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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by James Allan Wren entitled "The Greek Ideal in Mishima Yukio's Apure Novels." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

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THE GREEK IDEAL IN MISHIMA YUKIO'S APURE NOVELS

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ABSTRACT

Written during a ten-year period, from 1946 to 1956, Mishima Yukio's apure novels--Confessions of a Mask, Thirst for Love, Forbidden Colors, The Sound of Waves, and The Temple of the Golden Pavilion--set the stage for the canon of his works thereafter and demonstrate a significant knowledge of Greece and the Greeks. Essentially, Mishima appropriates a sense of male beauty from classical Greek models, yet because of his particular socio-historical context--national despondency and feelings of alienation plagued postwar Japan--this appropriation becomes ambivalent. That is, while Mishima seems to endorse the values of Greek depictions of homosexuality--its redemptive possibility--he simultaneously undermines them. His homosexuality attracts him to the ancient Greeks; his social identity, to the modern Japanese. And in a desperate search for a separate and personal world of homosexual beauty, he finds male beauty, and underneath this male aesthetic lurks nihilism. Herein lies the key, that tension between the Greek ideal and the nihilistic, not only to his works but, also, just as importantly, to his life and his death.

A NOTE ON JAPANESE NAMES

Followed throughout this thesis is the Japanese practice of referring to Japanese persons by their surnames followed by their given names (e.g., Kawabata Yasunari), rather than in the usual Western order. There are two important exceptions concerning Japanese names that should be noted. First, after an author's death, he is often referred to by his given name only (e.g., Ogai for Mori Ogai, Saikaku for Ihara Saikaku). Second many Japanese writers use a pen name, their go, rather than their family name (e.g., Mishima Yukio, rather than Hiraoka Kimitake).

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INTRODUCTION

Much like dominoes toppling one onto another, a series of closely related events--Perry's arrival in 1853 and the Restoration of imperial power under the Emperor Meiji in 1868, for example--culminated in numerous changes for Japan. Ironically, the introduction of European literature renewed interest in a novel form. Prior to this time, Japanese literature had begun to stagnate, had used and reused old devices until they became trite. Hungry for new forms, plots, and themes, novelists eagerly embraced the new literature.¹ Such reasons, however, do not adequately explain why contemporary Japanese authors continue to identify with works like those of such prominent Western writers as de Maupassant, Zola, Lawrence, Joyce, Camus, Sartre, or Mann, to mention but a few. A better explanation for this phenomenon is that Western works explore a modern universal metaphysical dilemma: contemporary man, frequently feeling trapped, isolated, burdened by anxiety, must search for solutions to his perplexing situation.² As S. M. Schreiber aptly notes about such novels,³

¹For a brief but informative text on the subject of early Western influences upon the Japanese novel, see Donald Keene, Modern Japanese Novel and the West (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 1963).

²Hence, we see the historical preference for the term modernization to Westernization, a distinction often made and yet often disingenuous.

³S. M. Schreiber, Introducción a la critica literaria (Barcelona: Nueva Collección Labor, 1971), p. 152.

novela contemporánea que es proponga todo y sobre todo entretenernos "contándonos una interesante historia" conforme al viejo estilo del novela tiene tanto de novela moderna como lo que puede tener de arquitectura moderna una inglesia neogótica o una villa que un agente de bolsa y cambio se mande construir en estilo Tudor. Una novela sólo es moderna, como contradistinta de contemporánea, si, o bien a imitación de las de Joyce y Virginia Woolf, rechaza enteramente la narración cronológica directa substituyéndola por alquin otro procedimiento, o bien, aunque cuente una historia, la cuenta de diferente modo, de resultas de los experimentos que se sequieron a la puestra en cuestión de la forma tradicional de la novela. . . .

It is not surprising, then, that Japanese novelists should seek similar solutions from the West.⁴ This is obvious not only in the works of such lesser-known postwar authors as Sina Rinzo, Noma Hiroshi, and Ooka Shohei,⁵ but in the works of Japanese Nobel Laureate Kawabata Yasunari as well.⁶ And although it is equally obvious that Mishima Yukio borrowed heavily from Western traditiona--he read much of world

⁴For a summary of Japanese society and the West, see Ross E. Mouer and Yoshio Sugimoto, "'Internationalization' and Ideology in Japanese Society," presented on 30 June, 1981, at Kwansei Gakuin Daigaku (Kobe, Japan) to the Conference on the Internationalization of Japan. Copies of this essay are available from the Griffith University School of Modern Asian Studies or from the La Trobe University Department of Sociology, both of which are in Melbourne, Australia.

⁵The works of Shina Rinzo show the influences of Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Dostoevski, the French Existentialists, and Christianity. Noma Hiroshi's works depend upon the French Symbolists and communism, though his most important Western influence, seen in his Kibachi (The Wasp, 1946), reflects the paintings of Bruegel. Ooka Shohei's works are modeled after the psychological novels of Stendhal and Radiguet.

⁶Kawabata Yasunari's novels and short stories bear the influence of the Bible, Whitman, Woolf, Forster, Williams, and Faulkner. For a brief discussion of Kawabata's Western influences, see Chris Brockett, "Approaches to Contemporary Japanese Novels in Translation," in Center News: The Journal of the Japanese Studies Center and the Japan Foundation, VIII (August 1983), 4,5.

literature, classical and modern, while a youth--it is not always clear in what manner he did so.

There is much evidence to support the fact that Mishima was widely read in Western literature, from the Ancients--Plato and Aristotle--to the moderns--James Joyce and Thomas Mann--while in the Peers School. And although modern Western writers speak to themes which concern him, he, nonetheless, early in his career, is influenced by the ancient Greeks. Such an influence stems from two reasons: ancient Greece simultaneously tolerated homosexual behavior and placed necessary stress on the arts, a situation alien to postwar Japan. Thus, in the ancient Greeks, Mishima finds a means by which to deal with a defeated Japan, his homosexuality, and his personal need to create art. Because of his complex situation, he is drawn to Greek art: using the framework of myth, he evolves a concept of beauty through his pure form apure novels.

Between 1905 and 1935, a clear division in Japanese literature into popular and pure forms developed.⁷ Popular literature ordinarily is that which is written for mass appeal, whereas pure literature ordinarily seeks an educated elite as its audience. For the most part, Mishima's writings fall under the latter category, although he did produce a number of works for a mass readership. These writings differ only slightly in style and content from Akutagawa Ryunosuke's pure works. This thesis will concern itself with Mishima's pure form

⁷For an anthology of popular literature, see Ukiyo, ed. Jay Gluck (New York: Grosset's Universal Library, 1963).

apure novels. Written during a ten-year period, from 1946 to 1956, these works include Confessions of a Mask, Thirst for Love, Forbidden Colors, The Sound of Waves, and The Temple of the Golden Pavilion. First and foremost, these novels set the stage for the canon of his works thereafter and demonstrate a significant knowledge of Greece and the Greeks. The apure novels, in short, define early in his career an evolving standard of beauty based upon the ideal Greek male form. Mishima presents through this concept of beauty--initially a very physical one--a complete notion of his homosexuality. This ideal also serves to quiet his anxieties concerning his sexual orientation. Later, however, his definition of beauty begins to take an abstract form. Particularly in The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, his notion becomes an artistic avenue, as Miyoshi Masao and Yamanouchi Hisaaki note, for the exploration of man's modern sense of alienation, whether rooted in homosexuality or elsewhere.⁸ His later works, written from 1957 to 1970, owe a great debt to these apure novels.

In order to demonstrate this development of Mishima's dualistic concept of beauty through Greek myths and allusions for a postwar Japanese audience, it is necessary to discuss the four stages of development, each of which deals with his evolving concept. Chapter I concerns itself with Mishima's artistic influences and places him within the context of postwar literature. Chapter II defines Mishima's

⁸For a discussion of Mishima and man's alienation, see Miyoshi Masao, Accomplices of Silence: The Modern Japanese Novel (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1974), pp. 154-55; and Yamanouchi Hisaaki, The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature (London: Cambridge University Press, 1978), p. 141.

early concept of beauty, as seen in his first two apure novels, Confessions of a Mask and Thirst for Love. Chapter III, dealing with the final three apure novels, Forbidden Colors, The Sound of Waves, and The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, traces this evolving definition to its roots, a duality of the Greek ideal merging with a postwar Japanese sense of despondency and nihilism. And Chapter IV, using an archetypal approach, analyzes Mishima's use of Greek myth and its relationship to his aesthetic. The thesis concludes by placing the apure novels within the greater context of his writings and acknowledges his debts to both the ancient Greeks and the modern Japanese.

CHAPTER I

"HEAVEN MUST THEN HAVE BEEN FILLED WITH BEAUTIFUL YOUTHS":

MISHIMA YUKIO AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIS GREEK IDEAL

Mishima Yukio has been misread in many ways. Literary critics--Tohata Seiichi and Arthur G. Kimball, for example--and weekend readers alike more often than not peruse his works only to dismiss them as little more than the products of a sensationalist, an individual who enjoys probing the lives of those psychologically disturbed or mal-adjusted.¹ They read Mishima as Walter Hilsbecher has read many Occidental novels, as "A-kausalitat, A-logik, die plötzlich erneuerte Furcht vor dem Irrationalen."² Such a view, however, lacks both critical foresight and a precedent in contemporary Japanese literature, excluding popular literature.

