THE MASK AND THE HAMMER:
NIHILISM IN THE NOVELS OF MISHIMA YUKIO

By

ROY STARRS

B.A., The University of British Columbia, 1971
M.A., The University of British Columbia, 1980

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
(Department of Asian Studies)

We accept this thesis as conforming
to the required standard

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
August, 1986
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Department of Asian Studies

The University of British Columbia
1956 Main Mall
Vancouver, Canada
V6T 1Y3

Date Oct.7, 1986
ABSTRACT

This thesis offers an analysis of some of the major novels of Mishima Yukio in the light of their underlying nihilist world-view. There are primarily three different levels to the analysis: philosophical, psychological and moral/political, to each of which a chapter is devoted. In the treatment of each of these "levels" the focus is not merely on the nihilism per se but on the aesthetic consequences of the nihilism in Mishima's art of fiction. An attempt is also made to place Mishima, as a "nihilist writer", within the international context of the nihilist literary/philosophical tradition, a tradition whose origins may be traced back to mid-nineteenth-century Europe.

The analysis centres on what are, in the writer's view, Mishima's three major works—which also represent, coincidentally, the three separate decades of his literary career: Confessions of a Mask (Kamen no kokuhaku, 1949), The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (Kinkakuji, 1956) and The Sea of Fertility (Hôjô no umi, 1965-70), a total of six novels, since the latter work is a tetralogy. The study aims not to provide an all-inclusive survey of Mishima's career but to penetrate to the very core of his inspiration through an in-depth study of his most important works.

Chapter One, "The Tragic Mask", begins with a general consideration of the relation between philosophy and the novel,
or ideas and the novel, and offers a brief taxonomy of the "philosophical novel". Using this taxonomy, a description is then given of Mishima as a philosophic novelist whose central philosophy is nihilism. The main body of the chapter then offers an analysis of each of his three main works in terms of their nihilist philosophy, paying particular attention to its expression in "experiences of nothingness" which form the climaxes of the novels, and to the structural discipline which his use of this philosophy confers on the novels.

Chapter Two, "The Void Behind the Mask", opens with a general discussion of the relation between nihilism and psychology, and then proceeds to a consideration of Mishima's own "nihilist psychology" and the "nihilist psychology" of his novels. Each of his major novels, whether explicitly "autobiographical" or more apparently "fictional", is found to be primarily an expression of the author's own "nihilist psychology". The active/passive tensions which characterize this psychology are analysed in Freudian, Adlerian and peculiarly Japanese terms.

Chapter Three, "Hammer to Mask", opens with a general consideration of nihilist morality and politics, especially in terms of the "active nihilist" tradition which may be traced from Nietzsche down to 20th century fascism and terrorism. Mishima's own right-wing extremism and his glorification of terrorist violence place him squarely in this "active nihilist"
moral/political tradition. But his "active nihilist" side was also continually in danger of being undermined by his "passive nihilist" side, his sense of the futility of all action. The resultant tensions are found to form the basis of the moral/political dialectic of his major novels.
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my heart-felt thanks to my supervisor, Professor John Howes, for his warm encouragement and support, and for his sagacious direction of this thesis. I would also like to thank the members of my thesis committee, Drs. Leon Hurvitz, William Wray, Kenneth Bryant and Peter Petro, for their patient reading of this work during a particularly hot and dry August.

Grateful thanks are also due to Professor Kinya Tsuruta for his advice and support over many years. Many thanks also to Professor Takahito Momokawa of the National Institute of Japanese Literature for sending me reference materials.

Finally, a deep gasshō to Kazuko, my wife, for her patience and loving support, and to Sean Kenji, my son, for lightening my days.

NIHIL EX NIHILO.
INTRODUCTION

Mishima Unmasked

Mishima Yukio (三島由紀夫, 1925-70) is probably the first modern Japanese novelist to have gained a genuinely international reputation. That is, he is the first to be widely known not only among readers with a special interest in Japan but also among readers in general—and, indeed, perhaps even among many who never read novels. This fact was most obviously demonstrated, of course, by the 1985 film, Mishima: a Life in Four Chapters, directed by Paul Schrader—which, in turn, has led to yet another "Mishima boom" in the English-speaking countries. In France, too, there has long been a "Mishima cult", and one of the most distinguished of contemporary French writers, Marguerite Yourcenar, has written a respectful critical study of his work, Mishima ou La vision du vide. That a popular American film was based on the life and work of a Japanese writer was certainly an unprecedented event in the history of Japanese/Western cultural relations, and one cannot imagine such a thing happening with any other modern Japanese writer. Long before the film, in fact, there were already two excellent and highly readable biographies of Mishima in English, one by John Nathan, the other by Henry Scott Stokes—again, an unprecedented phenomenon for a Japanese writer.

The curious fact is, though, that probably almost anyone who has read widely in modern Japanese literature regrets this "undue" popularity of Mishima. The general agreement seems to
be that it would be far preferable if this worldwide fame were bestowed on some of the Japanese novelists of obviously higher rank—say, Kawabata or Tanizaki, novelists who not only possessed deeper wisdom and finer artistry but were also more "respectable" as men, and would thus "represent Japan to the world" in a much more satisfactory way. But a writer's fame, of course, is not always strictly commensurate with his literary or moral worth, especially his fame beyond the borders of his own country. Many "extra-literary" factors may enter into it, especially, in this age of mass media, the "human interest" quality of his life and character—in other words, the extent to which the writer himself arouses the public's curiosity.

Needless to say, Mishima was a past master at "arousing curiosity", at self-publicity stunts which, to put it bluntly, helped sell his books. As the media people say, he was "good copy": a writer with an international reputation as a "serious" novelist but who, nonetheless, did such bizarre things as play bit parts in gangster movies, pose nude for semi-pornographic pictures, found his own private army and, finally, commit suicide by ritual disembowelment and decapitation after a failed attempt at a coup d'état. And, indeed, many cynics have suggested that his suicide was merely the last and most spectacular of his self-publicity stunts—a final desperate attempt to revive his flagging popularity. If that was, in fact, its purpose, it can only be judged an outstanding success. Though politically a "non-event", in "human interest" terms it commands our attention like no other incident in the lives of modern
Japanese novelists—which, it must be admitted, tend on the whole to be rather dull. More than a decade and a half after it occurred, Mishima's suicide—almost as if it were his last "theatrical performance"—continues to be the object of a somewhat morbid fascination, as well as the subject of lively debate among "Mishima critics", most of which revolves around the tantalizing question: why did he do it?

