The Post-War in Mishima's Early Fiction

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Hurriedly inventing the nom de plume of Mishima Yukio, sixteen-year-old Hiraoka Kimitake published his first serialized story in 1941 and his first novella in the closing months of WWII. During the American Occupation(1945–1952) he produced almost 20 works. Despite this comprehensive output, he is not normally described as a "post-war writer" in any sense other than one of timing. Oe Kenzaburo, writing directly about the effects of the Hiroshima bomb, Dazai Osamu expressing national defeat through a personal nihilism, and Enchi Fumiko describing the domestic milieu in the face of scarcity, are clearly seen to be scrutinizing the post-war condition. Mishima, on the other hand, is usually described as a supreme esthete who writes highly individualistic fiction, the universal themes of which somehow exist outside place and time. This paper examines the first two major works published in the period of occupation, Confessions of a Mask *(1949) and* Thirst for Love *(1950) and points to the need for further consideration of* Forbidden Colors *(published in two parts, 1951 and 1953). Though not previously acknowledged as such,* Confessions *is clearly part of post-war* kasutori *culture, the polemic of which attempts to argue for the acceptance of decadence, nihilism, and solipsism in the face of unprecedented catastrophe.* Thirst for Love *explains the murderous behavior of its main character by showing the connections between her individual pathology and the social tenor of early reconstruction. Both novels are about narcissism, but they are not about narcissism* per se; *they reveal and explore a narcissism in the context of post-war society and post-war literary culture.*

In the introduction to the first English edition of *Thirst for Love*, Mishima's second major novel of the period of American Occupation, Keene asserts that the author's "intention is clearly not to write a period piece" (1970, p. vi). He makes this judgment because similar themes important to Mishima—such as the eroticism of death, human sacrifice, and narcissistic obsession—thread through his work from beginning to end. Biographer Henry Scott Stokes and translator Seidensticker represent the other common critical approach to Mishima, nominating the writer's "forte" as "style" (1974, p. 136). These are the common ways to approach Mishima's work, where setting and background are seen to be less important than theme and artistry. This paper argues, however, that a historical contextualization of the early fiction provides a fertile ground for a more varied reading of Mishima's prose.

A consideration of post-war content in *Confessions of a Mask* (1949) and *Thirst for Love* (1950) does color our appreciation of what they mean. *Confessions of a Mask* is not just about the formative development of a narcissist; it is about a pathologically dysfunctional narcissist who grows up in society glorifying death and war only to discover in it unprecedented human pain, national disgrace, and massive urban destruction. The narrator remains unmoved either by the pre-war political propaganda, or by post-war catastrophe. Furthermore, though it has never been described

as such, *Confessions* belongs to the more sophisticated edge of *kasutori* culture, the dark underbelly of occupation Japan characterized by prostitution, the black market, gangsters big and small, pulp magazines, popular movies, and a coterie of loosely connected largely decadent writers.

Thirst for Love moves its concerns away from a first-person revelation of the shamelessly warped psychology of one man, to a third-person account of the life of one woman, Etsuko, and the new society in which she must survive. The novel includes much passing detail on post-war social trends, economic conditions, new legislation, societal changes, even linguistic changes, all of which impinge on the formerly prosperous Sugimoto family now forced to feed themselves by working on their hobby farm. This paper describes *Confessions* and *Thirst for Love* as period pieces. It does not argue that the common psycho-aesthetic criticism of Mishima's beautiful and tortured work is invalid—indeed that approach is inescapable: rather it wants to look at some of his content from a new, if less central perspective.

Confessions of a Mask

"Narcissism … will make use of everything for its own ends.
Even the annihilation of the world." (Nathan, 1974, p. 53)

Published in 1949 and written in the first person, *Confessions* looks back over Kochan's childhood and developing adolescence as he sees them. It is quite clear that Mishima is Kochan and that the book is largely autobiographical—both biographers, Nathan and Scott Stokes, assume the novel is redolent with biographical fact. Described throughout *Confessions* are his painful introspection, his erotic fantasies about homosexual erotic death, his clumsy attempt at a heterosexual relationship, his avoidance of the draft, and his life in Tokyo during the closing stages of the war. Unlike key post-war novelists, such as Oe Kenzaburo in Japan and Heinrich Böll in Germany, Mishima did not try to make any sense of the chaos or to find some fictional antidote to the moral quagmire in which the post-war generation was stranded. Instead Mishima's *alter ego*, Kochan, swims entirely in the muddy depths of his own imagination. *Confessions* can also be read as a the manifesto of a decadent: "My immorality was a subtle one, going even a step beyond the ordinary vices of the world, and like an exquisite poison, it was pure corruption. Since immorality was the very basis and first principal of my nature I found an all the more truly fiendish flavor of secret sin in my virtuous behavior…" (Mishima, 1970a, p. 243). The idea of Death was not a catastrophe for the young Kochan before and during the war years; instead it was "a rite and an intoxicated blessing" (Nathan, p. 50).

This self-absorption at a time of unprecedented national crisis, death, starvation and dislocation could be described as the reaction of a sensitive writer surviving in a time and place which had just witnessed the death of surety and traditional values. A contemporary of Mishima, and spokesman for the disaffected, Dazai Osamu responded to the crisis by arguing for the primacy of decadent eroticism in the midst of ruins. Mishima attempts to do the same thing. But his decadent narcissism, if Kochan is to be believed, and his erotic love of death were well and truly formulated long before Japan's defeat, so we cannot assume they are the product of his reaction to it. Two perceptive Japanese critics of the 1970s suspect that in *Confessions* Mishima is being deliberately provocative and that one of the masks he wears therein is of the post-war decadent (Moriyasu Masafumi and Noguchi Takehiko quoted in Starrs, 1994, pp. 175–177).

By way of comparison, Japan's capitulation, the Emperor's humanization, the atomic bombs, the scant regard for the individual life, all shocked and humiliated the young Oe Kenzaburo and "colored much of his work." His fiction became his "way of exorcising demons" (Nobel press

release, 1994). On accepting the Nobel Prize he noted that shame and sadness in the face of WWII imbued his work with the desire to find a "cure and reconciliation for mankind" (Oe, 1994, p. 8). He had, and still has, a passionate regard for the post-war mission of writers who "came onto the literary scene immediately after the last War, deeply wounded by the catastrophe yet full of hope for a rebirth" (pp. 4–5). Oe's mission is related to that felt by the anti-Nazi Heinrich Böll whose first hand experience in the war as a front line German soldier gave him what he called a "worm's eye view" of the War. This view gradually transformed into what he called "rubble literature", a complex and multifaceted moral analysis of post-war Germany.