Other, more insightful critics, Miyoshi Masao included, read Mishima with an eye--often either an unenlightened eye or a single eye only--on his homosexuality, taken out of context, isolated from his broader concept of beauty.³ They insist that he tries in his novels to understand the psyche of those psychologically disturbed individuals

¹An Invitation to Japan's Literature, ed. Tohata Seiichi et al. (Tokyo: Japan Cultural Institute, 1974), p. 38; Arthur G. Kimball, Crisis in Identity and Contemporary Japanese Novels (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1973), pp. 75-93.

²Walter Hilsbecher, Wie modern ist eine Literatur? (Munich: Nymphenburger Verhandlung, 1965), p. 14.

³Miyoshi, pp. 141-180.

who are either homosexuals, transvestites, or effeminent males. No-where do such critics make distinctions among the various categories, nor do they even consider seriously the possibility that such individuals, rather than being psychologically alienated, might have been forced into such isolation by society. Martin Seymour-Smith, an important scholar in this group, goes so far as to write that Mishima "was finally evil and cruel. . . . His vision of life was pitiful: he was, for all his gifts and his occasionally expressed sense of beauty, no more than a nasty little boy."⁴ Again, such an interpretation fails to understand the interrelationship between Mishima's homosexuality and his aesthetic; more importantly, it reflects an ignorance of other postwar Japanese writers and of Mishima's audience, the contemporary Japanese, the salaryman, the housewife, and the student.⁵ In fact, to understand Mishima's works is first to recognize, as Munesuke Mita has done, the "process by which . . . alienation determines the everyday existence of ordinary people and draw[s] a composite picture of the numerous factors which impinge on the life situation of contemporary man."⁶ Lafcadio Hearn in the Meiji period

⁴Martin Seymour-Smith, Who's Who in Twentieth Century Literature (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977), p. 243.

⁵Kato Hidetoshi, "A Content Analysis of Life Counseling Columns," in Japanese Popular Culture, trans. Kato Hidetoshi (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959), pp. 60-75.

⁶Mita Munesuke, "Patterns of Alienation in Contemporary Japan," Journal of Social and Political Ideas in Japan, V, Nos. 2-3 (December 1967), 139-40.

and Ruth Benedict in the early Showa period were all too painfully aware of this sense of alienation.⁷ But to understand Mishima fully is to understand, as Doi Takeo, Nakane Chie, and Oda M. have done, what it means to be Japanese in postwar Japan.⁸ They are a frustrated, anxious people who appear to derive psychological support--far more so than Americans or Europeans--from society, itself frustrated, isolated, anxious. It is to be expected, then, that Mishima's literary works should echo such anxieties. Noguchi Takehiko describes Mishima's canon as essentially a "confession of the feeling of terror and uneasiness directed against postwar everyday existence, postwar life, against the postwar period as a kind of world in itself, which caused Mishima to feel conscious of himself as an isolated in-der-Welt-sein [sic]."⁹ But what is the relationship of such isolation to beauty?

Essentially, Mishima appropriates a sense of male beauty from classical Greek novels, yet because of his particular socio-historical context--national despondency and feelings of alienation plagued postwar Japan--this appropriation becomes ambivalent. That is, while Mishima seems to endorse the values of Greek depictions of

⁷For a discussion of Japanese homosexuality before World War II, see Lafcadio Hearn, Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Life (New York: Hse International, 1956); Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1954), p. 87.

⁸For a discussion of postwar Japanese homosexuality, see Doi Takeo, The Anatomy of Dependence, trans. John Bester (New York: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1980); Nakane Chie, Japanese Society (Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 1972); Oda M., "Watakushi no naka no Nippon," Asahi Shimbun, IV (March 18, 1969).

⁹Noguchi Takehiko, Mishima Yukio no Sekai (Tokyo: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1968), p. 108.

homosexuality--its redemptive possibility--he simultaneously undermines them. His homosexuality attracts him to the ancient Greeks; his social identity, to the modern Japanese. And in a desperate search for a separate and personal world of homosexual beauty, he finds male beauty, and underneath this male aesthetic lurks nihilism.

As his major biographers agree--including his wife Hiraoka Yoko, Saeki Shoichi, and Noguchi Takehiko in Japanese, and John Nathan and Henry Scott-Stokes in English¹⁰--Mishima's single most influential source of anxiety was his sexuality: through most of his life, he argued, as in his Shosetsu towa Nanika,¹¹ that life and art are separate entities of an artist and, by implication, that Confessions of a Mask, his first major novel and one that treats a homosexual theme with unusual sensitivity, is not autobiographical. Only later in his life was he able to admit freely that Confessions reflected his actual feelings during much of his adolescence.¹² Ironically, Mishima placed too much emphasis on the isolating effect of homosexuality: "in Japan, only descriptions of normal sex relations cause problems. . . .

¹⁰There are over thirty available biographies, though most are inadequate. For reliable biographical information on Mishima, see the following: Hiraoka Yoko and Shimazaki Hiroto, Teihon: Mishima Yukio Shoshi (Tokyo: Bara Jujisha, 1972); Saeki Shoichi, Kyoden Mishima Yukio (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1978); Noguchi Takehiko, Mishima Yukio no Sekai (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1968); John Nathan, Mishima: A Biography (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1974); Henry Scott-Stokes, The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975).

¹¹Mishima Yukio, Shosetsu towa Nanika in Mishima Yukio Zenshu, 36 vol. (Tokyo: Shinchosha, 1976).

¹²Taidan: Watakushi no Bungaku, ed. Akiyama Shun (Tokyo: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1969), p. 88.

I don't think abnormal relations have much impact on the Japanese at large."¹³ But even within this statement, with his choice of such words as normal to describe heterosexuality and abnormal to describe homosexuality, there is significant evidence of an attempt to conceal, to mask his anxieties concerning personal sexual orientation. Moreover, as a homosexual in heterosexual postwar Japan, he felt faced with the existential task of seeking solace in a world where it could not exist. His only alternative, then, was to discover a world personally suited to him, and especially in his apure novels there is ample evidence that he does this as he comes to an understanding of the nature of beauty, an understanding deeply rooted in the Greek ideal of physical beauty. But because most critics argue that he sought solace in the richness of Japan's past--as do most modern Japanese when plagued by seemingly insurmountable difficulties¹⁴--it becomes necessary to compare his works with those representative of the Tokugawa era, immediately before the advent of major Occidental influences, to show that such an assertion is invalid.

Although Ihara Saikaku's Danshoku Okagami¹⁵ deals with homosexual relations among the samurai and Tokugawa kabuki actors, it is

¹³ Leon Zolbrod, "Love in the Morning," The East, II, No. 2 (1965), 36, n. 1.

¹⁴ Once Japan opened her doors to the West, problems in cultural identity became commonplace. To combat new problems, the Japanese attempted to return to an older tradition free from Occidental influence. For a discussion of these events, see Paul Varley, Japanese Culture (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978).

¹⁵ Written in 1687, Ihara Saikaku's Great Mirror of Manly Love is not available readily in translation. For a similar work, see his

perhaps better to draw comparisons between Mishima's Confessions of a Mask and Saikaku's 1686 work Koshoku Gonin Onna, first and foremost, because Saikaku's novel is primarily concerned with heterosexual relationships. The most prominent parallels between the two novels can be seen in character choice. Both Saikaku and Mishima are interested in the adventures of one man or one woman, though both speak to wider social issues. The third book of Saikaku's Gonin Onna, for example, deals not with Genroku¹⁶ society and the harsh ramifications of illicit love, but rather with the relationship between Moemon and Osan, two star-crossed lovers. Mishima's Confessions of a Mask presents the protagonist Kochan's metamorphosis from sexual naivete to sexual experience. Unlike the French Naturalists, who had such a profound influence on modern Japanese literature, Mishima speculates neither about the cause nor the consequences of such a metamorphosis. Rather, his focus is on the concept of beauty, a notion intricately interwoven with the male form and its mystique. Equally important, both Saikaku and Mishima see individuality within their characters as a fault which eventually leads to unhappiness for all concerned. When Moemon and Osan run from the household, they are, in effect, exerting their individuality, their desire to act completely and utterly for themselves and without regard for others. Clearly, their actions are

The Life of an Amorous Man, trans. Hamada Kenjo (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1964).

¹⁶The term Genroku describes the merchant pseudo-aristocracy which controlled much of Japan's wealth and dictated much of its traditions by the Tokugawa period.

responsible for their downfall and, ultimately, for their deaths. Once Omi, Kochan's first living object of sexual adoration, has expressed himself as an individual, by creating his own world with its own rules, he is literally removed from the novel, never to be seen or heard of again.