But this is not to say that there are no "legitimate" literary reasons for the unprecedented popularity of this Japanese writer in the West. Firstly and perhaps most importantly, his novels are probably far more exciting to read for the average Western reader than many of those Japanese novels more highly valued by the Japanese themselves. For a reader not in tune with the subtleties of traditional Japanese aesthetics and social relations, the more "purely Japanese" novels by such writers as Sōseki, Shiga, Tanizaki and Kawabata often seem rather "flat" and "uneventful"—or, to state the case extremely, a boring parade of trivial details headed in no particular direction, and apt to be cut short at any arbitrary moment. Mishima's novels, by contrast, seem a veritable circus of colour and excitement, and a well-organized circus too. This is not entirely because they have more sex and violence, though admittedly this is part of it. Mishima's novels have a clearer structure—a structure as clear, in fact, as a logical syllogism—and they always seem to be brought to a neat and resounding conclusion, the aesthetically satisfying kind of conclusion which ties up all "loose ends". Still more, one also often
derives a kind of intellectual excitement from reading Mishima's novels, the excitement of coming into contact with a "dangerous thinker", a man who challenges conventional wisdom and does so in great style, upon the point of a witty aphorism. This quality in Mishima often reminds one of those earlier "dangerous thinkers", Oscar Wilde and Friedrich Nietzsche, and this is no coincidence, as these two were among Mishima's very favourite Western writers. Especially Nietzsche, as we shall see, was a primary influence on Mishima's thought. The sharp sense of irony, the hard-edged cynicism, the devastating iconoclasm of Mishima's style of thought—all those elements, in fact, which make his thought seem so "dangerous" and so "modern"—issue from basically the same source as those qualities in Nietzsche's thought: a nihilist world-view. Though Mishima was probably a "nihilist" of sorts from early childhood, before he had ever read Nietzsche, there can be no doubt that his reading of Nietzsche as a teenager helped him to formulate his nihilism in a more comprehensive and systematic way. The great dualities of Nietzsche's philosophy: the Apollonian versus the Dionysian principle, active versus passive nihilism, as well as such of his leading concepts as "eternal recurrence" and "love of fate" (amor fati), remained the guiding principles of Mishima's thought throughout his entire career. And it is essentially Mishima's Nietzschean-style nihilism which creates the sense of intellectual danger and excitement in his best novels—the intellectual equivalent of playing with fire. Or, in moral terms, this may be described as the cultivation of an
exciting "machismo of evil", the kind of defiant reversal of values which creates a heady sense of freedom.

A less "legitimate" reason for Mishima's popularity with Westerners centres on the view of him as a kind of archetypal or quintessential Japanese, a paragon of Bushido, perhaps even the "last samurai". His seppuku is naively accepted as "in the best samurai tradition", and it is assumed that by reading his works one will discover all the dark secrets of the "Japanese soul". This is as ridiculous, of course, as it would be for a Japanese to regard, say, Edgar Allen Poe as a "representative American", Oscar Wilde as a "representative Irishman", or even the Marquis de Sade as a "representative Frenchman". Mishima himself was not above encouraging such a misconception: posing in fundoshi (loincloth) with samurai sword in hand, hachimaki (headband) around his scalp, and an expression of grim determination on his face, as if he were indeed the last human embodiment of the Japanese warrior tradition. All this, needless to say, was part of his "sales pitch" to the West, as well as of his general cultivation of a "machismo" image. He was no more a "true samurai" than he was a true traffic policeman or air-force pilot, in whose garb he also had himself photographed. The "samurai" image was simply one of Mishima's favorite masks—and also one of his most transparent.

The question naturally arises, then: who was the "real" Mishima, the man behind the masks? Or, in literary terms: what was the real world-view underlying his novels? The question is best answered, of course, by reading the novels them-
selves. Though the protagonists of Mishima's novels don masks of various kinds—from the "mask of a normal male" worn by the narrator of Confessions of a Mask to the "mask of an ultranationalist terrorist" worn by the hero of Runaway Horses, the second volume of the final tetralogy—there is always in these novels a powerful countervailing force which tends to rip the mask from the protagonist's face just as the work is brought to a conclusion. In a word, this force is Mishima's nihilism, his sense of the nothingness of reality and the meaninglessness of life itself, a sense which continually undermines any small, momentary comfort his heroes take in a tentative "faith" or in melodramatic role-playing. To use a familiar nineteenth-century nihilist symbol, his nihilism is the "hammer" with which he smashes to pieces the masks worn by his characters—and this act of "smashing" itself often forms the dramatic climax of his novels. This was Mishima's real "act of courage": not the self-indulgent sword-play with which he mesmerized the world but the devastating honesty with which, in his writings, he unmasked his fictional alter egos and revealed the void which gaped behind the mask.

Though Mishima tried hard to find Japanese and Chinese precedents for his nihilism, this only forced him, as we shall see, into some anachronistic interpretations of his own cultural tradition. The truth is that nihilism of Mishima's kind was originally a product of the modern West's disillusionment with its own moral, religious and philosophic traditions, and that the foremost influence on the intellectual formulation of
Mishima's nihilism was the German philosopher, Nietzsche. Ironically in view of his much-cherished "ultranationalist" and "traditionalist" masks, this makes Mishima essentially a "Western" thinker--or, at least, a "modern" thinker, since nihilism is now a worldwide phenomenon--rather than a thinker in the Sino-Japanese tradition. And, indeed, it seems to me that many of the distortions, exaggerations and contradictions one finds in Mishima's view of Japanese culture, and of Asian culture in general, may be attributed to the simple fact that he often views this culture "through Western eyes".

Mishima sometimes referred to himself as a nihilist, and also described at least one of his novels as "a study in nihilism". And various critics have noted some of the nihilist aspects of Mishima's work. Masao Miyoshi, for instance, speaks rather vaguely of Mishima's "quasi-Nietzschean world-system". Noguchi Takehiko speaks of his "nihilist aesthetics", by which he seems to mean Mishima's attraction to "death and night and blood". Sadoya Shigenobu, Agata Ibuki and John Nathan see a fundamental dichotomy between Mishima's "nihilism" on the one side and his "emperor-worship" and "ultranationalist faith" on the other. From a historical rather than a literary/critical perspective, Umehara Takeshi views Mishima as one of a whole group of "nihilist writers" produced by Japan's defeat in the Pacific War and the general disillusionment that resulted.

No-one has yet offered, though, a comprehensive and systematic study of Mishima's nihilism as expressed in his novels, a study which would attempt to show the philosophical, psycho-
logical, moral and political ramifications of this "core element" of his world-view, and the aesthetic consequences of these within his art of fiction. By doing so, such a study would not only clarify some of the obscurities and apparent contradictions in the "inner logic" of these novels, but also demonstrate to what a remarkable extent they form an integral whole, both in themselves and as related to each other. This should at least have the effect of increasing the reader's respect for the "aesthetic integrity" of Mishima's novels—even if those novels continue to seem flawed in many other ways.

Needless to say, the present work aims to be the above-mentioned study. It has seemed best to concentrate the analysis on what, in my view, are Mishima's "three major works"—which represent, coincidentally, the three separate decades of his career, the 'forties, 'fifties and 'sixties: Confessions of a Mask (1949), The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (1956) and The Sea of Fertility (1965-70). Though these constitute "three works", the total of novels is actually six, since the final work is a tetralogy. Mishima was a prolific writer and, of course, wrote many other novels, as well as numerous short stories, plays and essays. I have preferred to limit my analysis to these three major works for two reasons. Firstly, because Mishima, like many writers, repeats the same basic structural and thematic patterns in most of his novels, so that to go through them one after the other analysing the same nihilistic elements would be to risk a monotonous redundancy. And I doubt that any reader will have trouble "extrapolating" our
findings here onto other Mishima novels. Secondly and more importantly, my purpose is to show how Mishima's nihilism functions on all "levels" of his novels—especially the philosophical, psychological and moral/political—and I devote a chapter each to these three main "levels". Rather than use a different work to illustrate each different "level", it has seemed possible to better demonstrate the interrelationships between the various "levels" by referring to the same works in each of the three chapters. What is lost in "scope" is, perhaps, made up for in "depth". For my purpose is not to offer an all-inclusive survey of Mishima's career but to penetrate to the "essence" of his character as a novelist—to find the "real" Mishima behind the masks.
Introduction

Notes


Chapter One

The Tragic Mask

1. Introduction: Mishima as a Philosophic Novelist

A. Philosophy and the Novel

The precise nature of the relation between the novel and ideas—or, more formally, between literature and philosophy—has often been a fertile source of controversy, and even of raging debate, among novelists and critics. At one extreme is what might be called the "novel-as-fine-art" view, which denies that there can be any worthwhile relation at all, since the value of a novel is based on purely aesthetic factors, and ideas by their very nature are "inartistic". At the other extreme is what might be called the "novel-as-criticism-of-life" view, which insists that any novel worth its salt provides significant interpretations of major philosophical issues.

