Tsunagi ... came to see me at the height of the summer while I was examining specimens under a microscope in the midst of the charcoal storage room [which, he has mentioned earlier, served as a laboratory in his secluded retreat]. We spoke of many things. It so happened that at the moment I was examining some slime mold under the microscope, and so I showed it to him and explained how its life cycle il-
illustrates the principle set forth in the Nirvana Sutra\(^\text{11}\) so the effect that at the moment when one ephemeral being is extinguished another is created, without interruption, as when a lamp is lighted the darkness is destroyed and when it goes out darkness is created. Similarly, as a sinner approaches death, down in hell one of the infernal order awaits birth; but should the dying sinner recover his strength the half-born child of hell cries out as it is stillborn. Only when at last the sinner dies do the fiendish hordes cry out, loudly proclaiming the safe delivery of a new cohort.

Slime mold in its initial stage attaches itself to rotting trees and dead leaves. Its subsequent progress is as follows: a) after a considerable period during which it is acted upon by the effects of warmth, sunlight, moisture, wind, etc. the mold can no longer remain in its original state; b) the mold extends itself such that its original matter is transformed into either "spores" [spores] or spores that have climbed these stems while, simultaneously, other bits of the original matter turn into spore cases that enfold the spores; c) still other fragments of the original mold are transformed into threads that bind together the spores and spore cases; d) then the spores dry out in the wind, the binding threads become desiccated and break off, whereupon the spore cases break open, releasing the spores into the air, so that at some later date they may resume the original form of the mold and be ready to propagate in other locations. On observing the [penultimate] stage of this process, some might exclaim aloud, Oh! here we have some real slime mold growing. But now let us suppose that before these, spore cases, spores and threads have finished drying, along comes a big storm with much wind and rain. All of a sudden the constituent matter of these features returns to its original form, leaving behind no trace of the spores, etc. Having thus escaped destruction, it lies hidden beneath the

\(^{11}\)Dashuriyacchayag: first translated into Chinese by Dharmanasra in the 5th cent., it was a particularly important sutra in the development of Mahayana Buddhism in East Asia. This lengthy text announces itself as the last "sutra" of the historical Buddha, preserved on the eve of his leaving the world (parinirvana), but proceeds to replace this transitory figure with the eternal and ubiquitous principle of Buddhahood—a state that is further defined as unassimilable to all sentient beings. Although in one of the "dialogues" with various disciples and "discursive" that make up the bulk of the sutra (the one with the First of the historical Buddha's disciples, Kasanadidra) the metaphor of lamps being lighted in a dark room is introduced, the context is quite different from what Kumagusu refers to in this fondly recollected "sitra" of his own. Indeed, while the parallels he draws here between a generalized Buddhist view of transmigration and the life cycle of slime mold are both interesting and convincing to a layman like myself, they appear somewhat misplaced when raised with specific reference to the Nirvana Sutra, which is a locus classicus of the historical period of Mahayana reformulation of both the very conception of Buddhahood and views on the nature of human, suttah, all sentient beings, their relationship to Buddhism, and hence their cycles of life-death-return. But thus I have only been able to consult a popularized synopsis of this work, and as was the case in this original form, leaves and rotting trees, and when good weather returns, extends itself and again forms spores. But once the retransformation into lobes, spore cases, spores and threads is complete, the slime mold itself becomes inert. In this form it exists only to protect the spores for future propagation, lying in wait as it were for the right opportunity to scatter hither and yon. Thus, when the mold is in its original state, if you tell people what it is they dismiss it as so much amorphous, mucous-like liquid, even though in this state it is active while in the form into which it next develops it is in fact dead matter, existing only to protect the spores for the purpose of subsequent propagation. How mistaken people's perceptions can be—to look at dead matter and ignorantly conclude that the mold has grown and become active and yet to consider it virtually lifeless in its original state... Despite this lifeless appearance, the mold has in fact resumed its active life. That even to this day the aboriginal peoples of New Guinea and other places do not think death a cause for sorrow, seeing it rather as a release for human kind from this debased world and a transition to rebirth into the sublime and lofty hereafter—this is not, then, something to scorn...