An important similarity to which most critics refer is the way each author handles sexuality. Both Saikaku and Mishima consider sexuality to be a normal, pleasurable aspect of life. Saikaku's Gonin Onna is, on one level, a novel of amorous men and women whose rollicking adventures provide amusing pictures of seventeenth-century life: that is to say, it is an ukiyo-zoshi,¹⁷ in which love and marriage are mutually exclusive states. Similarly, Mishima's Confessions presents a young man's sexual awakening through a physical process beginning with masturbation and leading to displays of physical affection, both to males and females. Interestingly enough, both novels deal with dosei and with homosexual love. Osan's comment, "Monju may understand the love of men for men, but he knows nothing about the love of women,"¹⁸ contains not even the slightest hint of prejudice toward homosexual relationships. Though somewhat more actively, Kochan

¹⁷ Ukiyo-zoshi, a literary genre, describes the "floating world" in Japan, the world of entertainment often completely different from the world of the day. For an interesting exploration of this world, see Howard Hibbett, The Floating World in Japanese Fiction (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

¹⁸ Ihara Saikaku, "What the Seasons Brought to the Almanac-Maker," in Anthology of Japanese Literature, ed. Donald Keene (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1955), p. 350.

comes to a similar conclusion. Ultimately, he turns away from his would-be fiancée Sonoko, away from the possible love of women, to "a youth of twenty-one or -two, with coarse but regular and swarthy features . . . , half-naked, rewinding a belly-band about his . . . rough and savage, but incomparably beautiful, body."¹⁹

It is ironic, then, that this very point of similarity between Saikaku and Mishima should also be their major source of difference. Whereas Saikaku's descriptions of beauty--

a lady of thirty-four or thirty-five with a graceful, long neck and intelligent-looking eyes, above which could be seen a natural hairline of rare beauty--
(Gonin Onna, pp. 336-7)

are positive, Mishima's are not. Instead, ugliness and an equally strong sense of despondency pervade his aesthetic. His terminology more closely resembles the dark side of the Dionysian impulse in which violence and ugliness, for one brief moment, merge to become beauty. In short, Saikaku's world would never serve Mishima's purposes, for Mishima's world is one of dominant impulse, lacking stability. His is a world of the commercial, the transient, the Narcissistic, and the homosexual, in which the only value seems to be the sensation of the moment. Mishima's concept of beauty, then, may be seen on one level as an esoteric, sadomasochistic symbol of decay in which beauty is simultaneously sick, sterile, and destructive.

¹⁹ Mishima Yukio, Confessions of a Mask, trans. Meredith Weatherby (New York: New Directions Books, 1958), pp. 251-2.

Removed both from the ethos and the influences of the Tokugawa period, Mishima found himself alienated from his own culture, and, too, he sought solace in a place far removed from that culture. His quest is that of other noted postwar homosexuals worldwide, Arno Karlen, C. A. Tripp, D. J. West, and G. Westwood.²⁰ Members of the homosexual subculture in Japan, for example, uncomfortable with the vernacular dosei or okama, prefer the Western term gei.²¹ Mishima, too, turned to the West, not because he was offended by the vernacular, but rather because it offered an alternative, one with which he had some familiarity. Yamanouchi Hisaaki recalls that "Mishima was well versed in European literature. Raymond Radiguet and Francois Mauriac, for instance, are among those writers to whom the young Mishima looked for inspiration."²² But because most modern Western treatments of homosexual themes are ridden with Judeo-Christian notions of guilt, Mishima turned to "some far distant past" (Confessions, p. 104), to the classical period of the West, to the ancient Greeks, a time of cultural development free from the later stains of Christian guilt.²³ In his

²⁰For a discussion of the plight of twentieth-century homosexuals, see Arno Karlen, Sexuality and Homosexuality (London: N.P., 1971); C. A. Tripp, The Homosexual Matrix (New York: N.P., 1975); D. J. West, Homosexuality Re-examined (London: N.P., 1977); and G. Westwood, A Minority Report: A Report on the Life of the Male Homosexual in Great Britain (London: N.P., 1960).

²¹The term dosei is Japanese for homosexual while okama refers to any male who dresses as a woman. Both terms are used interchangeably and have a comparable sense of the English slang drag queen.

²²Yamanouchi, p. 138.

²³For a discussion of ancient sexuality, see A. H. Armstrong, "Platonic Eros and Christian Agape," Downside Review, LXXIX (1961),

Watashi no Henriki Jidai, Mishima recalls, "My view is not necessarily a correct interpretation of ancient Greek thought, but in it I have discovered the Greece I sought. . . . the gods mounted guard against a disrapture of the human equilibrium."²⁴ In short, he sees a world in which physical beauty dictated the ethical standard.

As K. J. Dover notes, how, when, and why "overt and unrepressed homosexuality became so conspicuous a feature of Greek life is an interesting subject for speculation, but we are sadly short of evidence, for there is no doubt that overt homosexuality was already widespread by the early part of the sixth century B.C."²⁵ Such evidence of homosexual prohairesis or lifestyles, however, can be seen evolving in both the visual arts and the literature of the ancient Greeks. In the case of art, in the pictures themselves, for example, every point on the scale of intimacy is represented: at one end, youths relax in conversation; at the other, a man thrusts his erect penis between the thighs of a youth; and at intermediate points, youths refuse undesirable advances or an elderly man clutches the genitals of a willing youth.²⁶ Given the vast number of such works in existence,

105-21; K. J. Dover, "Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behavior," Arthusa, VI (1975), 59-73; T. Hopfner, Das Sexualleben der Griechen und Römer, I, Pt. 1 (1938).

²⁴"Faces of Japan," Asia Scene, II (March 1966), 34.

²⁵K. J. Dover, Greek Homosexuality (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), p. 1.

²⁶G. Devereux, "Greek Pseudo-homosexuality and the 'Greek Miracle,'" Symbolae Osloenses, XLII (1967), 69-72.

there can be little doubt, since Mishima was aware of Greek art, that he encountered works with a specifically homosexual theme. In most of his works, there are obvious references to Greek statuary: in Forbidden Colors, there are comments on Pater's passages on the Apollo; in Confessions of a Mask, he refers to the art works of the ideal male image, the epitome of which is seen in Greek statuary; and from one of his essays entitled Aporo no Sakuzuki, there is a study of aesthetics.²⁷ He even poses before a camera, either with Greek statues or in a stance reminiscent of the Greek male.²⁸ Gwenn Boardman Petersen is quite accurate to posit, "when Mishima speaks of a 'classical' theme . . . he is less likely to be thinking of the classics of the Heian period than of the poetic bodies of his Greek statuary."²⁹

Greek literature also boasts an abundance of works dealing with homosexual themes. Generally, we know from even the vaguest knowledge of Greek mythology that this is true: when we see a bearded male drop a scepter that he might seize a struggling youth, we witness neither a brawl nor a political dispute but the manifestations of Zeus' irresistible passions for Ganymede.³⁰ Specifically, there are five major sources on homosexuality in ancient Greek literature. The

²⁷ Mishima Yukio, Forbidden Colors, trans. Alfred H. Marks (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1968); Mishima, Confessions of a Mask; Mishima, Aporo no Sakuzuki, in Mishima Yukio Zenshu.

²⁸ Scott-Stokes, inserts between pp. 172-3.

²⁹ Gwenn Boardman Petersen, The Moon in the Water (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979), p. 255.

³⁰ E. Kunze, "Zeus and Ganymedes, eine Terrakottagruppe," in Winckelmannsprogramm (Berlin: N.P., 1940), pp. 25-50.

earliest is late Archaic and early Classical verse attributed to Theognis of Megara. Second are the rollicking comedies of the Attic period, particularly those of Aristophanes and his contemporaries. The third and perhaps most interesting work, however, is the Prosecution of Timarkhos, the official transcript of the trial of an Athenian involved in homosexual prostitution. As K. J. Dover notes, this is "the only surviving work of Greek literature on a substantial scale . . . which is entirely concerned with homosexual relationships and practices." The fourth is the homosexual poetry of the Hellenistic period, the most important of which is collected in the Garland of Meleagros. Finally, there is Plato, perhaps the most famous Greek to explore homosexual themes. In two works in particular, The Symposium and The Phaedrus, he takes homosexual desires and love relationships as starting points from which he develops his metaphysical theory, a "dialectical progress which may well begin with the ideal in the response of an older male to the stimulus afforded by a younger male who combines bodily beauty with 'beauty of the soul.'"³¹

³¹ For a discussion of late Archaic and early Classical homosexual poetry, see the following: L. H. Jeffery, The Local Scripts of Ancient Greece; Mary R. Lekowitz, "Critical Stereotypes and the Poetry of Sappho"; and M. L. West, Studies in Greek Elegy and Iambus. For a discussion of Attic poetry, see H. Hauschild, Die Gestalt der Hetäre in der griechischen Komödie; J. Henderson, The Maculate Muse: Obscene Language in Attic Comedy; and J. Taillardt, Images d'Aristophane. For a discussion of Plato and homosexuality, see K. J. Dover, Greek Popular Morality in the Times of Plato and Aristotle; Dover, "Aristophanes' Speech in Plato's Symposium"; Dover, "The Date of Plato's Symposium"; and John Gould, The Development of Plato's Ethics. Also, see Dover, Greek Homosexuality, p. 12.

There can be little doubt that Mishima would have been familiar with at least several of these works, for as a student at the Gakushin, the aristocratic Peers School, he was permitted to read the literatures of the world, in spite of martial law that blanketed Japan at that time. Many of his works reflect his reading of Greek literature. And there are his specific allusions: in Confessions of a Mask, Kochan's geometry teacher appears as a statue of the nude Hercules; in Forbidden Colors, Shunsuke sits in his study and reads ancient "poems about beautiful boys" in Straton's Musa Paidica, a second-century Roman work influenced to some degree by the aesthetic standards of ancient Greece; and Mishima even ends his study of literary criticism, Taiyo to Tetsu, with an original poem entitled "Icarus."³² As Jaroslav Prusek asserts,

Greece meant to Mishima not only sunlight strength but the rejection of its opposite, the haunted, martyred look of the typical Japanese intellectual. He decided that he would have to do something drastic about his appearance and began to practice weight-lifting with such a persistence that he eventually acquired the muscular torso of a Greek statue.³³

Though accurate, these comments do not go far enough: indeed, the Greek image of which Mishima grew so very fond influenced not only his personal lifestyle but also, more importantly, his creative

³² Mishima, Confessions of a Mask, p. 98; Mishima, Forbidden Colors, pp. 393-4; Mishima Yukio, Sun and Steel, trans. John Bester (Tokyo: Kodansha International, Ltd., 1970), pp. 124-5.