While Böll and Oe are trying to "exorcise demons" Mishima is seemingly indulging his own. Both Mishima biographers (Nathan, 1974; Scott Stokes, 1974) claim that three things drove Mishima inward: one, the death of his sister Mitsuko to typhoid fever; two, the failure of his heterosexual experience with the girl who would be called "Sonoko" in *Confessions*; and three, the collapse of his dreams about a glorious and erotic youthful death. The war obviously impacted on all three. Mitsuko died from an epidemic which took hold in the closing stages of the conflict and lasted well into the years of American occupation. The possibility of death drove many heterosexual couples into a compensatory union, the very kind of war-time relationship Kochan tries to manufacture so impotently with Sonoko. The war certainly contributed to the self-obsessive behaviors described by Mishima in *Confessions*, but it needs to be stressed that their solipsistic heartlessness was characteristic of the writer long before his sister died or the outbreak of the war—that is if Kochan is to be believed. Nevertheless, Mitsuko's death and the absence of his own (which robbed him of his own array of romantic erotic death-wish fantasies) may have exacerbated his already dysfunctional solipsism:

> Mishima withdrew into himself and ignored the chaotic world about him. "I would see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil." He paid no attention to the important changes in government. Although he was a law student, he did not interest himself in the "five reforms," General MacArthur's programs for the industrial, land, election, union, and educational law reform which were to lay the foundations for *demokurashi* in Japan. Nor did Mishima concern himself with social problems, although he was surrounded by them. The plight of the people of Tokyo, whose homes had been destroyed and who had little food, was acute; a roaring black market rose up and profiteers flourished. The suffering of ordinary people was immense; suicide by drinking methylated spirits was common. Mishima clung to his own little world—his "castle," he sometimes called it, his "dark cave." (Scott Stokes, pp. 110–112)

The content of *Confessions of a Mask* describes the inward psychic drama found in that "cave." Most Western critics at the time approached the novel enthusiastically as a frank revelation of the inner self. The cover blurb of the first English edition of the novel includes an extract from the *Times Literary Supplement* which introduced an "agonizing story of childhood and adolescence … [describing] the inner life of a boy entranced by sado-masochistic fantasy … told without self-pity but with true art and with a desperate humor." This kind of review treats the work as a frank and honest *bildungsroman* which normally traces the spiritual, psychological, and social development of the main character from childhood to maturity. This is all very well till the reader realizes that the boy's intermingling of love, death, eroticism, and pain (and the slightly older narrator's diabolic enjoyment of it) are celebrated without the moral development expected in the *bildungsroman.* Kochan is so obsessed by himself that he has no psychic energy left to allow for the pain of others.

One of the most influential late 20th century theorists on dysfunctional narcissism, Kernberg, describes the narcissist as driven more by self-loathing than guilt, thus moving his self psychology away from Freud's traditional emphases. The narcissist has great trouble feeling guilt—shared or individual—at any level since he cannot empathize with the feelings and pain of others (Watt, 2004, p. 98). Kernberg's archetypal narcissist is very much evident in the pages of *Confessions* as Kochan

presents "… excessive self-absorption, intense ambition, grandiose fantasies, over dependence on acclaim, and an unremitting need to search for brilliance, power and beauty." Kernberg also points to the pathology of the narcissist's inner world "regardless of their superficially adaptive behaviors. This pathology is manifest in an inability to love; a lack of empathy; chronic feelings of boredom, emptiness, and uncertainty about identity, and exploitation of others" (Akhtar & Thompson, 1982, pp. 12–13).

Kawabata was the first critic to recognize the disturbed soul at the heart of Mishima's creativity when he wrote the introduction to *Tozoku* (1948). While he was "dazzled" by Mishima's talent, he sensed it had its genesis in "deep wounds" (Scott Stokes, pp. 120–121). As a child Kochan recognizes, all but dimly, his incapacity "for accepting love" (p. 19) and as the narrative proceeds, of giving love. Reciprocity in mature object relations is an impossibility for Kochan since people, or objects for that matter, have no life beyond the internalized role they play in his psychic games. Omi as his first "love" at the Peers' School can only be regarded as loved if he has no "secret inner life" (p. 63), no real individuality.

Kochan later blames Omi for his lifelong attraction to men who possess "rough gestures, careless speech, and … flesh not tainted in any way with intellect" despite the "logical impossibility" of it (p. 64) . Even as a young adult looking back he can sense that his love for Omi was actually not love at all, but a desire to become him, to look into the narcissist's pool and see Omi's face and body rather than his own. Mishima's body-building fixation from 1955 was an attempt to do just that. Kochan thinks of the objective world around him—events and people—only so far as they reflect or challenge aspects of his self. "Everyone says that life is a stage. But most people do not seem to become obsessed with the idea, at any rate not as early as I did" (p. 101). His foray into the failed heterosexual affair with Sonoko is only possible when he treats her not as a real individual but as a character in a story. "Now there was an air about her that reminded one exactly how a storybook maiden looks and acts when in love" (p. 198). His readers know the affair is doomed before it even begins, for he admits with a perspicacity rare in dysfunctional narcissists, that from an early age he "never liked princesses" (p. 20).

Whenever the artificiality of his projection is challenged, Mishima acts with an almost palpable depression which Starrs describes as "cosmic paranoia," citing the young boy's first memory of the "revenge by reality" on discovering that Joan of Arc is actually female. He feels that this set the pattern for a life which saw "reality itself … [as] a malevolent force intent on making him suffer" (Starrs, 1994, p. 34). Mishima's death by *seppuku* in 1972 was the final revenge of the artist who needed to prove that an invented story would be more potent than life—the triumph of art over reality. As is the case with most narcissists, unconscious self-loathing is assuaged temporarily by illusions of potency: his sense of his own "superiority … became the intoxication of considering myself a step ahead of mankind" (p. 105). Yet at the same time he constantly loathed his own appearance. The remarkable thing about his dysfunctional state is his understanding of it, though such an understanding never led to its amelioration or the formation of a normal healthy narcissistic balance. Here Mishima describes himself when writing *Confessions*:

> The narcissism at the border separating adolescence from adulthood will make use of everything for its own ends. Even the annihilation of the world. At twenty I was able to fancy myself as anything I liked. As a genius destined for an early death. As the final heir to the tradition of Japanese beauty. As a decadent among decadents, the last Emperor of an age of decadence. Even as Beauty's *kamikaze* squad! (Nathan, p. 53)[1]

1. Mishima's narcissism is introduced in Watt (1995), but the most comprehensive contemporary view of it can be found in Piven's impressive study of the novelist (2004).