So it is, I went on to say to Professor Tsumagi, that the self-proclaimed specialists of today, spend their lives bogged down in other people's books, finding this theory plausible, that one not lacking in a few good points... hearily supporting some works, giving some credence to others, as if playing at some game of chance, such that in the end they accomplish nothing whatsoever of practical value. Compared to this, old-fashioned learning, without the pretenses of specialized scholarship of the modern type, yet with a propensity to find provisional resemblances among phenomena; to posit them as such only within the limited scope where they appear to obtain; and further to invoke their observations as convenient metaphors—this old approach did often lead to useful, practical results. [Kumagusu proceeds to invoke a few metaphors of his own, based on botany and zoology, to the effect that Narure like premodern learning, is economical and capable of something like "leaps of logic" in its approach to productivity.]

In a similar vein, take such old adages as "in this world, the two indispensable things for a man are righteous duty and a loincloth"; or "to see what is right or to look at a woman and not to do one's duty are equally spineless." If one scrutinizes such sayings with specialist rigor of course one can poke holes in them and see how they present only superficial perceptions. Yet to discern general principles that are 80% or 90% true for the human and super-terminate realms alike—this was always adequate to satisfy
general human needs. The so-called "esoteric summations" of the Zen school for the most part deployed this type of provisional, imperfect reasoning, yet proved to be of much use to the world.

But concerning the analogies I've suggested to you between the slime mold's life cycle and the philosophical truths for our lives to be found in the Nirvana Sutra, the specialized scholars of today would seek to foreclose any further extrapolations by declaring that slime molds and human beings are not at all the same, thus rendering any observations on the subject totally useless beyond the confines of the scientific discipline.13

The Frenchman Vernoin14 has said that so long as scholarship preoccupies itself with matters remote from what could benefit the world, ordinary people cannot be expected to take note of its findings. To put this another way, if one can stand to keep poking oneself up the ass long enough, it is possible that eventually there will be some lucid secret in the cecem that will yield a bit of pleasure. But rather than going to such extremes only to come up with useless productions, it would surely benefit the world much more to teach excellent precepts like this one, uttered by Mito Yoshimura: "One should rule one's subjects as one makes love to a woman, not as one makes love to a page. For in the former case both partners, the one on top and the one below, find pleasure; in the second case, the one on top enjoys himself, the one below suffers."

And so good priest, I said to him, if you wish to speak of the things of the human world and of hell alike in a homely, readily understandable fashion, you should explain this passage from the Nirvana Sutra in terms of the life-and-death cycle of slime molds. When they listen to you people will forget that slime molds and human beings are different. Yes, yes, they will say, in one thing are all phenomena revealed—this is truly the way of the world. And they will be enlightened in a flash.

Thus spoke I, Kumagassu, in the little charcoal room, to Professor Tsunagi, on whom my words seem to have made a deep impression. Striving mightily to commit them all to memory, with an eye to echoing my sermon faithfully in the future, he stood up and left with nary a word of farewell.

13Gessen: a preface of a sutra's most important points given as a preface to a full-scale lecture on it.
14Cit. Georges Bataille after implying an analogy between the life-reproduction-death cycle of asexual organisms and human beings: "These broad conceptions are not intended to be taken as precise analogies. It is a far cry from ourselves with our self-awareness to the minute organisms in question. I do warn you, however, against the habit of seeing these tiny creatures from the outside only, of seeing them as things which do not exist inside themselves... The distance between diminutive creatures and ourselves is nevertheless considerable... All I meant was to give a clear idea through a kind of reduction ad absurdum of these infinitesimal changes at the very foundations of our life." Exercices: Death & Sensuality (San Francisco: 1986, 14-15).

I recall from the work Kokyozen how when Sai Konron was preaching to devotees at the imperial court, one lady was so transported by the sublime truths he expounded that she became unable to speak, went numb all over, even seemed to have stopped breathing—was, in fact, to all appearances dead. Whereupon the Master said, "Like this woman shall you all become Buddhas in the here and now," or something to that effect. And this is exactly how Professor Tsunagi looked when he got up and left me that day in complete silence. [The author now returns to his account of an overnight visit, in the recent past, to the household of the Hayama sister, now Mrs. Yamada, who had been born on the last night of his stay with her family many years ago, on the eve of his departure for Yokohama and America.]

The whole clan assembled and we went to visit the Hayamas' ancestral home. Of the original six brothers and two sisters in the generation I knew, the two girls had married into families named Yamada and Yamakawa, and only the fourth boy, named Yoshiki, survived. His wife had died the previous year. When I visited the family just before leaving for America, Yoshiki had been only six years old. There had been quite a racket. I recalled, when he knocked his little brother (then three years old) on the head in the midst of a fight over a frog, and I helped to restore peace by giving them toys I'd brought along. And now he was fifty years old. I expressed to him my regret over our having been out of touch for so long and listened attentively to his childhood memories of his brothers. The window on the second story room which, long ago, I had gazed at the sea and the moon shining through the pines remained intact.