³³ Dictionary of Oriental Literature, Vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Prusek (London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1977), p. 177.

endeavors. His works present the Greek ideal male form through a reinterpretation inspired by despondency with modern Japan and the Japanese.

Essential to Mishima's reinterpretation of the male ideal is the taido or body, a concept that is, in this instance, surely Greek and absolutely non-Japanese. Moreover, such a notion constitutes an attempt to recreate the lost spirit of Japan, one which is not unlike that of the samurai to which he often refers in such critical studies as Eirei no Koe, Kagakure Nyumon, Bunka Boeiron, and Shobu no Kokoro.³⁴ It is that spirit present throughout his short story "Patriotism":³⁵

thus, so far from seeing any inconsistency or conflict between the urges of his flesh and the sincerity of his patriotism, the lieutenant [is] even able to regard the two as parts of the same thing.

Mishima intended that his new philosophy, deeply rooted in the physical, would replace Japan's lost spirit with a new wisdom, a Greek wisdom defined as "recognizing the supreme human worth of an equilibrium of spirit and body."³⁶ This new salvation for postwar Japan, moreover, would replace samurai lore and establish a necessary mask, that of a sturdy, all-powerful male, ideally Greek and heroic. It

³⁴Yukio Mishima on Hagakure: The Samurai Ethic and Modern Japan, trans. Kathryn Sparling (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1978); other works are available in Mishima Yukio Zenshu.

³⁵Mishima Yukio, "Patriotism," in Death in Midsummer, trans. Geoffrey Seargent (New York: New Directions Press, 1966), p. 102.

³⁶Gwenn Boardman Petersen, "Greek Hero and Japanese Samurai: Mishima's New Aesthetic," Critique, XII (1970), 107.

is this body that permeates all of Mishima's works, from his earliest short stories, though his *No* plays, to his final tetralogy.

Past the facade, schoolboy uniforms, loincloths, or a woman's kimono, we see Mishima's classically Greek body. In "Patriotism," for example, at the moment of her husband's ritual suicide, Reikosan sees his "masculine beauty at its most superb," while in The Sound of Waves, the young fisherman Shinjisan, nude before a fire, glistens "like a piece of heroic sculpture."³⁷ But beneath this new aesthetic of salvation, behind every beautiful male, is a negative vision awaiting its unleashing, awaiting its opportunity to spring forth. Expecting to see the poetry of the male physique embodied in youthful Japanese males whose bodies are those anticipated by the aesthetic standards of ancient Greece, we see instead Yuichi, the youth of Forbidden Colors, a beautiful but flawed specimen of Greek manhood, the optimistic male tempered by an equally strong sense of despondency. His beauty is an architectural facade, something constructed for the eye in an unyielding attempt to cover something undesirable. Yuichi is a beautiful spirit made ugly by his continually degraded morality. In short, whenever Mishima presents a picture of physical beauty--youthful males with black hair, honey-colored skin, and jet-black eyes--we must be aware that lurking somewhere, above, below, perhaps in the next room, is the putrid inner reality that Mishima calls beauty.

³⁷ Mishima, "Patriotism," p. 108; Mishima Yukio, The Sound of Waves, trans. Meredith Weatherby (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1956), p. 48.

In his essays, fiction, dramas, and interviews, Mishima insists that his main objective is the return, not of himself but of Japan, to a world where the ideal male was the rule rather than the exception.³⁸ The reality from which Mishima so dearly tried to escape was that of a "lost generation" of individuals who had not only survived the horrors of the Second World War but who also now must live "in the chaos and moral void of a defeated Japan."³⁹

In linking the samurai ethic previously lost with his newfound Greek ideal of physical beauty, Mishima sought to achieve salvation for his nation and a solution for his personal anxieties, which were underscored by certain aspects of his behavior. He traveled to New York expressly for sex with Caucasian males, he posed in the nude for a series of photographs in the album Barakei, and he displayed affection onstage in a cabaret act with Maruyama Akihiro.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, Mishima's nihilism, much like Nietzsche's, hindered the attainment of his desired ideal. We are left with a "Heart's leaning . . . for Death and Night and Blood," an aesthetic based upon recurrent images in each of his works.⁴¹ It is not until his later apure novels,

³⁸Mishima comments in his Hagakure Nyumon that Japanese males were fast becoming female-like, a quality that naturally would have revolted him.

³⁹Janeira, p. 211.

⁴⁰For a discussion of Mishima's personal exploits, see Faubion Bowers, The Village Voice (December 3, 1970); Scott-Stokes, p. 225. The Barakei album is a photographic essay by Eikoh Hosae of Mishima in a variety of poses, mostly sexual in nature. The collection is unavailable for sale.

⁴¹Mishima, Confessions, p. 21.

however, that Mishima is able to define the exact nature of this concept. According to his interpretation, his aesthetic standard is singularly applicable to the beautiful male form, perhaps another St. Sebastian. All of Mishima's important characters become Sebastian-like--tortured, their sides pierced with arrows, blood running down their bronze flesh. Herein lies the key, that tension between the Greek ideal and the nihilistic, not only to Mishima's works but, also, just as importantly, to his life and his death.

CHAPTER II

"THE AUDIENCE SHOULD NEVER SEE THE ACTOR WITHOUT HIS MAKE-UP":

BEAUTY BEHIND THE MASK IN CONFESSIONS OF A MASK

AND THIRST FOR LOVE

In 1885, Tsubouchi Shoyo, an early Japanese novelist who adopted Western literary style, expressed his desire to witness the improvement of the Japanese novel so that it might finally "be able to surpass in quality the European novels, and permit [Japanese] novels to take a glorious place on the altar of the arts."¹ Mishima Yukio's novels, in some ways, are the realization of that dream. His two early apure novels--Confessions of a Mask (1949) and Thirst for Love (1950)--are no exceptions: both are highly successful tromp-l'oeil works, preoccupied with character development and realistic psychological intrigue. The major characters, autobiographical persona, are anxious, nervous individuals involved in a quest to realize and fulfill their personal visions of the world. As such, they project themselves into what they so anxiously wish to become. Not contented, they search constantly for an absolute. Their search always ends if not with an absolute then with a multi-dimensional and complex beauty, devoid of traditional drappings. It is a beauty defined by an individual's despondency, that which is psychologically ugly, merged with the lusty passions of an individual for the classically Greek ideal male form in general.

¹Keene, Modern Japanese Novel, p. 34.

Specifically, then, the first half of Confessions of a Mask is both an Ich-Roman, as well as a Bildungsroman in the strictest sense of the word, a work which expresses the Steigerung theme, the heightening of a character, specifically in Kochan as a result of his discovery of beauty. Thrown into the chaotic world of adolescence, with its emotional and physical traumas, he undergoes a transformation: he undergoes an awakening process which renders him capable of adventures in sensual, moral, and intellectual pleasures he would never have dreamed of before. As a part of this transformation, he becomes the questor hero, not only in the Western sense but also in the universal tradition as well. As hero--like Gawain, Lancelot, Perceval, or the modern Hans Castorp of Thomas Mann's Zauberberg--he is the seeker who covers on one level the two worlds of the normal and the abnormal, the heterosexual and the homosexual, and on a second level, the beautiful and the ugly, which merge for a brief moment to define Mishima's aesthetic, beauty bathed in pathos and nihilism.

According to Paul MacCarthy and Gwenn Boardman Petersen, Kochan, the protagonist of Confessions of a Mask, cannot be more than a "mask,"² an individual character distanced from Mishima himself: such a reading, however, is in disagreement with modern Japanese literary trends. Rather, Mishima and Kochan are oftentimes synonymous: Kochan is the diminutive of Koi, the Chinese reading of Mishima's given name Kimitake.

²Much has been written about Mishima's intent for his "mask," but the best summary of the arguments is perhaps seen in Petersen, The Moon in the Water, pp. 254-60.

Thus, Kochan's quest is Mishima's personal one; his confession is also Mishima's. Through this convention, he literally opens himself up and writes his personal story, no matter how painful or what the ramifications, for all to read. Many critics argue that this work cannot be read as an I-novel or shishosetsu because it is twenty years distanced from the mainstream of Japanese Naturalistic fiction which spurred such a convention. Likewise, they would discount Mishima's contemporaries who also use this form, Dazai Osamu, Sakaguchi Ango, Ooka Shohei, Takeda Taijun, Miyamoto Yuriko, and Nakano Shigehara, to name but a few. Following this tradition, Mishima confesses, and what he confesses is his sense of beauty, a concept heavily influenced by the Greek ideal male form.

Throughout Confessions of a Mask are examples of Mishima's desire to establish a bond--either physical or spiritual--with males modeled on his ideal. This urge is made concrete for the first time early in his childhood:

a young man was coming toward us, with handsome, ruddy cheeks and shining eyes, wearing a dirty roll of cloth around his head for a sweatband. He came down the slope carrying a yoke of night-soil buckets over one shoulder, balancing their heaviness expertly with his footsteps. He was a night-soil man, a ladler of excrement. He was dressed as a laborer, wearing split-toed shoes with rubber soles and black-canvas tops, and dark-blue cotton trousers of the close-fitting kind called "thigh-pullers."
(Confessions, p. 8)

From the sexual image of the night-soiler's momohiki, or pants, the young Kochan turns to the silver armor of a beautiful youth, but there is an incipient sense of catastrophe somewhat akin to that of

the "ladler of excrement." It is his dichotomy between the classically Greek ideal male form and Mishima's nihilism that defines beauty:

I believed he would be killed the next instant. If I turned the page quickly, surely I can see him being killed.
(Confessions, p. 12)

But Kochan's most significant memory comes from his discovery of a hidden book of Western art. Therein he finds a reproduction of Guido Reni's St. Sebastian, a painting in which

a black and slightly oblique trunk of a tree of execution was seen against a Titian-like background of gloomy forest and evening sky, somber and distant. A remarkably handsome youth was bound naked to the trunk of the tree. His crossed hands were raised high, and the thongs binding his wrists were tied to the tree. No other bonds were visible, and the only covering for the youth's nakedness was a coarse white cloth knotted loosely about his loins. . . . The youth's body--it might even be likened to that of Antonius, beloved of Hadrian, whose beauty has been so often immortalized in sculpture--shows none of the traces of missionary hardships or decrepitude that are to be found in depictions of other saints; instead, there is only the springtime of youth, only light and beauty and pleasure.