What part does death play in *Confessions*? It appears largely in the erotic descriptions of youthful death in the narrator's illusory murder theatre. Seen in the context of the war and the early period of occupation this murder theatre must be seen to be as tasteless as it is decadent. The erotic death of beautiful young men figures almost all the way through the novel. The narrator's view of his own death is intimately connected to this, for he cannot truly separate subject from object. Kochan's earliest memory of soldiers marching past his home "intoxicated" him and left him with a "sensuous craving" linked to the "ways they would die…" (p. 14). The murder theatre of "Death and Night and Blood" reserved for a school acquaintance early in the novel (whom he devours at the end of the dream) was especially exciting to Kochan when transferred to low ranking servicemen and other young toughs. He relates this predilection to his first ejaculation after masturbating to Guido's rendering of the death of St Sebastian. In the first murder theater fantasy recorded in the book, a school acquaintance meets his death. Two "cooks" place him on a platter after slowly removing his clothing and tying him up, then deliver him to Kochan face up so he could view "the boy's chest looking … like an amber-colored shield." Mishima was later to call his private army *manque* the Shield Society (*Tate no Kai*). He "thrust the fork upright into the heart. A fountain of blood struck" him "full in the face" (pp. 96–97).

The prevalence of servicemen at the time gave him an endless source for sadomasochistic fantasies, which—like the one above—are grandiose visions of personal potency, probably subconsciously founded in the face of his own physical and constitutional weakness. "I was ashamed of my own thin chest, of my bony, pallid arms…" (p. 126). As with Omi, the victims of the "pagan ceremony" are not allowed to have "a trace of the intellect about them." Mishima describes his (Kochan's) visions unwittingly as narcissistic defense:

> The pleasure you experience at this moment is a genuine human feeling. I say so because at this precise moment you possess the normalcy that is your obsession. Whatever the form of your fantasy, you are sexually excited to the depths of your being, and such excitement is entirely normal, differing not a jot from other men. Your mind quivers under the rush of primitive, mysterious excitement. The deep joy of the savage is reborn in your breast…. You glitter with debauched loneliness. (pp. 175–176)

The wider theatre of war initially provided unlimited grist for Mishima's erotic mill, soldiers and school mates becoming a kind of psychic cannon fodder for him. Looking back both to the child who slavered over the death of young knights and to the young adult who selected his victim from the ranks, one constant repeats itself: he remains "completely in love with any youth who was killed" (p. 20). The narcissist cannot ultimately separate the introjected object and the self, so as he matured, Mishima indulged in erotic fantasies of his own heroic death. The war became "a unique period of happiness" in which he found a "childish delight … at the thought of my own death" (p. 118). When invasion was imminent "even more than before, I found myself deeply immersed in a desire for death. It was in death that I had discovered my real 'life's aim' " (p. 183).

Mishima's preoccupation with and eroticization of death and blood—others' and his own—are disturbing when pitted against the number of casualties of war. It is never possible to be accurate about the number of victims in a catastrophe like World War II. About 10 to 15 million Chinese, 4 million Indonesians, 1 to 2 million Indochinese (from starvation alone), and 3 million Japanese are all thought to have perished in the conflict. Domestically, 10 million Japanese were close to starvation in the first year of occupation while 6.6 million soldiers awaited repatriation (Takemae, 2002, p. xxxviii). The whereabouts of over half a million servicemen still remained a mystery as late as September 1946. In Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, 65 percent, 57 percent and 89 percent of all homes had been destroyed by the time the Americans arrived (Dower, 1999, pp. 40–52).

The early Western reaction to *Confessions* simply ignores all this as if it never happened, and

seduced by the cleverness of style and archness of psychological theme, hailed the novel as a great success. The narrator's cold narcissism is almost unnoticed. It is possible that by the optimistic late 1950s when the novel was first printed in English, the catastrophe of the war was less in critics' minds than it would have been if they read the book just after the close of the conflict. Even so, John Davenport's review in *The Observer* is puzzling: Mishima's "… analysis of the psychology of the public after the disaster of Hiroshima would alone make the book worth reading" (quoted on the cover blurb of the Tuttle edition, 1970). Analysis of the psychology of the public? There are at most five or six pages out of 255 devoted to describing the people in Tokyo and the destruction of the city. The rest of the time Kochan dwells in his own mind. There is little space for empathy or social analysis in the disturbing claustrophobia of an overwhelming personal introspection.

In one paragraph Mishima describes "a parade of misery" of the homeless after a major American bombing raid which discovered that "it was permissible to kill one person in order that another might live." The public, he suggests, have the kind of preoccupied look one would get from watching a great "drama" (pp. 160–161). It is his response to this which is telling. His preoccupation is not on how they feel but how he feels. The parade "emboldened and strengthened" him. He admits to "experiencing the same excitement that a revolution causes", and in the warmth of this excitement he puts his arms round "Sonoko's waist for the first time." In the face of other human suffering, major and minor, he is equally self-centered. He describes the hunger of a starving girl in a crowded train gobbling her very meager lunch as "ridiculous" (p. 207). The starving slave-labor boys from Formosa, who are forced to cook stolen rice in engine oil, are treated with comic condescension (p. 182). He also describes the cheering of young workers watching the destruction of aircraft over Tokyo "as though in a theatre" (p. 189). There is only one short paragraph allocated to the attitude of Tokyoites after Hiroshima, but again he projects his fevered reactions on the masses—"everywhere there was an air of cheerful excitement. It was just as though one was continuing to blow up an already bulging toy balloon, wondering: 'Will it burst now? Will it burst now?' " (p. 217).

The Swingler review of an Auden-Isherwood book reporting on their visit to the front lines of the Sino-Japanese war has relevance for Mishima here. The young writers were "too preoccupied by their own psychological plight to be anything but helplessly lost in the struggle of modern China…. It is impossible to escape the impression that the authors are playing: playing at being war correspondents, at being Englishmen, at being poets" (Parker, 2004, p. 409). Ironically, it is the very same Isherwood—also quoted on the cover blurb of the 1970 edition of the novel—who claimed that Mishima's *Confessions* made him "understand how it feels to be Japanese."