In their classic study of critical method, The Theory of Literature, (1942), René Wellek and Austin Warren argue largely in favor of the former view, and express regret that there are still critical discussions "which treat a literary work as though it were a philosophical tract." They subsume all analysis of the intellectual content of a literary work under what they call the "extrinsic approach to the study of literature", as opposed to the "intrinsic study of literature", which, according to them, includes analyses of such things as
style, image, symbol and narrative technique. But they never satisfactorily explain why an idea in a literary work should be regarded as a more "extrinsic" element than, say, an image. Indeed, even they concede that: "Sometimes in the history of literature however there are cases, confessedly rare, when ideas incandesce, when figures and scenes not merely represent but actually embody ideas, when some identification of philosophy and art seems to take place. Image becomes concept and concept image." 4

In an essay protesting the modern prejudice against ideas in literature, Lionel Trilling singles out Wellek and Warren, along with T.S. Eliot, as examples of critics "who seem to think of ideas as masculine and gross and of art as feminine and pure, and who permit a union of the two sexes only when ideas give up their masculine, effective nature and 'cease to be ideas in the ordinary sense and become symbols, or even myths.' [a quote from Wellek and Warren] We naturally ask: symbols of what, myths about what? No anxious exercise of aesthetic theory can make the ideas of, say, Blake and Lawrence other than what they are intended to be--ideas relating to actions and to moral judgement". 5 And Trilling argues in the same essay that it is this very lack of an active relation with ideas, with "intellectual power", 6 which accounts for the weakness of much modern American prose literature, in contrast to contemporary European literature, which is "in competition with philosophy, theology, and science", in that "it seeks to match them in comprehensiveness and power and seriousness". 7
Some distinguished practising novelists have also entered this debate. Perhaps the most powerful voice of recent years raised on the side of the "novel-as-fine-art" was that of the great Russo-American novelist, Vladimir Nabokov (1899–1977). Nabokov often thundered against the "second-rate and ephemeral" works of "puffed-up writers" who dealt in "great ideas", and he included among these some of the most respected novelists of modern times: Dostoevsky, Thomas Mann, Camus, Sartre, D.H. Lawrence, Pasternak and Kazantzakis. He held that "mediocrity thrives on ideas" and that the "middlebrow or the upper Philistine cannot get rid of the furtive feeling that a book, to be great, must deal in great ideas". Though Nabokov's witty jibes might serve as a salutary antidote to the intellectual pretentiousness of much modern literature and criticism, still one finds it hard to accept his wholesale dismissal of so many obviously important novelists. Certainly he is correct in asserting that one cannot judge the aesthetic value of a novel entirely on the basis of its ideas, but this does not mean that a novel can do without ideas, or that ideas are harmful to its nature as a work of art. And one might also question whether his own distaste for ideas did not prevent Nabokov from achieving the first rank as a novelist, despite his brilliant gifts as a stylist. There is always the danger, with such a writer, that his work may give the impression of being "all style and no substance".

Another distinguished novelist who has entered the debate is Mary McCarthy (1912– ), though she stands in the opposite
camp to Nabokov. In her *Ideas and the Novel* (1980) she laments that, "being of my place and time, I cannot philosophize in a novel in the good old way, any more than I can write 'we mortals'. A novel that has ideas in it stamps itself as dated; there is no escape from that law".12 McCarthy introduces an historical dimension into the debate, pointing out that in the nineteenth century, the "classic period"13 of the novel, the "intellectual and expository component" of novels was "immense".14 What spelled the death of this intellectual capaciousness, this receptivity of the novel to ideas, was the ascendancy of Henry James, who, according to T.S. Eliot, "had a mind so fine no idea could violate it".15 Thus began the Anglo-American modernist doctrine that ideas were "inartistic"—that is, incompatible with the aesthetic quality of the novel. What McCarthy fails to point out in her excellent study is that this is largely an Anglo-Saxon prejudice; on the European continent the novel of ideas has fared much better. Indeed, the literary situation in this respect resembles the situation in modern philosophy, in which a split obtains between the Anglo-American analysts, who shy away from traditional philosophical speculation, and the continental metaphysicians, who still dare to philosophize in the most abstract and abstruse Teutonic manner.16 And, of course, this parallel is not entirely coincidental. Since continental philosophy (existentialism, for instance) is more closely literary (being concerned with many of the same general themes as literature), it follows quite naturally that continental literature should be more philosophical. And, as
we shall see, it was mainly French and German literature which captivated Mishima.

In the context of modern Japanese literature, one can also find examples of the above-mentioned polarity of views on the use of ideas in the novel. Perhaps the most conspicuous was the division in the early Shôwa period (1926— ) between the left-wing "proletarian" writers, whose novels were imbued with Marxist ideology, and the "neo-sensory" writers (shin kankaku-ha) such as Kawabata Yasunari and Yokomitsu Riichi, whose novels were devoid of ideas but remarkable for their experiments in modernist style.17

B. The Philosophical Novel – a brief taxonomy

Evidently, then, for those critics of the most extreme faction of the "novel- as-fine-art" school, the very notion of a "philosophical novel" seems a deplorable contradiction in terms. But the fact remains that many important novels have been written which may justifiably be termed "philosophical", though not always in the same sense. In fact, there are at least six different senses in which a novel might be called philosophical, and it will be useful to distinguish between these before proceeding any further.

Passive versus Active
1. Any novel is passively philosophical. Even a novel intended as merely popular entertainment, with no pretentions to any "serious message", still presents the reader with an image of the world based on certain assumptions about the
nature of reality. The contemporary French novelist, Alain Robbe-Grillet, argues this point well, in his *For a New Novel* (Pour un nouveau roman, 1963), while advocating the need for a new form of novel consonant with a modern world-view. He deplores the continuing popularity of the "bourgeois", Balzacian model of the novel because, according to him, it reflects an outmoded philosophy: "All the technical elements of the narrative--systematic use of the past tense and the third person, unconditional adoption of chronological development, linear plots, regular trajectory of the passions, impulse of each episode toward a conclusion, etc.--everything tended to impose the image of a stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable universe". In Robbe-Grillet's own novels, of course, the image of the universe presented is anything but "stable, coherent, continuous, unequivocal, entirely decipherable". To take a simple example: in a popular detective story, when A. puts arsenic into B.'s cocktail and B. dies upon drinking it, there may be some shock to the reader's moral sense but there will be none at all to his sense of reality. Everything is "in order"; the conventional laws of causation are functioning smoothly. But what if, without any explanation, B. were suddenly to reappear later in the novel as if nothing had happened? The reader might think either he or the novelist were going mad! Or, at least, he might begin to question the novelist's assumptions about the nature of reality. It is exactly such assaults upon conventional notions of time and causation that Robbe-Grillet--who
might be regarded as a kind of philosophical terrorist—has perpetrated in his novels and films.