(Confessions, pp. 38-9)

It is this concept of beauty in death, a product of the psychologically ugly depths of his mind, not the painting itself, which serves as stimulus for Kochan's first ejaculato, a sexual awakening induced by the blending of the worlds of homosexual love and death in a beautiful picture.

But why should Mishima link the Greek-like images of the night-soiler, the soldier, and the saint, each the epitome of youthful vigor and beauty, with despondency, catastrophe, suffering, and death? We

find an answer in the opening lines of a poem by the Alexandrian poet Cavafy. In "Desires," a work which Mishima both knew and admired, we see an analogous association:³

Like the beautiful bodies of the dead who had not grown old
and they shut them, with tears, in a magnificent mausoleum,
with roses at the head and jasmine at the feet. . . .

Mishima's concept of beauty as a strange harmony of "classical aestheticism blended with pain-filled eroticism,"⁴ however, has been based, thus far, on contemplations of "decadent purity" (Confessions, p. 72). He had failed to interject himself into his visions of such beauty, but that soon changes.

Later in the novel, Kochan resorts to daydreaming in class. He actively creates out of an ordinary high-school teacher a Grecian beauty filled with strength:

before my eyes, the young instructor gradually changed into a vision of a statue of the nude Hercules. . . . He stretched out his right hand and began writing an equation on the board. As he did so the wrinkles that gathered in the material at the back of his coat were, to my bemused eyes, the muscle-furrows of "Hercules Drawing the Bow." And at last I committed my bad habit in the midst of schoolwork. . . .

(Confessions, p. 98)

Enticing Kochan to masturbate, this image of the ideal male, in a sense, balances--even complements--his earlier visions of one of his

³"Faces of Japan: Yukio Mishima, Novelist," Asia Scene, II (March 1966), 34.

⁴Armando Martins Janiera, Japanese and Western Literature: A Comparative Study (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1970), p. 210.

schoolmates, a swimmer. In the former instance, Kochan imagines an elegant banquet laid out for a sexually ritualistic scene of cannibalism. Here, the young victim, a Greek god in his own right, is placed in a moment of suppressed excitement upon a silver platter, and

I thrust the fork upright into the heart. A fountain of blood struck me full in the face. Holding the knife in my right hand, I began carving the flesh of the breast, gently, thinly at first. . . .

(Confessions, p. 97)

The young male is eaten in an erotic, sadomasochistic manner which echoes closely those actions seen in a brutal moment of sexual coupling when, at the height of the attack, the firm penis is thrust repeatedly into a somewhat unwilling partner.

But the most important--indeed the most influential--image in the first half of Confessions of a Mask involves Kochan's "blind adoration . . . devoid of any element of conscious criticism" (Confessions, p. 7) for Omi, an older classmate.⁵ Here is a love affair embarked upon out of a desire for the ideal Greek male:

his swarthy skin made the pure whiteness of his undershirt look almost too clean. It was a whiteness that could almost be smelled from a distance, like plaster of paris. And the white plaster was carved in relief, showing the bold contours of his chest and its two nipples.

(Confessions, p. 76)

⁵The word Omi also has the meaning of "uncut meat," and the possessive form of the word is a homonym for a word meaning "a long, pointed spear." Both meanings carry obvious sexual overtones.

It is Omi's beauty, "happy imperfection with which nature always accents grandeur" (Confessions, pp. 57-8), that serves to haunt, to influence, to infiltrate all aspects of Kochan's life:

Because of him I cannot love an intellectual person. Because of him I am not attracted to a person who wears glasses. Because of him I began to love strength, an impression of overflowing blood, ignorance, rough gestures, careless speech, and the savage melancholy inherent in flesh not tained in any way with intellect. . . .

(Confessions, p. 64)

In keeping with this dual nature of Mishima's concept of beauty, it is not surprising that Omi becomes St. Sebastian in a very literal way. When Kochan returns to school in the autumn, he learns that Omi has been expelled for some unspoken act of wrongdoing. Kochan, unlike his peers who are repulsed by the news, is delighted. He reflects upon the nature of such a heinous deed--at least Kochan imagines it so--with pleasure:

the compulsion toward evil that some demon incited in him gave his life its meaning and constituted his destiny. At least so it seems to me. . . . upon further thought, however, his "evil" came to have a different meaning to me. I decided that the huge conspiracy into which the demon had driven him, with its intricately organized secret society and its minutely planned underground machinations, was surely all for the sake of some forbidden god. Omi had served that god, had attempted to convert others to that faith, had been betrayed, and then had been executed in secret. One evening at dusk he had been stripped naked and taken to the grove on the hill. There he had been bound to the tree, both hands tied high over his head. The first arrow had pierced the side of his chest; the second, his armpit. . . . the more I remembered the picture he had made that day, grasping the exercise-bar in preparation for the pull-up, the more I became convinced of his close affinity with St. Sebastian. . . .

(Confessions, pp. 90-1)

Whereas in the first half of the novel Kochan comes to an understanding of his sexuality, his quest for normalcy dominates the second half. Realizing that he is indeed a homosexual in heterosexual Japan, he begins to muse:

how would I feel if I were another boy? How would I feel if I were a normal person? These questions obsessed me. . . . My "act" had ended by becoming an integral part of my nature, I told myself. It's no longer an act. My knowledge that I am masquerading as a normal person has even corroded whatever [sic] of normality I originally possessed. . . .

(Confessions, pp. 152-3)

In keeping with this masquerade, he allows himself to be dragged to a brothel, but once in bed with a prostitute, he must face a hard truth--that he cannot physically react to the "normal" concept of beauty. He must, for once, discard any semblance of a mask. In truth, this is the one situation in his life where there can be no masks, and for him, it is a traumatic experience:

the prostitute opened her big mouth, its gold teeth framed by lipstick, and produced her sturdy tongue like a stick. Following her example, I stuck out my tongue also. The tips of our tongues touched. . . . Perhaps I will not be understood when I say there is a numbness that resembles a fierce pain. I felt just such a pain, a pain that was intense, but still could not be felt at all. I dropped my head upon the pillow. Ten minutes later there was no doubt of my incapacity. My knees were shaking with shame.

(Confessions, p. 226)

In the final scene, while dancing with Sonoko, a young girl he had thought of marrying for the masking effect, Kochan catches a glimpse of a young male who suddenly removes his shirt, exposing his bare chest. Instantly, Kochan is "beset by sexual desire, fervent

gaze . . . fixed upon that rough and savage, but incomparably beautiful body" (Confessions, p. 252). Only now does he become fully aware of the mysteries of human love and its wide-reaching pleasures, but such knowledge satisfies him little. Having seen love, he can think of but one thing, of that young man

going out into the streets of high summer just as he was, half-naked, and getting into a fight with a rival gang. Of a sharp dagger cutting through that belly-band, piercing that torso. Of that soiled belly-band beautifully dyed with blood. Of his gory corpse being put on an improvised stretcher, made of a window shutter, and brought back here.

(Confessions, p. 252)

Again, physical love and death are inseparable. They are necessarily involved in an interwoven dichotomy, that "mysticism of the flesh" called beauty.⁶ Love, then, becomes a sacred rite, made so by death: perfect love, having exhausted all the joy and bliss that body and soul might reach, has its natural consumption in death. It is Mishima's second novel, Thirst for Love, that involves itself with the embodiment, if not the codification, of such a concept, for it is a novel which defines one aspect of beauty not so much as love but as a desperate need to love.

Whereas Confessions of a Mask is Kochan's story, Thirst for Love stresses Etsuko's confessions. She is a young, sexually vital female who is very much the extension of Kochan. She is the faithful wife who watches her unfaithful husband die, and like Kochan, she sees death

⁶Henry Scott-Stokes, The Life and Death of Yukio Mishima (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975), p. 71.

as an "occult thing, that sacrificial death she dreamed of, a suicide proffered not so much in mourning for her husband's death as in envy of that death."⁷ Moreover, this novel is very much the traditional extension of the autobiographical tradition, and as such, images from the first novel, all of which concern themselves with beauty, are developed fully within the second.

First, the image of the matsuri, ever so insignificant in Confessions of a Mask, becomes a prevalent one in Thirst for Love. Here, at the fire festival, prefaced by the father-in-law's concern with night-soil, we have a sexually excited Etsuko, and though her excitement appears to be heterosexual in nature, it nonetheless reminds us of the homosexual attractions seen in the earlier novel. She is awakened first by the climb up the mountain to the temple and later by the Bacchanalian frenzy of the festival itself. In fact, in a moment of uncontrolled passion, she gouges youthful Saburo's back, watches as the blood drips between her fingers, and later licks it, drop by delicious drop.