In this world where all has changed/so utterly changed for me
What joy? that the wind still murmurs/amidst the pines

I wrote this on seeing that the ancient pines I had gazed at on that night had not faded in the slightest, and the breeze still whispered all around me as before. Then, at long last, we went together to pay our respects at the aforementioned shrine of "the Prince of Beauty." So-called civilization had, it appeared, reached even to the recesses of this remote countryside. The sacred groves of yesteryear had all been felled, and in their place had been planted many-petalled "peony-cherries," cosmos, and other showy flora of the kind displayed at horticultural tourist attractions. It was as if the figures of Matsukaze and Murasame, in their classic pose of sweeping brine from the sea, had been replaced with modern-day bathing beauties.15

15Co-protagonists in the no play Matsukaze (ascribed to Seami), they are beautiful sisters, once lovers of the long-dead Hizen poet-courtier Yukihira, whose ghostly existence as they continue to "piss" (the meter in the name Matsukaze means both positive and to year) for Yukihira are portrayed as thoroughly intertwined with the natural surroundings.
—not very appealing. That morning the whole shoreline was enshrouded
in fog, which as we approached the shrine hid its precinct from view as well.
It put me in mind of how, forty-four years ago, I had parted in the midst
of fog from Mrs. Yamada's oldest brother, who saw me off as far as
Amada before the break of day.

That early morning fog/all around us as we parted
Saying only “Never forget!”—This morning I feel it in my bones.

I wrote this on a piece of paper and handed it to the fourth brother. When
we reached the shrine, I asked him to present it to his older brother's
spirit. . . . The author goes on to conclude his account of this visit with
the Yamada and Hayama families, and to relate at some length how, just
after his return home, he received an invitation from Dr. Kintaro Kôtarô,
head of the biology laboratory at the imperial palace, to present a lecture
to the Emperor concerning his research on slime molds, on the occasion
of an impending imperial visit to the Wakayama region. In a virtual panic
over this unforeseen performance—and well aware of his capacity
for offending people, sometimes quite unwittingly—he tells how he ur-
gently appealed to Mrs. Yamada to pray for his success in this undertaking,
and to do so as a kind of surrogate for her late brother, whom Kumagusu
consistently portrays as his guardian deity. That all did in fact go well with
his lecture on board the imperial yacht some months later, he attributes to
Mrs. Yamada's compliance with his request. Indeed, she went well beyond
the terms of his request, journeying to the seashore location closest to
where the imperial yacht was anchored offshore and prayed fervently for
the duration of Kumagusu's stay on board.

In one of the Hakamisensu's books there is a story about a boy whose
good looks and fine character set him far above the common herd. Con-
tinuously impertinent by admirers, he is greatly perturbed and goes to call
on a young samurai whose conduct has always been above reproach. "Please
be my older brother," he begs him, "and save me from these dangers."
At first the samurai politely declines, but on seeing how truly overwrought
the boy has become, he can't bear to refuse any longer. As promised, he
doesn't let anybody lay a finger on the boy. But there comes a time when
a new admirer somehow or other manages to approach the boy. The man
insists that he is totally innocent of any evil intention, and proceeds to grind
his tea cup into little pieces between his teeth. Both the boy and his samurai
protector are overwhelmed by this display and conclude that the man is
thoroughly sincere. I once heard from a now deceased friend, who at-
tributed this to the late Baba Tatsui, that in Tosa, much as in the ancient
Greek city-states, when a boy was reaching the prime of his early youth his
parents and older brothers would approach some upright-seeming samurai
and formally request his protection. Assuming that the samurai who ac-
ccepted such a role proved trustworthy, the boy's safety would be assured.
In my native Wakayama this tradition of "The Way of Men" did not ex-
ist, and in the rare instance where something along these lines appears
to have happened, it turns out to have been based on lust. I do believe,
though, that in regions where the old samurai code took root things hap-
pened more or less as Baba maintained. According to the historian [Henry]
Hallam, in the Western Middle Ages when chivalry was in force, while
much lip service was paid to the Love of Noble Maidens, there was in fact
a great deal of promiscuous sexual behavior. Although there may be some
truth to this assertion, if chivalry had actually been nothing but a pretext
for promiscuity, it would have led to complete social anarchy, and the
whole code would have gone to pieces in a year's time.