2. Though any novel may be considered passively philosophical, obviously it would not be appropriate to call every novel a philosophical novel. The term should be applied, if at all, only to those novels which are in some way actively philosophical, by which I mean that—unlike the popular detective story, which is merely based on conventional assumptions about the nature of reality—they actively engage with philosophical issues. Robbe-Grillet's novels, as we have seen, are in this sense actively philosophical, though they do not indulge in any explicit philosophizing. And this brings us to the next distinction.

**Implicit versus Explicit**

3. A novel may be actively philosophical without ever resorting to a philosophical idea—by, for instance, addressing philosophical issues metaphorically or symbolically. To aesthetes this is no doubt the highest kind of philosophical novel, and perhaps the only kind which deserves to be considered a work of art. As Stephen Ross, in his *Literature and Philosophy: An Analysis of the Philosophical Novel*, argues convincingly, Kafka's *The Trial* is a good example of the fact that works of literature "which present philosophical theses do not necessarily harangue the reader with philosophical diatribe".19

4. There are many novelists, though, and among these some of the greatest, who see no reason why they should abide by the
taboo against the explicit discussion of philosophical ideas. Indeed, they seem to feel that, since such discussions are an ordinary and important part of life, their novels would present a narrower and less accurate image of life without them. The discussions may be carried on either in the narrator's voice, the voice of a "spokesman" character, or the voices of characters in general. Since a novel is a work of fiction and not a philosophical treatise, it can never be taken for granted that the philosophical positions expressed are those of the author himself. But there is one further distinction to be made, and it has important aesthetic consequences: does the novel merely present an array of philosophical positions, in an ongoing conflict that may never be resolved? Or is it organized around a central philosophical argument that is brought to a definite conclusion by the novel's end?

Mimetic versus Advocatory

5. A prime example of what Mary McCarthy calls the "discussion novel", which presents conflicting philosophical views without ever resolving them, is Thomas Mann's _The Magic Mountain_, in which the debates between Naphta and Settembrini, as McCarthy says, "oppose nihilistic Jesuitry to progressive atheist-istic humanism...."

6. An aesthetically more dangerous kind of novel, but also, it seems to me, a potentially more kind, is the novel which actually advocates a philosophical position. It may seem odd to say that the "novel" advocates rather than the novelist, but, as already noted, since a novel is not a philosophical
tract, none of its views may be unequivocably attributed to the author. The danger in this kind of novel, of course, is exactly that it might come to seem like a tract, a crude piece of propaganda—in the manner, for instance, of so much Marxist or social-realist fiction. With most such advocacy philosophical novels, of course, the position advocated is probably that of the author himself, but the possibility remains that he has adopted the position tentatively, on a "what if" basis, purely for the purpose of writing this particular novel. Such is the case, for instance, with many of the *ficciones* of Jorge Luis Borges. And even in the case of a philosopher/novelist such as Jean-Paul Sartre, the correspondence between his philosophy and his fiction is not necessarily exact. Given the unconscious processes at work in any true act of artistic creation, there is no guarantee that what the novelist intends to say precisely equals what the novel says. Especially in this age of psychoanalysis, it is, in fact, quite easy to imagine that the novel says something more or something quite different. Even great philosophers make Freudian slips.

Though the dangers of the advocacy philosophical novel are obvious (many readers, for instance, still cannot abide D.H. Lawrence's "preachiness"), its advantages are perhaps less so. Since Mishima's novels belong largely to this category, it will be one of the main purposes of the present study to show what those advantages are.
C. Mishima as a Philosophical Novelist

Using the above taxonomy of the philosophical novel, it may be said that Mishima's novels are philosophical mainly in the active, explicit and advocatory senses, though occasionally, also, in the implicit and mimetic senses.

Nihilism, the central philosophy of Mishima's novels, informs not merely the world-view of the characters but the very perspective from which the novels are narrated. Nothingness, the core idea of nihilism, is presented not merely as an idea but as a fact of life, as an experience which the characters must suffer through, and as the very nature of reality. No other world-view besides this nihilistic one is permitted. Even when other philosophies, such as Buddhism or neo-Confucianism, are made use of, they are interpreted in a nihilistic way.

Because the nihilistic philosophy is so all-pervasive in these novels, no clear line can be drawn between their "philosophic" and their "aesthetic" components. Nihilism permeates not only their themes and motifs but also the psychology of their characters, their narrative points of view, their plots, structures and styles. Nevertheless, the focus of the present study will be more on the aesthetic effects of the nihilistic philosophy, to the extent that these can be isolated, than on the philosophy per se. This is not primarily a study of Mishima as philosopher but of Mishima as novelist.

Although there was a remarkable consistency in Mishima's world-view from the day when, as a precocious thirteen-year-old,
he published his first story in a school magazine, to the day when, over thirty years later, he handed in the manuscript of his last novel and promptly committed suicide, nonetheless, there were, of course, some changes in the "style" of his nihilism. In an early novel such as *Confessions of a Mask* (Kamen no kokuhaku, 1949), as we might expect, it is presented with a youthful, narcissistic romanticism, as part of the hero's "tragic destiny" and with strongly erotic overtones, since the hero obviously derives an intense masochistic pleasure from the role of victim. In a middle-period work such as *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (Kinkakuji, 1956) the nihilism is presented in a more complex philosophical and psychological form, with less self-indulgence and sentimentality, and even, it seems, some promise of its being overcome—a rare positive note in Mishima. By his last work, *The Sea of Fertility* (Hôjô no umi, 1965-70) tetralogy, however, the reader is permitted no illusions about the possibility of nihilism being overcome. Its final scene is the bleakest, least sentimental and most uncompromising of all Mishima's expressions of nihilism, and it may be regarded as his "last testament", since it was the last thing he wrote before committing suicide. Indeed, he seems to have purposely emphasized this point by affixing to it the date of his death, November 25th, 1970.

Since the tetralogy's final scene does give the clearest and most powerful expression of Mishima's nihilism, it has seemed appropriate to begin the present study with an analysis of this scene. As Mishima himself once said, his novels have
a kind of "optical" structure, in which all of their forces converge on the final scene. Since this is as true of the two earlier works dealt with in this chapter, Confessions of a Mask and The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, as it is of his last work, in my analysis of these too I begin with their final scenes. In this way, having witnessed the end, one is able to understand more clearly the forces leading to that end. Thus, after examining the nihilist implications of the final scenes of each of the three novels, I proceed to analyse the forces throughout the novel which lead to this final nihilist epiphany, then the aesthetic functions of the novel's nihilist philosophy and, finally, in the light of these analyses, the value of the novel as a work of art.