The idea of playing with destruction, indeed celebrating it, is not only seen in *Confessions.* In the early years of occupation, while not ubiquitous, it was a relatively common trope in both fiction and non fiction. As a period piece, if it belongs anywhere, *Confessions* belongs to the literary wing of *kasutori bunka*. *Kasutori* culture is a multifaceted and complex social, economic, political and artistic phenomenon. It takes its name from the rough, black market grog, *kasutori shochu,* which was the drink of choice of petty gangsters, and of the counterculture intelligentsia—along with other readily available substances including philopon, a stimulant for keeping American servicemen awake during action (Dower, p. 108). On one hand *kasutori* culture was the province of shady and not-so-shady figures in the black market, gangsters, prostitutes and their pimps, quasi-pornographic publishers, sleazy club owners, and the even the producers of an increasingly popular cinema. On the other hand it can be represented by the iconoclastic *kasutori-gencha* who, were doing their level best to link "degeneracy and carnal behavior to authenticity and individuality" (Dower, p. 155). Though Dower does not include Mishima in his short list of representatives, it is clear that Mishima's manifesto in *Confessions* belongs to this movement. Dower cites Sakaguchi Ango, Tamura Taijiro,

and Dazai Osamu as the *kasutori* spokesmen for their age.

If *Confessions* argues for anything it is the acceptance of individual degeneracy. The very names of some of the most popular pulp magazines of the era (*Kasutori zasshi)* obviously mirror aspects of *Confessions*: *All Bizarre, Sex Bizarre, Grotesque, G-Men, Blood and Diamonds, Thrill*—to name but a few.[2] We have no record of Mishima's reading any of these magazines, but their ubiquity was such that it would be impossible for an observant man to be unaware of its content and style.

One of the most widespread forms of *kasutori* culture (and one that can be seen directly influencing the content of *Confessions*) was the new popular cinema. It emerged initially under the auspices of David Conde who led the Motion Picture and Drama Branch of MacArthur's occupation machine. Under Conde's guidance, Japanese film makers produced crude propaganda, the aim of which was to underscore defects in Japanese militarism and in the *zaibatsu.* Conde also inadvertently encouraged the emergence of the *seppun eiga* (kissing film). Japanese powers-that-were frowned on kissing which, particularly during the war and the years leading up to it, was viewed as Western and decadent. Two immensely popular movies were released in May 1946 which included kissing for the first time[3]—"Twenty-year-old Youth" (*Hatachi no seishun*) and the appropriately titled, "A Certain Night's Kiss" (*Aru yo no seppun*). While these releases initially had nothing to do with *kasutori* culture they did result in the growth of a large industry of sloppily romantic to quasi-pornographic movies which became a genre by themselves, and very much part of *kasutori* culture—*ero guro* "grotesque eroticism" (Takemae, pp. 397–398). The spirit of *ero guro* and the *seppun eiga* are obvious throughout *Confessions of a Mask,* to the point that his contemporaries could not have failed to notice the inclusion. The kiss plays a significant part in the unfolding of Mishima's narrative in *Confessions* and in the presentation of Kochan's character. As expected, Mishima takes the grotesque to an unprecedented degree.

The kiss first appears in Mishima's homoerotic murder theatre, something which would have been anathema to the relatively straight-laced Conde. Mishima's victims are mythical figures, school acquaintances, gladiator types, servicemen, or young gangsters. They must always be slain by a blade. In allegiance to his memory of St. Sebastian, arrows are also allowed. The intimacy of carving flesh, the coursing and spurting of blood, are followed by a kiss:

> I was one of those savage marauders who, not knowing how to express their love, mistakenly kill the persons they love. I would kiss the lips of those what had fallen to the ground and were still moving spasmodically. (p. 93)

When he directs the murder theatre involving his school friend "B" the kiss becomes a prelude to the death rather than its postlude. "The naked youth lay where he had fallen, face up on the table, his lips slightly parted. I gave those lips a lingering kiss" (p. 96). These sadistic kisses become foils for the failed heterosexual kisses which follow later in the novel.

Kochan's uses Sonoko to explore the possibility of heterosexual experience, though like everyone in his world she is little more than a puppet in his psychic game—an Echo to his Narcissus. He does all he can to pretend that he is in love with her. Towards the end of the novel, he is in bed with a fever of 103 degrees when he experiences real kissing for the first time. He is visited by a distant and older relative, whose sisters were reputed to be "loose women." They kiss energetically if not

2. This kind of publication did not only have its genesis in the shady side of publishing. *Number One*, possessing a similar flavor to its major competitors, was published by a penniless group of students from Tokyo Imperial University (Dower, p. 149).
3. John W. Dower reports discovering a movie released one month prior to those mentioned by Takemae, the Daiei Studio production delightfully named "He and She Go." Dower includes a note of caution, however, by admitting that this first kiss was light and platonic (Dower, p. 180).

passionately until they are interrupted by a servant. In the memory of the event Kochan wonders if his fever or the kissing caused the sense of excitement he experienced; he also wonders if there was anything of sexual desire in the encounter. "It was no use," he concludes, "to try to single out from the drunken emotions of that moment the usual sexual element of the kiss. The important thing was that I had become a 'man who knows kisses' " (pp. 186–187). He spends far more time from then on pondering the possibility of kissing Sonoko than in speculating on the social chaos and the impending doom around him. The anti-climax of the novel is, in fact, the kiss he finally gives (for want of a better word) Sonoko. There is a cinematographic and melodramatic quality in the prose Mishima uses to describe the moment. "I swore," he admits, "to play my role faithfully" as artifice since

> It had nothing to do with either love or desire….
>
> Sonoko was actually in my arms. Breathing quickly, she blushed red as fire and closed her eyes. Her lips were childishly beautiful, but they aroused no desire in me. And yet I kept hoping that something would happen within me at any moment—surely when I actually kiss her, surely then I will discover my normality, my unfeigned love.
>
> The machine was rushing on. No one could stop it.
>
> I covered her lips with mine. A second passed. There was not the slightest sensation of pleasure. Two seconds. It is just the same. Three seconds … I understood everything.
>
> I drew away from her and stood for an instant regarding her with sad eyes…. But Sonoko, overwhelmed with bashfulness and innocent joy, kept her eyes cast down, doll-like. (pp. 196–197)

While Mishima borrows from *kasutori* movies, he also shares thematic concerns with a number of other contemporary writers. These writers, though diverse in theme and style, as a group argue that the only reliable certainties in the new world of defeat and chaos are introspection, eroticism and decadence. Sakaguchi Ango, Tamura Taijiro, and Dazai Osamu, like Mishima

> dramatically linked degeneracy and carnal behavior to authenticity and individuality. In his short essay "On Decadence," published in April 1946, Sakaguchi offered a impassioned critique of the "illusory" nature of the wartime experience, contrasting it to the intensely human and truthful decadence of postwar society…. Sakaguchi observed how former *kamikaze* pilots who had intended to die like scattered cherry blossoms were now working the black market, while wives who heroically saw their husbands off to battle and then knelt in prayer before their memorial tablets had already begun casting around for other men. (Dower, pp. 155–157)

Sakaguchi also suggested that given the choice, he would preserve a railway station rather than a temple in Nara or Kyoto, and that the destruction of the latter might be cause for celebration. While there are philosophic similarities between Mishima and Sakaguchi, *Confession* is probably closer to the work of Tamura Taijiro, whose mission was to prove that the only reliable certainty in the post-war years was the flesh and bodily contact since all "thought" or "ideas" had failed. In *Confessions* Mishima's eroticism is actually fantastic whereas Tamura intended his to be experiential. Dazai and Mishima, though personally antithetical when they met, shared the morbid fascination of rehearsing their own suicides in their art.