Although it so happens that this year I have not once "shared the con-
jugal bed" with my wife it is obvious from the fact we have had two chil-
dren that she and I have often slept together. Even in the age when the
warrior code [Bushido] was so strongly in force that, as we have seen, older
samurai would risk their very lives to protect boys entrusted to their care
(as was the case in the civilian life of ancient Greece, governed by a simi-
lar ethic), the sharing of a heterosexual conjugal bed was, I believe, the
universal rule. This is very much part of the Pure Way of Men. That even
those who have studied these matters enough to perceive the ideal prin-
ciples involved—need not speak of the common views of vulgar people—
still revile these traditions as evil, unclean, immoral, impure, etc. is no
doubt because they have only understood one half of what they have read
and not the other. In my own life, I believe that I owe my success on the
occasion of my command performance before the Emperor, something for
which I was neither worthy nor prepared, to the fervent prayers of Mrs.
Yamada, who acted in this capacity in place of her departed brother, he
with whom I shared my heart.

Though in my declining years (I am sixty-five), poor and dependent on
others to raise funds for me, and with a wife and two children who suffer
from various afflictions, I have managed to continue my biological
research. All the while there has been a steady stream of visitors, some
wishing to pay their respects, some with particular inquiries. But I have
refused them all. For at my age, even more precious to me than money is
time, of which I am very jealous. I beseech you, then, to make do for now
with this letter, meant for your eyes only, and not to cause me to lose any
more time. It is past dawn now and I must conclude here. In the course of
writing this letter I have let spoil three containers full of fungus samples.

. . . But one cannot be bothered about such things if one wants to discuss
serious matters with someone on paper and truly get one's point across. So
please rest assured that I have no regrets.

Anyone who is totally unaware of the kinds of things I have written about here, or is incapable of understanding them, will certainly not be able to comprehend the traditional Way of Men. Taine has emphasized that in our approach to the past, if we do not enter into the individual characters and the social life of a given era, if we do not in fact enter into the spirit of that time, it is pointless simply to chronicle events of long ago. On the subject that we have been discussing, to denounce such experiences as in general impure, immoral, scald and irrational—when the Way of Men is nothing more or less than true friendship, one of the five central relationships—is to goander to vulgar conventional opinion. Those who do so are not only incapable of any serious work on this subject. Moreover, they are the sort whose work on any subject whatsoever will never amount to more than parroting the vulgarities in which they have immersed themselves. . . . [Despite having declared that he is signing off above, he continues to hold forth here at some length and with much animus on the subject of the shallowness of contemporary scholars and men of letters. After a digression on the increasing sloppiness of scholars of Western cultures, he pointedly raises the matter of some malicious remarks in a recent issue of "Criminology," a periodical with dubious scholarly pretensions in which the young Iwata, having little choice, published much of his early work on the history of homosexuality. The self-serving, philistine remarks Kumagawa quotes below, were clearly directed against Iwata himself.]

There are of late many things among the pronouncements of Japanese writers and scholars that I simply cannot understand. To give only one example, in a recent number of "Criminology," there was a piece by someone or other about the spectacle of both young would-be kabuki actors and especially actual apprentice actors hanging around the parks of Tokyo and offering sexual favors to foreigners. . . . In the introduction the author begins by saying, "This article describes the contemporary reality of kabuki boys' prostitution, and as such deserves to be called living scholarship. It is not just another batch of little bits dug up from dusty old books and strung together with incomprehensible nitwitteds"—or something to this effect. . . . I have never encountered a case in America or Europe in which editors allow a previously published article to be subjected to an attack of this sort in the very same publication. But for some time now Japanese editors have seen nothing wrong with such practices, large numbers of them being quite capable of reading one thing in a certain frame of mind, another in quite a different frame of mind, and in any case not wishing to trouble themselves with making judicious decisions. . . . There ensues here a lengthy account of the death of the fourth, and only surviving, Hayama brother, and of his apparition that Kumagawa describes as having appeared to him in the night a time he later ascertains to be within moments of his death; also a further choleric outburst against his younger brother, the heir to the family fortunes.]