This scene of blood-letting is a prelude to the final murder scene. Throughout this novel, Etsuko has attempted to seduce young Saburo, but in that moment of mindless passion when he responds, she screams. Her father-in-law brings forth a mattock. In keeping with previous murder scenes in Mishima's novels, Etsuko grabs the mattock and bashes Saburo's head in. Balancing this brutal act is a kind of epiphany in

⁷Mishima Yukio, Thirst for Love, trans. Alfred H. Marks (New York: Knopf Publishing, 1969), p. 32.

sunlight, a notion later to be developed further in Mishima's curious apologia Sun and Steel.

Embodied in this novel is Etsuko's compulsion to love, her need to inflict pain in love, and her revulsion when she suddenly feels love. Moreover, she is given a particular vividness by her sexuality, but it is a vividness characterized by the banality, meaningless, and inadequacy of the people around her. In the end, it seems preferable that she does love so intensely--whether successfully or not--rather than accept a situation that countless others have accepted.

When people concentrate on beauty and what is beautiful--so Mishima comes to believe--they are, without realizing it, confronting the darkest thoughts of their world.⁸ In Confessions of a Mask and Thirst for Love, these thoughts are the result of an absorbing concentration on the subtleties of sexual love and of death; nowhere throughout his work is there a profound feeling of that love or friendship that makes for real human values, for which Mishima's characters and Mishima himself search. Instead, we see "remorse as prelude to sin" (Confessions, p. 19). Otherwise, for him, a relationship does not and cannot exist.

Mishima's aesthetic, often seen as a morbid and decadent sense of beauty, reflects a particular Japanese notion of the tragic draped upon the image of the ideal Greek male, with the result being that a "violent death is ultimate beauty."⁹ Recall, for instance, the

⁸Mishima Yukio, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, trans. Ivan Morris (New York: Perigee Books, 1959), p. 51.

⁹Scott-Stokes, p. 74.

relationship between orgasm and death in Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. Didi and Gogo discussing hanging themselves produces orgasm, in effect, joins life with death, an image later developed with the gravedigger with obstetrician's forceps. Mishima's images of violence and ritual are somewhat similar, as if the religious rite sacrifices or validates what he sees as "abnormal" sexuality. Mishima's sensibilities in many ways echo not Longinus' notions but rather Edmund Burke's sublime:

whatever is filled in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, that is to say, whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror . . .; that is, it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. . . .¹⁰

Mishima, then, must be credited with emancipating Japanese literature from the dictates of moral convention and subjective emotion, those aspects of earlier Japanese literature to which Tsubouchi Shoyo was so adamantly opposed. At the same time, he contributes a duality in beauty, seen more clearly in Forbidden Colors and The Sound of Waves where his beauty defines a multidimensional and complex sense of reality. In his first two apure novels, however, he seeks on a personal level his detailed visions of the ideal male form, so classically Greek and preoccupied with a Dionysian impulse. In doing so, he forces himself onto a path that leads to the death not only of his characters, but to his own as well.

¹⁰Edmund Burke, "The Sublime and Beautiful," in Critical Theory Since Plato, ed. Hazard Adams (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Jovanovich, Inc., 1979), p. 356.

CHAPTER III

"AN EXPRESSION OF THE MOST OBSCENE AND UNDISGUISED DRUNKENNESS IN THE WORLD": DUAL NOTIONS OF BEAUTY IN THE LATER APURE NOVELS

Once Mishima Yukio completed his autobiographical works, Confessions of a Mask and Thirst for Love, he had completed a portion of his calling. In these works, he achieves what he had initially seen as his purpose: he purges himself of all stains of guilt associated with his homosexuality, and he actualizes an aesthetic intricately linked to that homosexuality. But having done so, he could now venture into the unknown. In his next novels, he explores the nature of his aesthetic, which wavers somewhere between the worlds of ancient Greece and postwar Japan, between the ideal Greek male form and the pathetic and the nihilistic. These two worlds are brought into focus in his next two apure novels, Forbidden Colors and The Sound of Waves. Forbidden Colors, written from 1951 to 1953, is in general a novel of flagrante delicto in which beauty is progressively unmasked, taken from its complex state and made elemental. Whereas Confessions of a Mask only hints at sexuality and Thirst for Love only brings us to the moments before intercourse, this work becomes one in which sexuality--in this instance, genital sexuality or intercourse, as the masturbation in the earlier works is clear enough--is made concrete in a time when "an aristocratic lady and a negro, an ambassador and a villain, a king and an actor in American action films slept together" (Colors, p. 379).

Specifically, however, it becomes a novel of the ugly, figuratively speaking, in which "there [are] two or three rude sketches of the vagina, roughly scratched over with a canceling X . . . cursing the vagina" (Colors, p. 13). In fact, we see herein the result when the Greek ideal male form, Yuichi, "having extripated [sic] universality from the sense of beauty, [is] larcenously and violently torn . . . from the arms of ethics" (Colors, p. 5).

We have in this novel the story of Yuichi, yet another Mishima male modeled after Greek statuary. He is

an amazingly beautiful young man. His body surpassed the sculptures of ancient Greece. It was like the Apollo molded in bronze by an artist of the Peleponnesus school. It overflowed with gentle beauty and carried such a noble column of the neck, such gently sloping shoulders, such a softly broad chest, such elegantly rounded wrists, such a rapidly tapering tightly filled trunk, such legs, stoutly filled out like a heroic sword.

(Colors, p. 21)

But the external beauty, much like that seen in the columns of Grecian temples, is but an illusion which hides a somewhat different concept of reality; but, in this instance, it is a mask which "disguises in order to reveal" (Colors, p. 7). For all of his external beauty, his body remains one which "can love a woman. Do you know what I mean? My body can love them, but my interests in them is purely intellectual. I have never wanted a woman since the day I was born. I have never seen a woman and wanted her" (Colors, p. 24). In spite of his homosexuality, Yuichi is portrayed in a positive light. He is, in effect, the ideal Greek male who

for eight years or so since puberty . . . had set himself against sexual desire, which he detested. He kept his body pure. He involved himself in mathematics and sports--geometry and calculus, high jumping and swimming. He did not realize particularly that this option of his was a Greek option; mathematics somehow kept his head clear, and athletic competition kept his energies in tune.

(Colors, p. 27)

Like the Greek empire, Yuichi and all his purity must crumble, must come to a natural end, either self-induced or otherwise.

Yuichi's descent from the Greek pinnacles of mathematics and athletics to the depths of nihilistic hedonism is two fold. First, his mentor Shunsuke, a brilliant and elderly scholar, actively fashions him into a creature of ugliness vis a vis his own motives. He opts for an ugly corruption of purity which might corrupt all others: "[Oh!] To hold in store such complete unhappiness for . . . woman. With Yuichi's help, he could send a hundred still-virgin women off to the nunneries. In this way Shunsuke for the first time in his life knew real passion" (Colors, p. 25).

Whereas Thirst for Love is a novel true to its title, Forbidden Colors is a "thirst for revenge." Shunsuke, however, is not completely responsible for Yuichi's downfall; in truth, he only supplies the impetus at the right time. Rather, Yuichi's descent is a result of his own internal ugliness. He always had the potential--though he remains passive for most of his life--to tantalize and to tease male and female alike. Moreover, once he recognizes love, realizes that others can love that which he cannot, he himself included, he turns:

by all the logic of purity, he had decided that he could not love the boy. . . . If I, who, though I cannot love women wish only to love women, loved the boy--after all a man--would he not become transformed into some unspeakably ugly, woman-like creature?

(Colors, p. 28)

Second, when he marries Yasuko, a young woman innocent of the ways of the homosexual world, he unwittingly follows Shunsuke's advice, for he has no choice. If he is to succeed in his deception of his young bride, he must do so:

just make believe she's a bundle of sticks, a cushion. A side of beef hanging from a beam in the butcher shop. You'll surely be able to conjure up a counterfeit passion to excite her and make her happy. Nevertheless, . . . to teach a woman pleasures is to incur a hundred liabilities and not one asset. The only thing to be careful about is never to acknowledge at any time that she has a soul. Even the dregs of a soul are out of the question. . . .

(Colors, p. 29)

Ultimately, because of his own actions, either with Yasuko or with his male lovers, he concludes, "I am an unpaid prostitute. I am cheap. I am a devoted toy. . ." (Colors, p. 147). Such an image, that of an individual who gives his body to others while he receives little or no pleasure, is oddly appropriate, for Yuichi's life is one of prostitution. He parades his physically beautiful body for all to see, and yet he takes no pleasure either in the act of sex or in his parading. Rather, he is like a statue, a "young Bacchus holding high a glass of champagne and smiling mischeviously" (Colors, p. 153). Like Kochan in Confessions of a Mask and Etsuko in Thirst for Love, he is yet another of Mishima's Greek beauties made all the more

beautiful, according to Mishima's aesthetic, by an unyielding sense of nihilism.

But as a lotus flower, an Eastern symbol of purity and rebirth, springs forth from the muddy depths of a swamp, so, too, must a positive image of beauty, one free either from the pathos of tragedy or the despondency of nihilism, emerge from the negative ones presented by Yuichi and his world. Such a positive image is made concrete by the 1954 novel The Sound of Waves, a touching romance made so by the purity of a couple's love--in this peculiar instance, heterosexual love.

Shinji, the youthful male protagonist of this novel, is, like numerous other Mishiman males, a Greek god, but he is oddly different. His beauty is not that of his predecessors: rather, he is

tall and well-built beyond his years, and only his face revealed his youthfulness. Skin can be burned no darker by the sun than his was burned. He had the well-shaped nose characteristic of the people of his island, and his lips were cooked and chapped. His dark eyes were exceedingly clear, but their clarity was not that of intellectuality. . . .