While it is clear that there are connections between Mishima and other *kasutori* authors, *Confessions* is the first of Mishima's literary exploits to reveal his fascination with gangsters, a very prominent urban presence in the *kasutori* age. One year after Sonoko marries, Kochan—ever the psycho-social experimenter—wants to meet her again to discover if it is possible to find "love that has no basis whatsoever in sexual desire?" (p. 240). When she is not in his presence, Kochan thinks of Sonoko as the "incarnation of my love of normality itself, my love of things of the spirit, my love of everlasting things" (p. 241). But when she is in his presence he is unmoved by her company and somewhat bored, his theoretical posturing revealed for what it is:

> For a time we carried on a meaningless, endlessly revolving, insincere conversation…. It gave us a feeling that we were overhearing a conversation being carried on by two strangers. It was a feeling like that felt at the borderline between sleeping and waking, when one's impatient efforts to go back to sleep without awakening from a happy dream only make the recapture of the dream all the more impossible. (p. 245)

During one of these moments of boredom, he takes Sonoko to a shady dance club. At the club Kochan's intended foray into the sexless world of unalloyed love is replaced by his immediate and graphic attraction to a young gangster.

While organized crime had long been part of the economic, social and political structures of Japan, the immediate post-war years provided boom years for the *yakuza* and a myriad of other gangs. Kaplan and Dubro (2003) provide several reasons for this, not the least of which is the demilitarization of the police, and right-wing forces at Occupation HQ who had no compunction about using and rewarding gang leaders who could assist them in their battle with the Left.[4] The millionaire boss down to the young would-be thug—in the *demimonde* of protection, black market, gambling, racketeering, prostitution—became far more visible in the years of the American Occupation than ever before. Even the sex industry, hitherto hidden by traditional Japanese taste and compartmentalization of experience, took on a brazen public face. Not surprisingly, it is the youthful representative from this underworld that attracts Kochan, rather than the political ramifications of its complex organization or exponential growth. Sonoko had been "trained not to see things that should not be seen." But see them Mishima does, and he describes them with a graphic enthusiasm characteristic of the *kasutori zasshi.* The young man in question is in the process of replacing his belly-band, the traditional low-cost armour against knife attack:

> The hot mass of his smooth torso was being severely and tightly imprisoned by each succeeding turn of the soiled cotton belly-band. His bare, sun-tanned shoulders gleamed as though covered in oil. And black tufts stuck out from the cracks of his armpits, catching the sunlight, curling and glittering with glints of gold.
>
> At this sight, above all the sight of the peony tattooed on his hard chest, I was beset by sexual desire. My fervent gaze was fixed upon that rough and savage but incomparably beautiful body. Its owner was laughing there under the sun. When he threw back his head I could see his thick, muscular neck….
>
> I had forgotten Sonoko's existence and was thinking of but one thing: Of his going out on to 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 the belly-band, piercing that torso. Of that soiled belly-band dyed with blood. (pp. 252–253)

For a writer whose forte is supposed to be style, this is purple prose at its most melodramatic. Does Mishima really take himself seriously here—and in many other of the more infamous sections of the novel? Does he know that this is the kind of prose that appears in popular literature? Noguchi Takehiko was one of few Japanese critics in the 1960s and 1970s to sense that the moral vacuum which the character Kochan seems to inhabit is characteristic of the age in which the novel is written. But more than that Noguchi also argues that the personal posturing for which the man is famous, is also a characteristic of his literary style. He argues that Mishima exploited the "mask of sexual deviant" in an act of "aggressive opportunism." Painting himself black he inhabits a dark age of "disorder and confusion, or collapse of social taboos, of an unprecedented reversal of values."

4. In his history of the years of occupation, Takemae (2002) spends little time on organized crime, but he does note that two notorious right-wing racketeers, Kodama Yoshio and Sasagawa Ryoichi were released prior to their planned war-crimes trial in the wake of cold war concerns. They immediately entered a "vast and powerful nationalist underground" members of which became legitimate national leaders immediately after 1952 when the occupation ended. A released and untried member of Tojo's war cabinet, Kishi Nobusuke, who "had been responsible for the enslavement of tens of thousands of Chinese laborers in Manchukuo in the late 1930s, would become prime minister in 1957" (pp. 246-247).

Noguchi was also perceptive enough to notice that Mishima manages to "adapt himself negatively to a society governed by the morality of others…. He asserts the power of his own existence by that minus image of himself" (Starrs, pp. 176–177). Moriyasu Masafumi has also noted that the direction of *Confessions* is not common in autobiographical writing which usually looks back in order to explain. This novel looks forward; it is the creed of a young man who wants to be someone else. Gobbling up the images of Omi, young soldiers and sailors, thugs, toughs and gangsters—he wants to appropriate their identity into his future heroic self. It is not surprising to see Mishima a decade later appear on the silver screen as the camp and unconvincing Takeo, the young *yakuza* hero of *Afraid to Die*. Once again Mishima tries to turn himself into someone else.

Mishima provides in *Confessions* an intimate portrait of a solipsistic self, and like all of the *Kasutori gentchi* (intelligensia) whose work articulated and shaped the tenor of the age, he recognized his debt to the times. "Truly I slept together with that age. No matter what pose I assumed of being against the age, still I slept with it" (Starrs, p. 176). So too does his work.