Were you to say to me, "If there is in our world today even a single example of the Pure Way of Men, show him to me." I would venture to reply that precisely in order to show you that I am that single example I have written this letter, both in great haste and at great length. My penmanship is poor and even I cannot read what I have written here. But to send it as is, without revision or adornment bears further witness to the truth of all I have told you. . . . Perhaps you are snickering at me for having written of these strange experiences at such length, in the meantime neglecting the important work that I should have been doing on my fungus samples—for, indeed, wasting a prodigious amount of time and effort. That I have gone on at this length about trivial matters, to the point of incurring the derision of even someone like yourself who is not a fellow biologist, is all because of my propensity for loving friendship. Anybody who would scorn this could only do so because he himself has no first-hand experience of what I've spoken of and can feel nothing on hearing of another's. . . . As the late Herbert Spencer observed, there is nobody who on crossing a bridge and seeing a child fall into a river does not feel some pity. But those who will dive into the water and try to rescue the child are but one in a hundred; and if you ask such a person about his past, you are sure to learn that either he himself once almost drowned or had a close relative who died in this way—a rather obvious but true observation.

Thus any attempt to write a novel based on the Way of Men as it existed hundreds of years ago is extremely challenging, is, in fact, doomed to result in some cheap travesty (like those little so-called "wham-bam" pornography books), that is, if the would-be author does not possess the kind of experience I have described and the authority it confers. If one wants to write about the Pure Way of Men, one must first read intensively about ancient Greece and delve deeply into works related to Bushido in Japan. And on the other hand one is content to approach the topic (as do Sakai Kiyoshi and Umehara what's-his-name) as simply one variety of erotic pleasure, it will end up sounding a lot like heterosexual relations, but of a debased, twisted nature; nothing more.

Lately my eyes and hands have ceased to work the way they did ten years ago. For me to have written such a long letter as this is like some plant that has thrived for a long time yielding one last fruit. I've written it, rough as it is, because I have been moved by your work, the result of your long, patient labors, and by my own youthful experience to which it has some relevance.
From Iwata Jun’ichi to Minakata Kumagusu
August 27, 1931

This letter begins with a very lengthy, convoluted apology, accompanied by much self-justification, for having sent to the editors of "Criminology" a copy of the passage in Kumagusu's previous letter where he inveighs against their being printed in the pages of the same journal a thinly veiled attack on Iwata's article. (In a letter omitted from this selection, Kumagusu has sternly taken Iwata to task for this breach of confidence, perhaps, we may imagine, because as he elsewhere makes clear, he does not wish to have made public in any way his interest in the history of Japanese homosexuality.) Iwata also apologizes here for having put so many trivial questions to Kumagusu and worries that he may have given his correspondent the impression he is engaged, not in serious scholarship, but the "idle pastimes of a dilettante."

I have read three times over the splendid long letter that you were recently so kind as to send me. Please allow me to say that this account of actual events in your life, in which can be discerned what a beautiful friendship truly is, has moved me more than any work of fiction possibly could. On reading it, in particular the passage about your parting from your friend on the banks of the Hidaka River, I could not help wanting to know further details—beyond the brief description of the farewell, I wanted to hear the words of your conversation together then. It grieves me to think how esthetically obtuse you must find me for having touched so often onordid matters in my letters. But while it is true that part of me has a predilection for lower-class boys, so much so that impulses in that direction come to mind on the slightest provocation, I believe I have another side that is capable of entering into true friendship and not hopelessly impeded or satisfied by base impulses. In this connection, as I mentioned in passing in an earlier letter, there is someone with whom I have a beautiful friendship, but if I were to speak of it here it would take too much time. It is a very complex relationship, not so much in terms of particular events as psychologically complex, and so I would like to find a more tranquil time to discuss it with you in an open, leisurely manner.

There is one point that I do not fully understand. No doubt I am falling into petty argumentation, as is my wont, but is it really possible to equate a beautiful homosexual love with relationships which can be defined, in conventional terms, as "true friendship"? According to received opinion, true friendship indeed qualifies as one of the "five ethical relationships/five constancies." But does this admit of homosexual love? Most friendships are adventitious and in the end come down to a question of mutual self-interests, yet there are certainly others that cannot be so described. Is it possible that friendships in this other category are partly based on perceptions of beauty as well? Or are they from their inception rooted in spiritual love? Clearly, received opinion will accept and praise as worthy of the five central relationships those friendships that are both conceived and continued on the basis of spiritual love alone. But in the case of homosexual love, there would appear to be the added requirement of an attraction based on outward, physical beauty. The actual love between friends in the Sengoku period should be seen, I think, as having been realized through the conjunction, as in a perfect circle, of both spiritual love and a love inspired by physical attraction. Moreover, it would seem to be the case that as a later period impurities crept in, so that eventually those relationships came to be viewed by the world as a kind of vice; and when this vice became rampant, the true Way of Young Men (bushido) came to an end. (There is, for example, an account in "The Grand Design for Wise Riders and Loyal Ministers" of how Hosokawa Sanraku put a stop to an infatuation between two of his retainers.) While the world will accept as "true friendships" those in which two men bend together out of regard for each other's spiritual beauty, without any mutual physical attraction, if something occurs between them that causes them both to desire a complete fulfillment of their beautiful friendship, will the world still praise this as worthy of the five ethical relationships?