(Sound, p. 6)

His name, Shinji, is perhaps a verbal play on the term shinjin, new man, and he is to Mishima's works a new man in every way.

The complement to Shinji's perfection is the female Hatsue, a youthful maiden whom he will later marry:

her forehead was moist with sweat, and her cheeks glowed. . . . The healthy color of her skin was no different from that of the other island girls, but there was something refreshing about the cast of her eyes, something serene about her eyebrows.

(Sound, pp. 7-8)

Together they are the perfect couple, by any standard, for each complements the other. Both are beautiful, both are pure and virginal, and both dominate others of their sex in strength: Shinji proves himself to be the strongest man on the island when he single-handedly saves a merchant-ship from sinking during a storm, and Hatsue tempts the depths of a formidable ocean to win a prize for collecting the most pearl-rich oysters. In short, each is the image of classical Greek perfection, the embodiment of physical beauty, purity, and physical prowess.

Contrasting these images of perfection is another couple, in this instance, images of absolute imperfection made so by ugliness, Yasuo and the lighthouse-keeper's daughter Chiyoko. President of the Young Men's Association and the son of a leading family in the village, Yasuo nonetheless represents the well-bred individual in love with illicit breeding: fearing that Hatsue will become the bride of another man, he sets out one night to rape her--only to have himself raped, in a sense, by an equally determined hornet. Likewise, the lighthouse-keeper's daughter, educated in the ways of the world--

with nothing better to do, Chiyoko had begun studying her history of English literature. Knowing not a single one of their works, she memorized the names of a group of Victorian lady poets--Christina Georgina Rossetti, Adelaide Anne Proctor, Jean Ingelow, Augusta Webster--exactly as though she were memorizing Buddhist scriptures. Rote memorization was Chiyoko's forte; even the professor's sneezes were recorded in her notes--

(Sound, p. 79)

desires Shinji only to realize that her desires must go unheeded. Her ugliness is one that Mishima had much earlier learned to hate, for it

has its origins in intellectual endeavors. With such recognition, she determines to ruin Hatsue, and thus she whispers malicious rumors of omeko, Kansai dialect for sexual intercourse. Thus, absolute beauty--epitomized by the relationship of Shinjo and Hatsue--is defined by unadulterated strength; absolute ugliness--the relationship of Yasuo and Chiyoko to Shinji and Hatsue--is defined as the adulteration of the unknowing world of the innocent by the intellectual world.

Unfortunately, despite its 1954 Shinchosha Literary Prize, The Sound of Waves is little more than a highly romantic fairy tale, strong in morality and didacticism, weak in substance. Moreover, taken in exclusion of Mishima's other works, this novel presents at best a weak argument for the positive accoutrements of a beauty which is natively Greek in origin. But when read with Forbidden Colors, we have a complete definition of Mishima's aesthetic. His is a beauty analogous to that described in Dostoevski's The Brothers Karamazov:¹

within beauty both shores meet, and all contradictions exist side by side. . . . Beauty! I cannot bear the thought that a man of noble heart and lofty mind sets out with the ideal of the Madonna and ends with the ideal of Sodom. . . . What the intellect regards as shameful oftentimes appears splendidly beautiful to the heart. Is there beauty in Sodom? Believe me, most men find their beauty in Sodom. Did you know this secret?

Having explored these mysteries of such a beauty, Mishima now might turn to a concrete portrayal of such an abstraction. This he does in his final apure work, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion.

¹Mishima, Confessions of a Mask, p. i.

Written in 1956, this novel represents the culmination of Mishima's quest for an acceptable aesthetic. Like his earlier pieces, this work can be read on several levels. Indeed, it is a dramatic, close accounting of an actual situation in which a young acolyte burns a famous Kyoto Pavilion. Arthur G. Kimball reads it as a Künstlerroman somewhat in the same stream as James Joyce's Portrait of the Artist. Gwenn Boardman Petersen sees it as an account of the disintegration of an individual's personality, a study in psychopathology. Louise Duus, viewing it with an enlightened eye toward Buddhist philosophy, sees the work as a Koan, an irrational riddle the purpose of which is to instruct. A sexual interpretation is also possible: oftentimes, in Mishima's works, the penis is described as a "temple tower erect" or as a "shining pagoda of steel."² The original Japanese title, Kinkakuji, however, offers the most convincing insights into the significance of this novel. Literally, the title translates "Golden Pavilion," but the characters may also be read as "beautiful building." Thus, the novel's major focus--in Mishima's own words--is beauty.

But as discussed earlier, Mishima's concept of beauty is one in which the classical Greek attributes of physical beauty, prowess, and mental and spiritual purity are combined with the postwar Japanese sense of tragedy and pathos, despondency and nihilism. This combination

²For a discussion of possible interpretations for this novel, see the following helpful works: Arthur G. Kimball, Crisis in Identity and Contemporary Japanese Novels (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1973); Gwenn Boardman Petersen, The Moon in the Water: Understanding Tanizaki, Kawabata, and Mishima (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1979); Louise Duus, "The Novel as Koan: Mishima Yukio's The Temple of

exists in the novel: the Golden Pavilion represents the Greek notion of beauty, and Mizoguchi, the acolyte who burns the Temple, symbolizes the ugliness of postwar Japan. Real beauty, then, occurs when the two merge, at that moment when the acolyte becomes the Temple, ignites it, and prays for death. Such a merger, however, has its roots in two earlier apure novels, Forbidden Colors and Sound of Waves.

In The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, Mizoguchi, somewhat out of Mishima's mainstream characterizations, is depicted as a weak and ugly individual scorned by the world and forced into the retreat of the Temple. His withdrawal further underscores his own sense of inadequacy:

I had a weak constitution and was always being defeated by the other boys in running or on the exercise bar. Besides, I had suffered since my birth from a stutter, and this made me still more retiring in my manner. . . . Some of the ill-behaved children used to make fun of me by imitating a stuttering priest as he tried to stammer his way through the sutras. . . . My stuttering, I need hardly say, placed an obstacle between me and the outside world. It was the first sound that I have trouble in uttering. The first sound is like a key to the door that separates my inner world from the outside, and I have never known that key to turn smoothly in its lock.

(Temple, p. 5)

His world is one ridden with contradiction, opposition, and discord, both within himself and between himself and others. While his stutter is but a symbol of his world, it also serves both to isolate and to create:

the Golden Pavilion, Critique, X (1968), 120-9; and Mishima, The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea, p. 23.

when a stutterer is struggling desperately to utter his first sound, he is like a little bird that is trying to extricate himself from quick lime. When he finally manages to free himself, it is too late. To be sure, there are times when the reality of the outer world seems to have been waiting for me, folding its arms as it were, while I was struggling to free myself. But the reality that is waiting for me is not a fresh reality. When finally I reach the outer world with all my efforts, all that I find is a reality that has instantly changed color and gone out of focus--a reality that has lost the freshness that I had considered filling for myself, and that gives off a half-putrid odor.

(Temple, pp. 5-6)

Ironically, it is not so much Mizoguchi's stuttering but an incident which colors his perspectives on life before he finds the Temple. As a child of twelve or thirteen, he, his family, and a visitor sleep under a single mosquito net. Puzzled by an unusual, yet regular motion in the net, a motion not dictated by the wind, he turns to its source, only to find his mother intricately interwoven by a single mass of flesh with the visitor. Instantly, all that was visible is buried in darkness: his dying father, in an untimely move, covers young Mizoguchi's eyes. In essence, his father introduces a stuttering effect to his son's world, and by doing so, his hands become the instrument of turning his son's visions into a blackness that covers most, hates all. Necessarily, then, it is his father who first introduces the child to the Temple. And when he dies, Mizoguchi senses freedom from those hands, but it is an illusion of freedom, for the Pavilion itself remains.

When Mizoguchi first encounters the beauty of the Pavilion, he is left with an increasing sense of inadequacy. In short, he realizes that his physical handicap pervades even the darkest, remotest recesses of his being, and as such, even his ability to perceive external

stimuli, whether it be of a sexual nature or an aesthetic one, is impaired. The beauty of the Temple, the force most dominant in his father's life, escapes him:

I feel that your beauty is something that I am very close to seeing and yet cannot see. Please let me see the real Golden Temple more clearly than I see the image . . . in my mind. And, furthermore, if you are indeed so beautiful that nothing in this world can compare to you, please tell me why it is so necessary for you to be beautiful.

(Temple, p. 36)

It is his contemplation of these questions that shows him first the "complete difference in their natures" (Temple, p. 42) and later creates a bridge, a link between himself and the Temple, but this bridge is necessarily "something like a huge heavenly compressor that would bring down dissenters, cataclysms, and superhuman tragedies, that would crush beneath it all human beings and objects, irrespective of their ugliness or their beauty" (Temple, p. 47).

It is this union of beauty and ugliness, illusion and reality, which comes to dominate the entirety of Mizoguchi's life. Furthermore, such a merger is, by definition, beautiful, but "true beauty is something that attacks, overpowers, robs, and finally destroys."³ And, indeed, this is true. We have instances of tradition, the art of flower arranging and the tea ceremony, judged by the Japanese to be beautiful. But the flower arrangement suggests to Mizoguchi "the dropping of blood" (Temple, p. 78). And the tea ceremony, itself a beautiful

³Ihab Hassan, The Dismemberment of Orpheus (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1982), p. 56.

one, is made ever more beautiful by the addition of a woman's milk, fresh from her breast, but immediately this ritual is contrasted with another. In return for a carton of cigarettes, Mizoguchi agrees to conduct another ceremony: he jumps on a young Japanese girl's abdomen. He receives his cigarettes from an American soldier; she aborts a much-wanted child.