Thirst for Love

"What was there to live for in a time like this?"
(Mishima, 1970b, p. 73)

While this sense of spiritual and social ennui might have come out of a Dazai novel, the quote is from *Thirst for Love,* Mishima's second novel. His obsessions find their way, as ever, into the heart of the work; as Henry Miller quips, Mishima's books inevitably include "the pattern of his life and his inevitable doom. He repeats the three motifs, youth, beauty and death over and over again" (Wolfe, 1989, p. 32). He might also have added that all three are inevitably underscored by erotic inversion. Avoiding the thinly disguised autobiographical approach of *Confessions,* Mishima chooses to make his trapped, sexually frustrated, socially dislocated *alter ego* female. Etsuko, who married beneath her into the formerly prosperous Sugimoto family, finds herself widowed when the philandering Ryosuke contracts typhoid in the post-war epidemic. The long-term decline of her own family's fortunes forces her to move to Maidemmura, on the outskirts of Osaka, to live with the Sugimotos. There she falls prey to the attentions of her dry and possibly impotent father-in-law, Yakichi.

Like the Victorian heroine in the pages of the Brontës or Edith Wharton, Etsuko is plagued by mysterious physical and psychological traumas to the point that being well and keeping well are impossible, a complex condition made more dangerous by her strength of character—what her sister-in-law calls her "will of iron" (p. 72). Mishima's objective attempts to write in the third person and divorce himself from the character was not very convincing to many readers who simply saw Mishima in drag. According to Scott-Stokes (1974) as "Flaubert was Madame Bovary, Mishima was Etsuko" (p. 128). Mishima awards Etsuko the same kind of diabolic edge he sensed was part of his own nature: "She was attracted, lived by pain and uneasiness, much as the mountain climber is lured by even higher ascents. She kept creating new anxieties, ever new agonies" (p. 179). Bored and lost and a knotted ball of sexual frustrations, she develops what she imagines is a passion for the unwitting Saburo, a handsome young servant from Hiroshima in the employ of the family. Saburo in different guises will feature in much of Mishima's work. He is prefigured in *Confessions* as Omi, the first love of the narrator, who has "no secret inner life" (p. 63) and as the young sailors and soldiers who exist without a "trace of the intellect about them" (p. 174). As such it is no surprise that Saburo will become a victim in Mishima's narrative murder theatre. Like most *kasutori* narrative, the novel posits the impossibility of pure love and the inability of reason to understand the dilemma. Moreover,

in the configuration of Mishima's work, love and reason are not only limited, but usually dangerous. The climax of the novel comes at the very moment when Saburo first sees Etsuko as an object of sexual desire—minutes before his death.

Chaos results when Etsuko can finally have what she thinks she has been wanting. She arranges to meet him for a midnight assignation in the garden. In a hysterical scene we don't know if she is trying to run away from Saburo or hold on to him. He retreats and she advances, clinging to him. He tries to run and she is "dragged through the briars" (p. 195) as she holds on to his legs. After hearing screams, Yakichi breathlessly arrives on the scene with a mattock in hand. Etsuko grabs the mattock and kills Saburo with two blows to the head and neck. The impotence of reason in the face of this action is encapsulated in Etsuko's answer to Yakichi's question:

> After a number of seemingly endless, wordless seconds, Yakichi spoke: "Why did you kill him?"
> "Because you didn't." (p. 196)

But what does post-war Japan have to do with this murder, and the nihilistic ideas it upholds? Changes in post-war Japan, economic and social, set a number of parameters within which the frustrated Etsuko could or could not move. Rather than underplay the post-war elements of his work, Mishima seems to go to some length to place the story firmly in time and place. Clearly set in 1949, the story constantly includes fleeting references to aspects of living in Japan at the time: scenes of urban destruction in both Kanto and Kansai, rebuilding programs, food rationing, land reforms, disease epidemics, poverty, social dislocation, changes in class structures and attitudes towards class, new American words, flourishing religions banned in the war, the new constitution, and economic strictures at the individual level. Wolfe is correct when he notices in *Thirst* an "intimacy" which stems from Mishima's "new attentiveness to setting. If Kochan moved along a flat, monochromatic plane, Etsuko … feels the jar and jostle of *her* surroundings" (p. 67).

Etsuko's response to her surroundings is, nevertheless, a narcissist's response. She can only think of events, places, lovers, family or war not in and of themselves but as extensions of her own ego. This is the reason she and Kochan must see Saburo or Omi or the young gangster at the close of *Confessions* as handsome but brutish, without introspection, thought processes or feelings. She is at her most uncomfortable with him when he demonstrates that he does, in fact, have an internal life. He is often described as possessing animal-like qualities: "His close-cropped head seemed to have the solidity of a young bull" (p. 159); he possesses a "wholesome docility" more like a domesticated animal than a man (p. 186); "In his black puppy's eyes a tiny sharp gleam moved" (p. 65); "There was a movement in Saburo's dark puppy eyes" (p. 92). This reduction of the Other is symptomatic of dysfunctional narcissistic behavior. So too can the environment itself have narcissistic relevance to someone who cannot separate the ego from an objective correlative, particularly one that reflects impotency, decay or poverty. For example, Edith Wharton's famous narcissist from *The House of Mirth,* Lily Bart, is depressed by the smell of cabbage in the stairwell when visiting a friend's apartment. Her reaction is out of proportion to the stimulus as she takes things personally in a way others do not. For Mishima's heroine, already suffering from a sense of familial and personal decline, the new emergency housing development near the Sugimoto farm is something to be avoided:

> Maidemmura, where Etsuko lived, was a suburb of the city of Toyonaka, which had doubled its population after the war. It had become a refuge for many made homeless by the Osaka fire bombings. Other settlers were attracted to the city by the government housing built there. Maidemmura was in Osaka prefecture. In a strict sense it was not rural at all. (p. 6)

For Etsuko, the period of reconstruction is marked not by renewal or recovery, but by a bleak sense of restriction. After alighting from the Osaka train (having bought Saburo two pairs of socks in an

excursion) she does everything to avoid walking through the new settlements with their row upon row of simple terraced dwellings:

> Lights were burning in the rows of government housing. There were hundreds of units—of the same style, the same life, the same smallness, the same poverty. The road through this squalid community afforded a shortcut that she never took.
>
> These rooms into which one could see so plainly, each with its cheap tea cabinet, its low table, its radio, its muslin floor pillows, its slim fare, of which one could see at times every scrap, and all that steam! Every one of them made Etsuko angry. Her heart had not developed to the point where she could look at poverty, or imagine anything but happiness. (pp. 7–8)

I understand part of her reaction to these housing schemes, having seen one of the few remaining inhabited post-war housing schemes in Hokkaido. The barracks-like rows of terraced dwellings had no gardens, no common play areas, cramped living conditions and a mind-numbing sameness to row after row. That said, these schemes did house some of the millions of homeless. Dower records that as of 1948, when Mishima was planning and writing *Thirst for Love,* there were still 3.7 million families without housing (p. 115). Starvation was common: in February 1949, the *Asahi Shinbun* reported that only nine homeless people had succumbed to cold and starvation when living at the Ueno station underground passages, whereas the three previous winters had each claimed 100 lives. At one point in December 1947 over 1000 individuals were evicted from the same station (Dower, p. 101).