Finally, are homosexual love and what received opinion calls friendship —a spiritual love without calculations of self-interest—the same? If so, is this because from ages past the company of those who have enjoyed friendship, so defined, has for the most part been made up of men given to Pure Homosexual Love? But then it may be that my posing of this question simply goes to show that I have failed to understand fully the meaning of Pure Love. I am not asking here for some sort of checklist in which various conditions are set forth as sine qua non for pure homosexual love and others as pertaining only to regular friendship. Still, I find myself wondering if there is not present in homosexual love, by which I do mean pure love, some sensual vulnerability (at least in the initial stages) on the part of one friend or the other. Most of the sources we have for the events of the Sengoku period come from the ensuing Tokugawa era, the heyday of impure man-sex, and the majority of them pose great difficulties to those of us who, from our present day point of view, would seek their true meaning. At the very least, however, one might expect to find in accounts by writers who lived through the transition from Sengoku to Tokugawa many com-

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1 More commonly known as Hosokawa Tadaoki (1563-1645), he took part in Hideyoshi's 1590 invasion of Korea and was married to Hosokawa Garahito (Gracia), an indent Christian who perhaps had some role in his professing the practice of "the Way of Young Men" among his retainers (a position that would appear especially anomalous for the sixteenth period to his work, whose age-graded homosexual bonds were more at his institutionalized from some fairly early in the medieval period).
memoraries on the true Way of Men, including passages where they recall how things used to be and deplore the flabby, gaudy going on of the present day. I have, in fact, only recently come to realize that Arai Hakuseki's *Rentenkansu* could be a reliable source in this context... [Iwata closes with still more apologies for his pernicious conduct in having tried to use Kumagusu's private observations as a rebuttal of his critic in "Criminology."]

From Minakata Kumagusu to Iwata Jun'ichi, August 31, 1931

I am delighted to see in your most recent that from my previous letter you have acquired a proper understanding of the distinction to be made in treating of love among men between the pure and the impure.

You refer in your letter to such matters as good looks and age, but where our topic is concerned these are of no consequence. In places like North Africa (Algeria, Egypt, etc.) where homosexuality thrives, they pay no attention to age limits. (It is their custom to remove their facial hair so that it does not grow back, to dress in a manner indistinguishable from women, and in some cases to enlarge the anus to the size of a vagina, occasionally going so far as to grow a clitoris... In China, eunuchs served in a role no different from that of female concubines to a ripe old age, and when they died were even buried with their "husbands," just as legitimate wives and concubines were.) On the subject of looks, there is the old adage "I'd rather have them good in bed then pretty," and among blacks it is very common for their bodies to generate a lot of internal heat, and for the flesh to be so pliable that it can be easily twisted and turned as much as one likes. Provided that they possess such desirable traits, men with misshapen, downright ugly features are if anything more sought after than others. In Turkey, China, and especially in the Roman Empire, Persia, and India, there were many men who, already having both wives and concubines, then progressed to sex with men. In contrast to young boys, they had already acquired much experience in the so-called arts of the bedroom with their women, and so were unbridled in their diverse interests. (The 17th-century Frenchman [J.B.] Tavernier tells us that while he was visiting Persia, there was a case of a married man who was killed for refusing another man's vigorous advances, and whose wife in turn avenged him by slaying his attacker. Such tales have been told in Japan as well, at least in fiction.)