Thus, until Mizoguchi encounters the Temple, until the Temple actually takes control of him, his life is meaningless. He is unable to act on anything, certainly unable to create. But with the Temple, after the merger, he becomes in a sense the artist-hero, that great man whose life, tempered by pain and temptation, might function as an example for others. Implicit, however, is an obvious contradiction between reality and this visionary artist. In truth, Mizoguchi is no match for the Temple. He is an even poorer person for the role of an artist-hero. In Mishima's world, he is talented and heroic in many ways, but inherent is his dislike of the Temple and "art for art's sake." Beauty that exists only to be beautiful can have no place in his world.

CHAPTER IV

THE APURE NOVELS IN CONTEXT

Essential to Mishima Yukio's reinterpretation of the ideal Greek male in terms of a postwar Japanese psyche is the concept of myth, for he develops his particular concept while simultaneously employing Greek mythology as a framework within which he works. But he does not randomly borrow from the ancients: instead, he evolves new myths by rejuvenating the old in such a manner as to create an art which all the while provides solace for his despondency over both his sexual orientation and a now-fallen Japan. As he develops his apure novels, however, his dependency upon the Greek framework becomes increasingly less. Thus, by his final apure novel, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, he has cast aside borrowings of entire stories for selected allusions when absolutely necessary to the development of his concept of beauty.

Like Tennessee Williams' Orpheus Descending, Mishima's Confessions of a Mask employs the Orpheus-Eurydice myth to a large extent as the format for Kochan's sexual journey into manhood, and as such, certain comparisons are worth noting. First, pure and all-knowing Kochan, the child who recalls details of his own birth, who plays neurotically a single phonograph record--the modern's lyre--over and over, hour after hour, undergoes the pains of death; in fact, he is once declared dead from "auto-intoxication." And he does descend into the Lower World, in an emotional sense, for love and that need

to love, but his concept of love, somewhat perversely, is one which bears a sexual stigma called self-awareness. Kochan's life is filled with descents, beginning with the social descent of his family, "sliding down an incline with a speed so happy-go-lucky that they hummed merrily as they went . . . because of . . . huge debts, foreclosures, sale of the family estate, and then, as financial difficulties multiplied, a morbid vanity blazing higher and higher like some evil impulse. . ." (Confessions, p. 4). Following his family's descent comes his own:

My parents lived on the second floor of the house. On the pretext that it was hazardous to raise a child on an upper floor, my grandmother snatched me from my mother's arms on my forty-ninth day. My bed was placed in my grandmother's sickroom, perpetually closed and stifling with odors of sickness and old age. . . .

(Confessions, pp. 6-7)

In contrast to such an image, as horrible as those of Dante's hell, is the descent of the night-soiler, a physical movement that produces an emotional one for young Kochan: "the close scrutiny I gave the youth was unusually close for a child of four. Although I didn't clearly perceive it at the time, for me he represented my first revelation of a certain power, my first summons by a certain strange and secret voice" (Confessions, p. 8). Sonoko, unaware of Kochan's sexual nature, chooses to descend the staircase (Confessions, p. 90), a motion from a higher level to a lower one in the name of what she mistook for love.

And there are those moments of Bacchanalian impulse, moments of "uncontrolled 'revolt against reason'" (Confessions, p. 65), which pervade even the original telling of the myth and are, ultimately, moments of a sort of psychological descent. In Mishima's version, we see them first externalized in the world outside Kochan's psyche, as in the incident of the shrine boys and the matsuri:

I rushed out to the second floor with someone and out onto the balcony. From there I looked down upon the scene, breathlessly. Just at that moment they had come swarming into the entry garden, bearing the black shrine. . . . Even long after, I wondered what force impelled them to such action. I still do not know. How could those scores of young men have suddenly arrived at the decision, instantaneous and single-minded, to come rushing in through our gate? . . . through it all there was only one vividly clear thing, a thing that both horrified and lacerated me, filling my heart with unaccountable agony. This was the expression on the faces of the young men carrying the shrine--an expression of the most obscene and undisguised drunkenness in the world. . . .
(Confessions, pp. 32-3)

Later, Kochan internalizes this impulse, so much so that it influences even his perceptions of reality. For example, as a child, he reads many a story about the valiant prince who slays the devilish, cruel-hearted dragon. But always distressed by the final scene, that life-and-death confrontation between one man and that which is wholly evil, when the prince "in a flash . . . suddenly was put back together again and came springing nimbly right out of the dragon's mouth. There was not a single scratch anywhere on his body. The dragon sank to the ground and died on the spot" (Confessions, p. 23), Kochan initiates an editorial change of sorts. In keeping with Mishima's aesthetic, physical beauty must meet its end in ugliness: "then, in a flash,

he . . . the prince . . . sank to the ground and died on the spot"
(Confessions, p. 23).

But the likeness between the two myths, the original and Mishima's retelling, ends here. For Mishima, there needs to be an ascent somewhat more meaningful than climbing a staircase and squatting to rest at the top (Confessions, p. 91). In fact, this occurs at the end of the novel. At the hands of his family--representative of society in general--Kochan becomes a homosexual masked in normality; but once the mask is removed, once he realizes, accepts, and even exploits his sexual orientation, we have a positive ascension:

and yet I saw that my words, spoken deliberately, had not only actually shocked my friends and made them blush with embarrassment, but had also played upon their adolescent susceptibility to suggestive ideas and produced an obscure sexual excitement in them. At that sight, a spiteful feeling of superiority naturally arose in me. . . .

(Confessions, p. 105)

By the end of the novel, Kochan--free from an illusion of heterosexuality, symbolized by Sonoko's constant twisting of his sleeve (Confessions, p. 200)--is able to enter a world truly of his own making. Unlike Orpheus, who accidentally loses Eurydice and must return to life without her, Kochan, deliberately turning back with a look of defiance, walks ahead, away from, Sonoko, into the sunlight. He regains faith in his self-worth, as well as a sense of true happiness for the first time. He belongs now to a social mainstream of his own creation. But his is a mainstream defined by nihilism: he destroys Sonoko, in a sense, and he revels in the fantasy of sexuality and death in union.

Such an interpretation, which Northrup Frye would see as essentially mythic, also sheds light on the other apure novels, though to a progressively decreasing extent. Thirst for Love, like Eugene O'Neill's Desire Under the Elms, is a reinterpretation of the Phaedra myth. In each a young wife turns from her elderly lover in search of a young man's love, for whatever reason, only to bring utter and complete destruction to all involved. Forbidden Colors, an exception in this series, is not so much a reinterpretation as a cataloguing of Greek and Roman mythology, which comes to a head--vis a vis the obvious aesthetic influences of Dorian Grey--in an old writer's musings during his last days by the deliberate corruption of a beautiful youth. The Sound of Waves, by Mishima's own admission, is the Daphnis-Chloe myth retold. In The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, however, he abandons such random borrowings in favor of selective allusions to those vices and virtues associated with the Apollo myth, truth and light balanced by darkness and remorse.

With the completion of his last apure novel, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, in 1956, Mishima Yukio began a turn in thinking, away from obviously Occidental allusions, especially those Greek. Such a shift is even suggested in the title of his final apure work, itself an allusion to the famous Kinkaku Pavilion of the Rokuon Temple in Kyoto. But his dependence upon allusion to conjure up pictures or word-images has left him open to such criticism as that expressed by Gore Vidal:

it is a commentary on his art that he never made anything entirely on his own. He was too quickly satisfied with familiar patterns and by no means the best. Mishima, paradoxically,

seems "original," glittering and swift in his effects, like Ibsen at his highest. What one recalls from the novels are simply fleshy obsessions and sadistic reveries: invariably the beloved youth is made to bleed while the sailor who fell from the sea . . . gets cut to pieces by a group of pubescent males.¹

Mishima's turn from the Greek tradition to the Japanese, from the West to the East, is not atypical for modern Japanese novelists. It is the same one made by many of his literary predecessors: Mori Ogai, Akutagawa Ryunosuke, Kawabata Yasunari, and Tanizaki Jun'ichiro. But regardless of this change, Mishima's ideal male form in particular and beauty in general are always lurking near the surface of all of his writings, whether published in 1949 or in 1970, the year of his death. Such images are not insignificant, cannot be dismissed as the toys of another sick child of the literary world. Instead, Mishima's concepts of beauty remain stable. In the end, his ideal of beauty does not call for perfection and formality in every detail: natural beauty, whether Greek or Japanese, is more impressive than whatever is artificially rendered perfect. This notion, though spurred by the Greek tradition for Mishima, comes ultimately from the Zen Buddhist concept of wabi--a taste for the quiet and simple--and is an essential part of all things inherently Japanese. But it is important to remember that Mishima comes to an understanding of this native tradition only after having traveled a Greek road to beauty. A necessary vehicle on this journey, moreover, is the concept of myth. Just as the apure

¹Gore Vidal, "The Death of Mishima," in Homage to Daniel Shays (New York: Random House, 1972), p. 256.

novels have their basis in Greek myth, so then do all of his later works have theirs in the myths of traditional Japan, as is evidenced most clearly in his No dramas, as well as in his final tetralogy. But regardless of their framework, be it Greek or Japanese, the ideal male form draped in despondency and nihilism is always present, is the controlling image. As such, all of Mishima's writings echo those "glistening, threatening reflections" (Confessions, p. 254), reflections of a modern man in his modern world.

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