Etsuko's coldness in the face of human suffering is much like that expressed by Mishima in *Confessions.* The other telling aspect of Etsuko's reaction to the poor housing is her "anger" which seems illogically out of place when responding to the dwellings. Why "anger"? Kernberg's view of the narcissist as described earlier stresses the inability to love, feelings of isolation and boredom, exploitation of others, the possession of compensatory grandiosity. The other most influential theorist of narcissism in the 20th century, Heinz Kohut, would add the constitutional anger or rage that narcissists experience when their inner fantasies clash with the realities of the external world. The "central features" of this narcissist anger include "the need for revenge—the undoing of hurt by whatever the means—and the compulsion in this pursuit, with utter disregard of reasonable limitations" (Akhtar & Thomson, p. 14). Etsuko's anger seen in the first few pages of the novel foreshadows the final murder of Saburo who will become the scapegoat for it.

Membership in the Sugimoto family constantly provides a series of narcissistic wounds to Etsuko. Ryosuke, who dies early in 1949, has always been revolted by his wife's physical presence, and won't even let her help him on with his coat prior to leaving for the office. He has numerous affairs with other women, deliberately leaving evidence of them lying around the house to goad his wife. Though the Sugimotos had humble tenant farmer origins, compared to Etsuko's aristocratic roots, they had gained in wealth and prestige. Yakichi retired as President of a large shipping company a year or so before the outbreak of the war. Ryosuke's marriage is pragmatically wise, for Etsuko hails from the minor aristocracy having an ancestor who was a general in the great civil war. Her sense of class consciousness is important; the poverty of the Sugimotos and the meanness of their existence, relatively easy though it is, is going to provide for a series of dents in her already embattled ego. Scott Stokes describes her inaccurately as coming from "a middle-class family in Tokyo" (p. 127) seemingly missing the view she has of herself as coming from the ruling classes. Etsuko's family in decline certainly mirrors Mishima's own—and, indeed, the fall of Japan itself. Like Etsuko, his grandmother had aristocratic roots and always felt she had married beneath her. His grandfather was former governor of the Japanese colony of Sakhalin, but resigned to take responsibility for a scandal. Mishima understood what it felt like to be the member of a family which had seen better days.

Etsuko's dysfunctional narcissistic reaction to external stimuli can also been seen in her complex

response to her husband's typhoid fever and the places it takes her. Though she is angered by the privation of new state housing developments, the squalid death-ridden atmosphere of the hospital is a source of bizarre exultation for her. She nursed Ryosuke at both the general and the infectious diseases hospital: "The nurses were amazed at her mad, feverish ministrations" (p. 51). In the burning of her husband's fever and in the cremation of the body, she hoped to see the death of her jealousy in the face of his infidelities. More than that she becomes one of a cohort of Mishima figures who, according to Piven (2004) express and experience the "need to exact revenge, feel pain once again, and control a chaotic and rejecting environment…" (p. 64).

Etsuko appropriates the most depressing of environments for her own aims: "The Hospital for Infectious Diseases. With great joy Etsuko welcomed that ugly building…. Life on an island, life in its ideal form, which Etsuko had always pined for, was about to begin. Nobody could follow them there. Nobody could get in." In the general hospital one of her husband's mistresses visited the sick room when Etsuko was there. She catches her husband winking at the woman when he thinks his wife is not looking. The second hospital provides Etsuko with a means of escape: "Here the value of men's lives and germs' lives frequently came to the same thing…. Here life existed only for the sake of being affirmed; no pettier desire was allowed. Here happiness reigned … in its most rotten, inedible form" (pp. 50–51). This celebration of decay is not unusual in the prose of the *kasutori gencha*, particularly in the polemic writing of Sakaguchi Ango which seeks salvation in the "fantastic destruction" of Tokyo. On an individual level, the discovery of a legitimate self can only happen after "we have fallen to the bottom of the path of decadence" (1969, pp. 13–15). For Sakaguchi "degradation is the true crucible of humanity" through which the sufferer can find the kind of active Nietzschean nihilism the essayist admired (Hashimoto, 2005). Etsuko's triumph in the face of her husband's suffering does allow for some release, however as a defense it lacks the long-term promise of Sakaguchi's cleansing.

The late Meiji era saw much success in curbing infectious diseases such as typhoid, cholera and smallpox, but in the chaos of the final stages of the war and early period of occupation these gains were but a distant memory (Takemae, 2002, p. 409). Water in rural areas was corrupted by fecal run-off, and in the large cities war damage had all but destroyed the few sewage systems which were in operation prior to the war. Overcrowding, social dislocation, and water pollution were bad enough, but the return of masses of infected soldiers particularly from Southeast Asia resulted in a horrifying growth of so-called "filth diseases" (Takemae, pp. 409–410). According to Dower a

> plague seemed to have quite literally descended on the country…. Deaths from dysentery nearly doubled to over 20,000 in 1945. Between 1945 and 1948, over 650,000 people were reported to have contracted cholera, dysentery, typhoid fever, paratyphoid fever, smallpox, epidemic typhus…, scarlet fever, diphtheria, epidemic meningitis, polio and encephalitis. Of this number, official records reported the deaths of 99,654 individuals.
>
> Tuberculosis carried off far more victims that all the other diseases combined…. The disease claimed 130,000 lives in 1935, 160,398 in 1942. (p. 103)

Of course literature is not the most appropriate forum for the presentation of these kinds of statistics, but it can distill a national crisis to the level of individual experience. Mishima had an intimate contact with typhoid. In *Confessions of a Mask* the young narrator mentions in passing the death of his sister, but he does so narcissistically, referring more to himself than to her: "My sister died. I derived a superficial peace-of-mind from the discovery that even I could shed tears" (p. 219). The brevity of the passing comment does not reflect the distress felt by the young man, but it does seem a curiously cold way to record a traumatic event as a self-referent. In 1955 when Mishima was trying to explain what he calls the "brutal lyricism" of his early fiction, he mentions that the death of Mitsuko, a few weeks after the Japanese surrender, was a large part of "the propellant force behind

my literary passion in the years that followed" (Nathan, 78):

> Japan's defeat was not a matter of particular regret to me. A far more sorrowful incident was my sister Mitsuko's death a few months later. I loved my sister. I loved her to an inexplicable degree. At the time she was a student … she had been helping classmates move books back to the library that had been evacuated, she suddenly developed a fever. The doctor said it was flu; but the fever stayed high and she lost her appetite. She was taken to Keio Hospital and quickly went into a coma. As soon as the diagnosis of typhoid fever was confirmed, she was transferred to a smaller hospital for infectious diseases.
>
> My mother and I took turns nursing her: but she began intestinal hemorrhaging and soon died. A few hours before her death, when she was quite delirious, I heard her say clearly, "Brother, thank you," and I wept. (Nathan, pp. 78–79)

Biographer John Nathan asked Mishima's mother, Shizue, to confirm this account. She did, at the same time providing a little more detail. Mishima went to school by day and sat up with his sister at night "never taking his eyes from her, sponging her brow and spoonfeeding her sugar water" (Nathan, p. 79). While Mitsuko's death is downplayed in *Confessions,* it is given extensive treatment in *Thirst for Love*, but once removed.