Though there were no eunuchs in Japan, in the course of my visits to Mt. Koya, which took place up until about 1882, I often heard from former acolytes there, now old men, how when they were attending senior monks in the bedroom they would have strapped around their upper thighs small triangular-shaped cushions of velvet that pressed down hard on their penises. (In Europe they employed similar devices, to the point where the penis went limp and lost its normal function.) On Mt. Koya, then, the frontal position was the established one, and since on these occasions the acolytes were short underskirts of a double thickness, they would have moved their bodies in the same way as girls, so I gathered. Apart from the absence of breasts, acolytes and novices (or "nemeses") as they were dubbed were indistinguishable from girls; and even the nomenclature for them as they progressed through various stages (*chijo, misai, nansho*) mirrored that of the girls in the pleasure quarters (*muuse, shiroye, shoshima*), with a different style of clothing for each stage. Thus they functioned quite analogously to wives and concubines. Up until around 1882, the abbey of the temple on Mt. Koya would pay a visit to our house accompanied by a low-ranking monk. He had about him the aura of a feudal lord. Now, having reached the highest honorary clerical rank, he lives in retirement at the main temple of Miyajima in Aki. In the meantime it would appear that he has indeed reached great enlightenment, as he has gone and married a blest stocker who made a lot of money painting in the *bakugama* style. Apparently on Mt. Koya there were also cases known as "widowed young men" who, having literally loved their head priests to death, seized their assets and positions and proceeded to rob the cradle themselves, to the great discomfort of the temple's lay congregation.

In the Ashikaga-period collection "Tales From Kwashimizu" it is related that the Vice-Governor of Hitachi, a married man who had also had an illicit affair with an older woman (she later became Empress), was favored by the love of the then Regent's heir-apparent. Although this comes from a work of fiction, we may assume that such relationships were not uncommon in that period, as in these times no one would have read stories made up out of whole cloth. In this account, the man in love with Hitachi-no-suke sings his praises by comparing him to the guardian deity Aizen Myōō (Sanskrit: Rāgarāja). This deity is analogous to Eros, the Greek god of love, and was originally worshiped as the divine patron of love between men... But in the depictions of Aizen Myōō he appears much more ferocious than Eros. For all the fervency of this deity's images, it is clear that during the Ashikaga there was a wide-spread preference for boys who were gentle and refined. (We also know from the diaries of this period, 1A chronology of events in the domain of 337 different diaries, covering the years between 1660 and 1680.

1Here and in the ensuing passage there are a number of passing slang words used by the monks apropos of their acolyte-layers most of which I have not attempted to reproduce.

2Roughly translatable as young boy, "greenhorn," and book-keeper (a looby function apparently assigned to adolescent monks).

3One of several age-graded categorization of girls/women applied to prostitutes in the pleasure quarters of the Edo (Tokugawa) period, then to geisha of a later era.
however, that there were not a few cases of acolytes and novices committing murder...

[A. J.] Symonds, the distinguished British man of letters whom I mentioned in my first letter, in spite of frequent rumors to the effect that he was quite the lady's man, maintained vigorously that from an ethical point of view there is nothing whatsoever reprehensible about homosexuality. He privately published two essays on this subject at his own expense, in numbered editions both of which I have copies of in my possession. On the basis of a detailed inquiry into the practices of well-known [contemporary] homosexuals, he concludes in these essays that anal sex formed no part of the more sincere, committed kind of bonding between men; rather, that moments of heightened emotion in a relationship of this nature are sealed with nothing more than an embrace. (I am reminded in this connection of Miramura Gentatsu's account of how he once went and paid for a prostitute only to find that, though of course she was his for the taking, he was overcome by pity and could not bring himself to do anything. This reaction strikes me as both commendable and believable, but of course there would be many small-minded men who would refuse to believe it and insist on demanding the "real story" behind his behavior with such questions as "How many times did you do it with your wife the night before? Was she satisfied?" etc.)

In the Agama scriptural corpus, which was probably compiled about a hundred years after death of the historical Buddha, there is a passage in which a heavenly prince (or more literally, a "heavenly child") appears at night in the quarters of the arhats and listens to them expounding on the dharma, then in turn preaches to them on the subject of sacred hymns. In Japan, as part of the process in which various native deities came to be linked to those that came in with Buddhism, the original handsome figure of the "heavenly child" gave rise to flourishing cults of various "young princes" ([Nyaku-oji] and the like). And these cults became, I believe, the very foundation of the Way of Men (witness the poem ascribed to the figure known as "the Boy who belonged to Two Mountain Gods") to the effect of "Try though I will to bear the thought/that you have pledged to another/the same vows pledged to me/I cannot restrain my tears").

In order to learn about these matters you should begin by studying the representations of the young bodhisattva Manjusri [Japanese: Monju] and the various sacred boy-princes of Mt. Hiei and Kannon, as depicted in both painting and sculpture.

In any case, you must never lose sight of the distinction between the pure and the impure, and should devote yourself to refining your whole outlook on this point. As with the saying that "to the boundless ocean of Buddhism, faith is the single point of entry," so is a single-minded faith vital to all important undertakings. To approach any worthwhile project off the top of your head, so to speak, will not yield any profound results.