Following this analysis of the novels themselves in terms of their nihilism and its essential consequences, the chapter then concludes with an attempt to situate them in a wide cultural and historical context, encompassing both the Western and the Japanese philosophic traditions, and the Western and Japanese literary traditions. At the same time, an attempt is made to assess Mishima's unique achievements as a philosophical novelist, especially in terms of his transcendence of the "I-novel" or shi-shōsetsu, the dominant form of modern Japanese novel.
II. Nihilism as the Core Philosophy of Mishima's Novels

A. The Experience of Nothing: The Sea of Fertility

1. The final scene of the tetralogy

The final scene of *The Decay of the Angel* (Tennin gosui, 1971) brings to a close not merely a single novel but a whole tetralogy, and not merely a tetralogy but an entire career. Mishima had always attached great importance to his final scenes. A playwright as well as a novelist, he liked to ring down the curtain with a last dramatic flourish, a traditional "grand finale". His spectacular suicide on November 25th, 1970, appears to have been inspired, at least in part, by the same theatrical impulse—a unique case of life imitating art. By affixing this date to the end of the tetralogy, in fact, he seems to have wanted to link the two: his final testament as a man of action with his final testament as a writer. A serious student of Mishima, then, will naturally pay close attention to the tetralogy's final scene, expecting to find in it some clue to what lies at the very heart of this writer's work. And he will not be disappointed.

The scene transpires at the Gesshū Temple, a nunnery in the hills outside Nara. Honda Shigekuni, the only character who appears in all four novels of the tetralogy, has come to visit the Abbess of this nunnery, who is none other than Ayakura Satoko, the heroine of the first novel of the tetralogy,
Spring Snow (Haru no yuki, 1965). Honda has not seen her for sixty years, though he has thought of her often, and he has finally come to visit her because he knows he is dying and feels a need to see her before he dies. The reasons for this need seem various. As an old man, he naturally wants to reminisce pleasantly with someone who shared the most meaningful experiences of his youth. Then again, he seems to need to reassure himself that her love for his friend Kiyoaki, who sacrificed his life for her, remains undiminished, despite her "enlightenment". And, perhaps most urgently, he hopes that she, in her mature Buddhist enlightenment, might be able to help him understand some of the puzzling incidents of his own life—especially his encounters with reincarnation—which still perplex him. Lastly, he no doubt hopes not only for enlightenment but also for purification from his contact with her: he has, after all, sunk into a moral quagmire in his old age—he has even taken to spying on young lovers in public parks—and so he feels himself to be in urgent need of a spiritual cleansing before he dies. In short, Honda's expectations as he goes to visit the old nun could not be higher, and he is so moved when finally he finds himself in her presence that his eyes fill with tears and he is unable to look at her. But his expectations are soon cruelly dashed. Instead of the various kinds of comfort and consolation he has come for, he receives a great shock. The Abbess does not even remember his friend Kiyoaki, a young man who died for love of her!
Honda suspects that she is only pretending ignorance, to avoid being tainted by the scandal which had surrounded her affair with Kiyoaki. If so, if she still is guided by such worldly considerations, then obviously her "enlightenment" is disappointingly shallow. But Honda is in for another kind of shock. The Abbess persuades him to doubt that Kiyoaki had ever even existed, and not only Kiyoaki but also Isao, the hero of the second novel, Ying Chan, the heroine of the third, and Honda himself—all now seem enveloped in a mist of unreality:

"But if, from the beginning, Kiyoaki never existed"—feeling as if he were wandering through a heavy mist, and beginning to think that his meeting here now with the Abbess was half a dream, Honda cried out, as if trying to call back his self, which was disappearing as precipitously as breath does from a lacquer tray.

The Abbess's "lesson" is now reinforced, as it were, by the "lesson" of the garden. Stunned into silence by what she has said to him, Honda is led like an automaton to view the temple's south garden, a vision of absolute stillness, emptiness and blazing sunshine. The only sound is a monotonous one: the shrilling of cicadas—a sound which only intensifies the silence. As the narrator tells us: "there was nothing in this garden" (kono niwa ni wa nanimo nai). Gazing upon this dizzying apparition, Honda's final thought is that he has come "to a place of no memories, of nothing at all" (Kioku mo nakereba nanimo nai tokoro e, jibun wa kite shimatta to Honda wa omotta).
2. The nihilist implications of the scene

At first sight, Honda's final ordeal might seem to have a strongly Buddhist tenor, and perhaps even suggest a Buddhist enlightenment experience. It takes place at a Buddhist temple, after all, and the primary agents involved are a Buddhist nun and a Buddhist temple garden. The experience these agents provoke in Honda might seem entirely consonant with the Buddhist philosophy of nothingness. Furthermore, it might easily be taken as the culmination of Honda's years of study of Buddhism, especially of the form of Yuishiki ("Consciousness Only") Buddhism represented by this very Abbess and temple. Honda was first introduced to this form of Buddhism as a young man, as recounted in the first novel of the tetralogy. His encounters with the reincarnations of Kiyoaki led him, in middle-age, to an in-depth study of the Yuishiki teachings on reincarnation. His struggles to comprehend these abstruse doctrines are recounted in detail in the third volume of the tetralogy, The Temple of Dawn (Akatsuki no tera, 1970). What puzzles him above all is the doctrine of anatman, "no self". If man has no self, then what is reincarnated through lifetime after lifetime? The Yuishiki answer seems to be: an impersonal karmic force, the alayavijnana or "storehouse consciousness". This alaya consciousness is a "stream of no-self" (muga no nagare) which the Yuishiki scriptures compare to a torrent of water, never the same from minute to minute. Thus the image of a waterfall is one of the main motifs running through the tetralogy, always associated with the reincarnations of Kiyoaki.
Honda's final experience at the Buddhist temple is certainly, as we have seen, an experience of "no-self"—of the unreality of his own self as well as of the selves of the incarnations of "Kiyoaki". It is also an experience of the unreality or nothingness of the external world, in keeping with the idealist Yuishiki philosophy of the reality of "mind-only". Does this mean, then, that all his efforts have not been in vain? That his years of patient study and his final arduous climb up to the temple on the hill have been rewarded by a redeeming flash of satori? Against all our expectations, did Mishima finally write a novel with a happy ending?

One smiles at the thought. If Honda's experience is Buddhist, then Schopenhauer and so many other Western interpreters since him must be right: Buddhism is a darkly pessimistic faith indeed, if not the very prototype of nihilism. But this is a view of Buddhism against which Buddhists themselves have often protested. To give an example: the eminent Meiji-period Zen Buddhist Abbot, Shaku Soyen, quotes the famous poem or gāthā by the sixth patriarch of Zen, Hui-Nêng:

No holy tree exists as Bodhi known,
No mirror shining bright is standing here;
Since there is nothing from the very first,
Where can the dust itself accumulate?

Soyen's comments on this verse are worth quoting at length:

At the first blush the gāthā seems to smack not a little of nihilism, as it apparently denies the existence of individuality. But those who stop short at this negative interpretation of it are not likely to grasp the deep signification of Buddhism. For Buddhism teaches in this gāthā the existence of the highest reality that transcends the duality of body and mind as well as the limitations of time and space. Though this highest reality is the source of life, the ultimate
reason of existence, and the norm of things multifarious and multitudinous, it has nothing particular in it; it cannot be designated by any determinative terms, it refuses to be expressed in the phraseology we use in our common parlance. Why? For it is an absolute unity, and there is nothing individual, particular, dualistic, and conditional. 30

The experience of mu or nothingness in Buddhism, then, is not to be confused with the nihilist experience of nothingness. In a very real sense, indeed, they are opposites. As Andô Shōei has said in his excellent study, Zen and American Transcendentalism:

The best way to overcome nihilism is to be awake to the Mind of "Mu", whereby we come to be able to enjoy perfect liberty, because the Mind of "Mu" is that which does not abide anywhere fixedly: which is one with, and at the same time free from, everything. 31