There are clear similarities between Mitsuko's fate and that of Ryosuke. In both cases the fever was initially misdiagnosed as a flu or cold. The frail Mishima and Etsuko stay by the bedside at great personal risk. Both patients were admitted to a public hospital first, before being transferred to a hospital reserved for infectious diseases—little more than charnel houses. Both the infectious diseases hospital in the novel and the one in reality were understaffed, gloomy, oppressive and inadequately equipped. The major difference comes in the reaction of the person watching the approach of death. In Mishima's case the surroundings and the death itself "contributed to the morbid darkness which deepened in … [him] during these war years" (Nathan, p. 79). For Etsuko the death is a diabolic, hysterical triumph, her hope being that her jealousy will die at the same time as her husband. "She still remembered the joy she felt the day her husband's illness was diagnosed…. The odor of Lysol in the [small hospital's] hall! Etsuko loved it!" (p. 42).

Etsuko senses that her salvation relies on Ryosuke's death. In a nation that has been stressing for decades that death is a way of saving the people, the empire, the Emperor, and Japan's place in the world, it is easy to reduce the code to the level of individual experience. Despite the dysfunctional nature of this equation—Ryosuke must die so I can live—Etsuko repeats it when she murders the unwitting object of her attentions. "You couldn't save me," she tells Sugimoto, "without killing Saburo" (p. 197).

The final view we have of Etsuko is seen through the eyes of Yakichi immediately after the murder. He witnesses her indifference, her coldness, her inability to accept responsibility, and finally, her narcissistic release:

> Yakichi's hands were shaking so severely he couldn't dip up water. Etsuko, who was not shaking at all, dipped it for them. She carefully wiped away the bloodstains that had formed in the sink.
>
> Etsuko left first, carrying her coat and *tabi,* rolled in a ball. She barely felt the skinburns and bruises she had suffered when dragged by Saburo. That was not true pain anyway.
>
> Maggie [the dog] howled then stopped.
>
> What can compare with the sleep that came upon Etsuko like divine favor as soon as she slipped into bed? Yakichi listened in amazement to her peaceful breathing. (p. 199)

Forbidden Colors

"This youth decays like radioactive material….
Yuichi does not believe in the modern distress." (Mishima, 1969, p. 103)

Forbidden Colors, published in two parts in 1951 and 1953, is the final work of the period of occupation. It is a far more polyphonic tale than *Confessions of a Mask* or *Thirst for Love*, but like its predecessors it describes the lives of people with no values and, seemingly, no conscience. It also links the nihilism of the main characters to aspects of occupation Japan which impinge on their lives. The novel describes two characters who, yet again, reveal different aspects of the writer's own nature. Dry, old novelist, Hinoki Shunsuke, and the narcissistic but beautiful Yuichi, are "the discrepancies and conflict within myself, as represented by two 'I's" (Scott Stokes, p. 128). The misogynistic Shunsuke wants to take revenge on womankind, using Yuichi as his *agent provocateur*. Yuichi is perfect for Shunsuke's needs because he is short of money, "is morally frigid," and "doesn't take responsibility for his actions" (p. 103). Taking advantage of Yuichi's homosexuality, financial and ethical poverty, Shunsuke encourages affairs with the very women on whom he seeks revenge. Like Etsuko, Shunsuke is an "expert in the act of jealousy" (p. 22). Yuichi leads a triple life: at home as a young husband with one women Shunsuke hates, as the lover of other married women, and on the homosexual edge of *kasutori bunka.*

Like Etsuko's in-laws, the war has severely dented the financial strength of Yuichi's family. His father, formerly head of a *zaibatsu* subsidiary, died in 1944 leaving the family with little on which to survive. The economic climate of the times is also conveyed through the inclusion of a corrupt former aristocrat, Count Kaburagi and his wife, two of the targets for Shunsuke's revenge. Like other members of the aristocracy, with the exception of the royal family, the count is stripped of his title the same day the new constitution is passed by the upper house. Estate taxes further dent the standing of the Kaburagis who are forced to sell the family mansion in Tokyo and live in the modest guest house in one corner of the grounds. They resort to extortion, theft, and craft in an attempt to retain some pretence of gracious living.

In all three novels of the occupation, Mishima's Japanese (most of them his own *alter egos*) do not illicit any feeling of sympathy from the reader. Nor does Mishima seek it. Kochan, Etsuko, Shunsuke, Yuichi and the Kaburagis are self-obsessed, morally vacuous, and unashamedly cold. They are supreme egocentric pragmatists in an age which seems to have lost the ballast of shared values. Despite an obvious artistry of grim humor and thematic intensity, for me at least, there is something missing in Mishima's work, something discomfiting. Stephen Spender's reasons for disliking an Isherwood novel can be used to explain my discomfort with Mishima. "You don't love your characters enough because you don't let yourself hate them enough. Therefore the reader is inclined to hate them a bit for you" (Parker, p. 631). The fact that he *is* his characters adds another level of complexity to Spender's point, and several levels of meaning to our reactions to Mishima the novelist and Mishima the man.

The critical world responding to the art, life and times of Mishima has generally given most of its attention to his artistry and his psychology, probably because they are graphically and dramatically intertwined in the texts, and partly because Mishima leads us in that direction. Yet it is the contention of this paper that Mishima does write period pieces—almost despite himself. Of course there are many aspects of Japanese society at the time of occupation which he completely ignores. Novels are not encyclopedic. The American serviceman, for example, is entirely absent from the pages of the occupation fiction. He obviously played no part at all in Mishima's fantasy world and therefore has

no place in the invention of the author's personal mythos. Mishima's period pieces are historically relevant, but they are highly selective and disturbing in their self-centeredness.

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