At last we have been visited here by unmistakable harbingers of autumn, so I am busier than ever with my fungus sketches and must sign off here.

From Iwata Jun'ichi to Minakata Kumagusu,
September 2, 1931

Since it seems that you are busier than ever with your research, for the time being I have resolved to avoid writing any more letters filled with questions, and you may just throw this one away as soon as you've read it if you like. Thanks to your generous and illuminating comments in your most recent on the subject of the pure and the impure in the Way of Men, the points about which I raised doubts in my last letter are now clear to me. I feel that I have hitherto been too literal-minded to grasp the full meaning of various things you have written to me. For instance, in reading what you wrote in your letter received today about the Emperor Kammu and his admirer Sugiyama, I realize that through failing to take into account your oblique style of presenting such material—the way you eschew crude directness—I have initially registered only the superficial meaning of your words, with the result that I come up with the kind of foolish questions I have put to you in previous letters. In this light, now that I have read over once again the long letter you sent me before the last one, your true meaning has become lucid and the things set forth there completely clear to me.

The initial motivation for my research on man-love had nothing whatsoever to do with any interest on my part in the impure side of these matters. Rather, I began my studies out of a sense of joyous awe at the mystery of Platonic love. (What the motives might be of those who in our times write about things erotic and grotesque, I have no idea, but to be judged as in such works would be most distracting to me.) It is, however, true that in the course of my studies I have come to learn about vulgar matters pertaining to the impure aspects of this topic, and have taken them in along with everything else—perhaps because part of my sensibility is in fact drawn to these things. Given this background, when I enter into discussions of homosexuality, it seems that along with the pure, I always speak also of the impure; and although my spirit is not hopelessly mired in the impure...
alone, when I write on this topic such matters inevitably come up; and then my imagination and powers of conjecture often run away with me. That is why, then, I have often written to you in this vein in my previous letters, for which I must apologize to you profusely. If, however, someone were to urge upon me a choice between the pure and the impure where the Way of Men is concerned—not that it would ever be possible for me to be ruled exclusively by one or the other for a lifetime—I would certainly declare myself without a moment's hesitation in favor of the pure. And this response would come from my true nature, not out of any attempt to defer to your estimable opinions on this subject.

Be our true natures what they may, though, for the sake of discussion there are all kinds of things we may feel free to raise on this topic. In my most recent I read with great interest your observations on the homosexual practices at the Kōya monastery, all of which is new and very useful to me. Concerning your remarks on the monks' impure activities, the business about restraining the boys' penises and taking them frontally, I once heard from a certain impure homosexual in Tokyo that there too the frontal position, chest to chest, has been the preferred practice, with a wad of bleached cotton used as a restraint during intercourse. Likewise I've heard that among the rent-boys of Shanghai it is the custom to render their penises completely inoperable when offering sex (this last, I should say, is only hearsay on my part, not based on any first-hand research). On the other hand, in the Nagasaki region, according to what I've learned from the novelist Hirayama Ashie, who comes from there, penetration from behind is the proper approach, while the frontal position is thought to betray a demeaning attitude toward one's partner. I wonder on reflection if this distinction in Nagasaki is not similar to the emotional differentiation evident in heterosexual practices between conjugal relations and recreational sex with whores. If my information is correct, perhaps we may suppose that, at least in the southwestern regions, and as was the case in the thirteenth century, and as there as well, it is one of the most important questions of our possession, that I have not yet heard from you anything about why you have made a point of collecting in this area. When you have the opportunity, please give me some idea of how you came to take up this particular interest. . . .

I have only written this letter as an inadequate expression of gratitude for your most recent, and in order just to pay my respects. Please forgive me for my usual chummy style of writing. And please look after your health, which is of the utmost importance with your condition. On reading over yet again your long epistle from a couple of letters ago, even someone like me cannot help feeling a deep, personal grief. Do, please, write again and do not concern yourself about your penmanship (I have no trouble making out all of the words), sentence structure, and the like. I only beseech you to keep writing whenever the spirit moves you and to impart to me some of your wisdom.

1An episodic narrative dating from the mid-thirteenth century, two chapters in length. One of the earliest monogatari to have a warrior-class hero and to be set in the eastern provinces, it relates episodes in the life of Iye-nō-kami, most of them having to do with homosexuality and, by and large, unhappy love affairs.

2Iwara presumably means to mention J.A. Symonds here, whom Kumagau has cited in previous letters for his essays on homosexuality in Greek antiquity and late nineteenth-century England, not the critic and poet Arthur Symons.