But how is the non-Buddhist to judge whether any particular experience of nothingness—say, Honda's—is Buddhistic or nihilistic? Surely there is only one safe way: to judge the tree by its fruit. One may judge the nature of what is experienced by the effect it has on the person experiencing it. The emotional tone of the nihilist experience of nothingness is invariably negative, whether in the mild form of a vague disquiet or in the more extreme form of despair or terror. As Charles Glicksberg points out in his comprehensive study of nihilism in modern Western literature, The Literature of Nihilism, the "nihilist denies himself the religious promises that could rescue him from the bottomless pit of despair. . . ."32 And, again:

The nihilist suffers excruciatingly from his obsession with the dialectic of nothingness. If he actually believes that nothingness is the ultimate end of existence, then he cannot be sustained, like the humanist, by the
constructive role he plays in the historic process or rest his hopes on some radiant consummation in the future order of society. This encounter with nothingness forms the crux of nihilist literature.... 33

And it is an encounter, concludes Glicksberg, which leaves the nihilist "trapped in a spiritual cul-de-sac", suffering from a "life-negating dementia". Another authority on the subject, Helmut Thielicke, asserts that the "decisive point is not only that nihilism asserts the vacuum, the nihil, the nothing, but that the assertor himself is oppressed and afflicted by his own nothingness; in psychiatric terms, he is oppressed by the breakdown, the decay of his 'self-world', [Ich-Zerfall] his loss of the centre. And at this point we may anticipate and say that there is an essential connection between the breakdown of the 'objective world' and the breakdown of the 'self-world'." 35

In absolute contrast to this, the Buddhist satori or experience of nothingness always produces a positive emotional and psychological state—or, as Suzuki Daisetsu has described it, a "feeling of exaltation":

That this feeling inevitably accompanies satori is due to the fact that it is the breaking-up of the restriction imposed on one as an individual being, and this breaking-up is not a mere negative incident but quite a positive one fraught with signification because it means an infinite expansion of the individual. The general feeling, though we are not always conscious of it, which characterizes all our functions of consciousness, is that of restriction and dependence.... To be released of this, therefore, must make one feel above all things intensely exalted. 36

If we examine Honda's final experience while keeping in mind these descriptions of the Buddhist experience of nothing-
ness on the one hand, and the nihilist experience of nothingness on the other, there can be no doubt as to which his type belongs. His experience is entirely negative; it has none of the positive emotional tenor or sense of self-transcendence described by Suzuki. On the contrary, he seems "trapped in a spiritual cul-de-sac," to use Glicksberg's phrase, and there is a simultaneous breakdown of both his inner and his outer worlds, as described by Thielicke. As he stares blankly at the empty garden, as if mesmerized by the sight of the void itself, he seems more like a man in a state of catatonic shock than a man who has just achieved spiritual enlightenment and liberation. The penultimate sentence of the tetralogy drives this home: "It seemed to Honda that he had come to a place of no memories, of nothing at all." There is a bitter irony in this sentence: the eighty-one-year-old man, after all, had come to the temple in the hope of revivifying and somehow authenticating his memories—certainly not expecting that they would all be taken away from him!

What is bestowed on Honda, in short, is not the soothing balm of Buddhism but a blow from the hammer of nihilism. At the same time, the mask of Buddhism, which has covered the true face of the work up to now, is shattered to pieces by the same hammer. Whereupon, for the first time, the work's true face stands revealed: the face of nihilism. To use another simile: it is as if Mishima erects an elaborate house of cards, based
mainly on the Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, only to knock it down again the moment it reaches completion. In this also the novelist himself shows a destructive impulse typical of nihilism.

If the tetralogy as a whole may be regarded as a Bildungsroman or "education novel", then the education which Honda receives is not so much in Buddhist philosophy as in nihilism. This becomes all the more clear if we trace the course of his "education".

3. Nihilist elements throughout the tetralogy

a. The historical dimension: the decline of modern Japan

It is highly significant that, just prior to his final experience of nothingness, while on his way to the temple, Honda pays close attention to the surrounding landscape, and finds that, even in this most sacred area of Japan, the ancient heartland of the culture, it is sadly desecrated:

From around Daigo the landscape was of the modern, desolate kind one finds all over Japan: fresh building materials and blue-tiled roofs, television antenna, high-tension wires with little birds perched on them, Coca-Cola signs and snack-stands complete with parking lots. At the edge of a cliff where wild camomiles stabbed at the sky, there was an automobile graveyard. Among the rubble he saw wrecks piled precariously on top of each other, blue and yellow and black, the flashy colours of their body-work incandescent in the sun. The sight of this miserable pile of rubbish, so different from how cars usually look, reminded Honda of an adventure story he had read as a child, which told of the piles of ivory in the swamps where elephants go to die. Perhaps cars too, when they feel their death coming on,
gather one by one at these graveyards—at any rate, the glitter, the shamelessness and the openness to public view all seemed quite automobilish. 38

This is not the first time in the tetralogy that this bitterly elegaic note is sounded or that the decline of the Japanese environment stands as a telling objective correlative of the moral decline of the Japanese themselves—and even, as suggested here by the image of the automobile graveyard, of the approaching death not only of Honda but of the whole of Japanese civilization. The most significant of all such scenes occurs earlier in the fourth novel, when Honda takes his friend Keiko to visit the pine grove at Mio; though in taking her there, he "felt that he might destroy her dreamy, buoyant mood by showing her how this scenic spot had been vulgarized and despoiled".39 And, indeed, they find that "the air was terribly polluted with car fumes and the pine trees looked on the point of dying".40 What is even worse is that the sacred site has been crassly commercialized; it is cluttered with souvenir stalls, which sell not only souvenirs but that omnipresent symbol of Americanization, Coca-Cola. And crowds of vulgar working-class Japanese (Mishima's snobbery evident here) pose to have their pictures taken in front of the famous pine, without even bothering to look at it.

The site of Mio is symbolically significant, in fact, not merely as a famous beauty spot but, within the specific context of the tetralogy, as the site of the No play, Robe of Feathers (Hagoromo), from which the final novel derives its title. In
this famous play a fisherman steals an angel's robe of feathers and refuses to return it. Unable to fly back to heaven, the disconsolate angel begins to exhibit the "five signs of an angel's decay" (tennin gosui—the Japanese title of the fourth novel), symptoms of physical and psychological deterioration which presage the approach of death.

What the Mio scene makes clear, then, is that, in the tetralogy, the "angel" who is showing signs of decay and of imminent death is not only the reincarnated protagonist, Tôru, but Japan itself. An important part of Mishima's purpose in writing this tetralogy obviously was to show the decline of modern Japan over a period of about sixty years, from just after the turn of the century to the mid-seventies. He could do justice to this historical theme, of course, only by writing a work of such considerable magnitude. Actually the course of this decline is not steady or unimpaired; the revolt of junior officers and young rightest fanatics against the "corrupt" establishment in the 'thirties was, from Mishima's point of view, a momentary reversal of the downward trend—and this is well represented by the second novel of the tetralogy. But whatever chance might have existed of a national renaissance was lost, of course, by Japan's defeat in the Pacific War. And, if we look at the tetralogy as a whole, the vision it presents of the decline of Japan over the modern period is clear and unmistakeable. As the first novel opens, the country is still flush from its victory over Russia in 1905; morale is as high
as could be, and military men are held in the greatest esteem by a grateful populace. (For Mishima, this was the most important gauge of the spiritual health of a nation, and his attempted "coup" of 1970 was ostensibly for the purpose of restoring the postwar Self-Defense Force to its proper place of honour.) The vision of Japan presented in the final novel makes a sorry contrast to this: a country both physically and morally polluted, thoroughly demoralized by the recent foreign occupation, and still so thoroughly dominated by the foreign culture that it is in imminent danger of losing the last shreds of its own identity. Given Mishima's own ardent nationalism, it would hardly be surprising if this view of his country's fate contributed significantly to his nihilist world-view. At any rate, it forms a major element in the nihilism of the tetralogy.

b. The personal dimension: the decline of Honda and of the reincarnated hero

The physical and moral decline of Japan over the course of the tetralogy is paralleled by Honda's own decline, which also occurs on both the physical and moral levels. His physical decline may be regarded, of course, as a natural part of the process of aging, since by the work's end he does attain the age of eighty-one. But Mishima the aesthete is not one to forgive the ugliness of the old, whether "natural" or not. For, in a sense, age is the fault of the aged; instead of survival at all costs, they might have chosen to die heroically
while still young and beautiful, like Kiyoaki and Isao, the heroes of the first two novels of the tetralogy. Thus the physical repulsiveness of the old Honda is something to be counted against him, as even he is made aware:

All old men dried up and died. As payment for failing to stop time in the wonderful period when the rich, abundant blood was bringing a heady intoxication, unbeknownst to the man himself.... Why had he not tried to stop time? 41

This latter question is made all the more urgent by the sad spectacle of Honda's moral decline, which is even more extreme than his physical decline. He begins in youth as an innocent observer, one who likes to watch great events from the sidelines, and to speculate on their meaning. By old age he has become a caricature of himself, no longer a detached, philosophic observer but now a prurient voyeur, spying on proletarian lovers in city parks. The evil which lurks beneath the surface of passive "detached observation" itself is unmasked for what it is and stands in sharp contrast to the stalwart virtues of an effective man of action such as Isao.

If by his example Isao seems to hold out some promise of a transcendence of the tetralogy's nihilist world-view, however, this is soon shattered. In its very next incarnation, the spirit of Isao becomes a lecherous Thai princess, a lesbian temptress, the very epitome of evil passivity, who makes an unheroic exit after being bitten by a snake. Similarly Tōru, the "false incarnation" of the final novel, is merely an
enlarged mirror-image of Honda, but one that illustrates the evil effects of intellectual detachment and passivity to an even more extreme degree. Whereas, then, the heroes of the first two novels, the tragical/romantic figure Kiyoaki, who sacrifices himself for love, and the man of action Isao, who sacrifices himself for his country, are both presented as admirable in their own way, the heroine and hero of the final two novels, the lecherous Ying Chan and the cynical Tôru, are both presented as thoroughly reprehensible. Thus the moral history of the reincarnated spirit follows the general pattern of decline evident in the history of Honda and of Japan at large. And the cumulative effect of these various forms of decline is an overwhelming sense of life itself as a process of ineluctable decay--given time, everything ends badly. Thus the great irony of the work's title: the "sea of fertility" turns out to be a mirage; the nihilist discovers that life is, in fact, the most arid kind of desert.

c. The philosophical dimension: Honda's own speculations and his contacts with Asian religious philosophies

We have already observed how, in the final scene of the tetralogy, Buddhist philosophy is turned to nihilist uses, undermining Honda's sense of self and of reality but without replacing these by "enlightenment" in any positive sense. Similarly, throughout the entire tetralogy, it is the apparently negative aspects of Buddhist philosophy which are exclusively emphasized: especially, the doctrines regarding no-self and the
illusory nature of the phenomenal world. No reference is made to the counterbalancing Buddhist ideas such as those of compassion and of spiritual liberation. Though on a more subtle level, this distorted use of Buddhist ideas is essentially the same as that in an earlier Mishima novel, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, in which certain *kōan* (Zen riddles) are taken as enjoining the hero to commit his act of arson. But in the tetralogy it is not only Buddhism which is put to such uses. Honda's most traumatic nihilist epiphany prior to his final experience of nothingness occurs in India, at Benares. The author himself is on record as saying that Honda's horrific vision of Benares in the third novel, *The Temple of Dawn*, was meant to be the "most climactic scene" of the entire tetralogy. At the same time, he went on to confess that, on his own trip to India, "I felt that I had never experienced anything more terrible than Benares". The same may be said for Honda. At Benares he is confronted with an appalling vision of the cheapness of life and the omnipresence of disease and death, of the cruelty of the gods and of the never-ending torture of all living beings on the wheel of *samsara*:

Everything was floating there. Which is to say, everything most ugly, most mournful, the realities of human flesh, the excrements, the stenches, the germs, the poisons of the corpses—all together were exposed to the sun, and, like a steam arising from ordinary reality, floated through the sky. Benares. It was a carpet so ugly it was splendid. One thousand five hundred temples, temples of love with scarlet pillars on which all the positions of sexual intercourse were carved in black ebony reliefs, houses in which widows waited for death while continually and fervently chanting sutras.
in loud voices—inhabitants, visitors, the dying, the dead, children covered with syphilitic sores, dying children clinging to their mother's breast....  

In the midst of all these horrors, Honda confesses to himself that "since his eyes had seen such an extremity, he felt they would never be healed. It was as if the whole of Benares suffered from a holy leprosy, and as if Honda's vision itself had also been contaminated by this incurable disease." 

It is as if, in fact, reality has finally taken revenge on the passive observer; he is no longer secure in his pose of intellectual detachment. Mere looking is no longer a harmless avocation; he has been forever "contaminated" by what he has seen. The practical effects of this "contamination" become increasingly evident in the remainder of the tetralogy. Soon after his return home from India, the Pacific War begins, but Honda is completely uninterested: "when the vision of Benares arose before him, all kinds of brilliant heroism lost their lustre. Perhaps the mystery of reincarnation had paralysed his spirit, robbed him of his courage, and convinced him of the nullity of all action.... Perhaps, finally, it had made him use all his philosophy only to serve his self-love?" In other words, Honda's contact with India and Hinduism has turned him into a passive nihilist, incapable not only of heroic actions but even of heroic thoughts. His descent into nothingness begins at Benares and ends, as we have seen, at the Yuishiki temple outside Nara. Both Hinduism and Buddhism thus are used in the tetralogy to reinforce the nihilist world-view.
Besides this Hindu-Buddhist strain in Honda's thought, another important current in his intellectual life is composed of his speculations on the role of human will in history. As a philosophic young man in the first novel, *Spring Snow*, he often discusses his ideas on this subject with his friend, Kiyoaki, and already takes a deterministic stance, arguing against the "Western view" that "Napoleon's will moved history":

"But, from a long-term perspective, the will of all human beings is frustrated. The usual state of affairs is that things never turn out as one expects. What do Westerners think when this happens? They think: "My will functioned as will; failure occurred by chance." Chance removes all laws of causality; it is the one irrationality which can be recognized by free will. Thus, the Western philosophy of will could not arise without the recognition of 'chance'." 48

The young Honda's arguments in favor of an iron-clad determinism, a rigid law of cause and effect, anticipate, of course, his later encounter with the Hindu/Buddhist doctrines of *karma* and reincarnation. And they also anticipate his experience, in the second novel, *Runaway Horses*, of the utter futility of the heroic Isao's efforts to impose his will on history. Honda's sense of what used to be called "Oriental fatalism" thus only intensifies with age. It appears in its most extreme, and most nihilistic, form in Honda's ruminations just before he makes his final visit to the Yuishiki temple:

For Honda now, to live was to grow old, to grow old was to live.... History knew this. Among the things human beings produced, history was the most inhuman. Because it generalized all human will, grasped it in its hand and chewed it up, while dripping blood from its mouth like the goddess Kali at Calcutta. We are feed to stuff something's belly. 49
This combination of a deterministic view of human fate with an almost paranoid view of the malevolence of the forces that control that fate was a central aspect of Mishima's nihilism from his very first major novel, Confessions of a Mask (1949).

4. The aesthetic function of the work's nihilist philosophy

a. structure

With a tetralogy such as The Sea of Fertility, the author is naturally confronted by certain problems of structure which would not arise if he were writing a single novel. He is called upon to delicately balance the independence of the four novels on the one hand against their interdependence on the other. Each novel must in some sense stand alone--otherwise, why not write just one large novel? But also they must all be linked together in some way--otherwise, why associate them together in a tetralogy?

In The Sea of Fertility this delicate balance is generally well maintained. Each novel tells a separate "story" in that each recounts the life of a new protagonist--three heroes and one heroine. At the same time, these protagonists are not entirely "new", since each is supposedly a reincarnation of his or her predecessor. In this way the theme of reincarnation itself serves as a linking device between the four novels, and is uniquely suited to the kind of balance needed in a tetralogy. Since it would probably fail to provide enough cohesive force
by itself, however, a stronger linking thread is provided in the shape of the character Honda Shigekuni, who plays the role of deuteragonist or what in the No theatre is called a waki, an observer of and commentator on the action.

Over and above these linkings through characters, a more abstract integrative agent functions in the work's thematic structure: namely, its central philosophic argument of nihilism, which, as we have seen, is carefully developed over the course of the four novels and brought to a powerful conclusion at the very end. It is primarily through the force of this philosophic argument that the tetralogy, despite its great length and diversity, is held together in a reasonably tight, well-integrated structure—a rare and refreshing virtue in a work of Japanese literature. From The Tale of Genji (Genji monogatari, early 11th century) to The Makioka Sisters (Sasame yuki, 1943-48), Japanese novels have tended toward a loosely organized, digressive and episodic mode of structure. By writing Western-style philosophical novels, Mishima was able, at least, to introduce a new level of formal discipline into the native tradition.

And, since the tetralogy is a philosophical novel, it should be noted that its philosophical argument takes precedence over other of its unifying agents. The full significance of this fact seems to have escaped those critics who argue that, by demolishing the whole myth of reincarnation at the end of
the tetralogy, Mishima destroys the very foundations of the work's structure.\textsuperscript{51} In fact he is merely playing a variation of his favorite game of applying hammer to mask: the hammer of nihilism to, in this case, the mask of the Hindu/Buddhist doctrine of reincarnation, a mask he has played at wearing throughout the tetralogy. What this shows is simply that the nihilism takes precedence over the Hindu/Buddhist doctrine as the work's real unifying force. The false support of reincarnation is suddenly removed and the true support of nihilism stands revealed. But the transition from one to the other is not really as sudden as it might seem at first sight. Honda's introduction to the "nihilist" aspect of Yuishiki philosophy, as we have observed, came long before the final scene: already in the third novel, its doctrine of "no-self" poses a challenge to his naive interpretation of reincarnation as a form of personal immortality.

The author's act of destroying the mask of reincarnation, or of Honda's illusions regarding reincarnation—which leaves Honda in a kind of nihilist limbo—may seem to the sensitive reader to be tinged by an unpleasant hint of a pleasure more sadistic than aesthetic. But this is also entirely appropriate in a nihilist novel. Destruction is the ultimate nihilist action—indeed, the only mode of true self-expression available to the nihilist. The nihilist artist can never be satisfied with merely an act of creation; he must go on to destroy what he has created, and takes a god-like pleasure in doing so. No
doubt this is why, in the present work, Mishima's alter ego, Honda, is so fascinated by the Hindu god and goddess of destruction, Shiva and Kali. At any rate, this destructive impulse may be found in various forms, as we shall see, in novels from all periods of Mishima's career.

This is not to say, of course, that a reader would be wrong to object to the sadistic or destructive elements in Mishima's works, but merely to point out their consistency with his overall nihilist perspective.

b. style

In his essay on "My Method of the Novel" (Watakushi no shōsetsu no hōhō), Mishima makes a significant distinction between his uses of the two Japanese words for "style": buntai and bunshō. Bunshō for him is the individual, subjective, intuitive quality of a writer's style, related even to his personal physiology. Buntai, on the other hand, is the universal, objective, intellectual quality of his style, and derives ultimately from his ideas about the nature of the world, his Weltanschauung. Or, conversely, buntai is the author's mode of interpreting the world, the way he uses language to achieve that interpretation. The problem with many Japanese novels, according to Mishima, is that they lack buntai. They are written in a personal, subjective, lyrical mode which precludes the kind of objective world-view and consistent structure of themes which gives shape to a proper novel. This is especially true of the writers of "I-novels" (shi-shōsetsu) such as Shiga
Naoya, but even a writer of more purely fictional works such as Kawabata Yasunari lacked buntai because, according to Mishima, he had "abandoned the will to interpret the world so entirely". The only conspicuous exception to this among modern Japanese novelists, in Mishima's view, was Mori Ōgai (1862-1922), who had lived for some years in Germany and had acquired there a taste for expounding philosophical ideas in fiction. It was Ōgai's unemotional, cerebral, "masculine" style that Mishima took as his model in much of his own writings.

By using his novels to give expression to a nihilist philosophy, it is clear, then, that Mishima wished to transcend what he considered to be the limitations of the Japanese novel as it had usually been written before him. He was determined that his novels would have buntai, a style which expressed a consistent and objective world-view. The effects of this determination, in The Sea of Fertility, may be observed on every level of its functioning as a work of art. The integrity of its overall structure has already been noted, but the effects are also evident on more particular stylistic features. Explicit philosophical discussions such as those which abound in the third novel of the tetralogy give a detached, objective tone to the narrative voice, of course, but the same effect is also attained, for instance, by the narrative treatment of Honda. Although he is generally the viewpoint character, he is not himself given the function of narrator; that is reserved
to a detached, disembodied narrative voice, in the omniscient third-person mode. The reader, then, is not allowed such close identification with the viewpoint character as would occur in an "I-novel". And the reason for this is obvious: the work seeks primarily not to involve the reader in Honda's emotional life but to present an "objective" world-view through the medium of his life-experiences. And, particularly since this world-view is nihilistic, it is essential that no humane sympathy interfere with the reader's perception of cold reality. Thus we see Honda destroyed, in the end, from a distance; the narrative voice describes it all with a kind of ruthless detachment, as in the description of him as a puppet-like automaton immediately after his experience of nothingness: "Honda stood up as if he were being manipulated by strings, and followed the two nuns through the dark rooms." 57 Or the impersonal, distancing tone of the very last sentence of the tetralogy: "The hushed garden basked in the high-noon sun of summer." 58 The nihilist vision behind the narrative viewpoint also produces strong tones of irony and satire, often in a typically Mishima-esque aphoristic style. Particular scorn is reserved for portraits of Westernized Japanese aristocrats and of Westerners themselves; here the general misanthropy which pervades the whole work reaches a venomous pitch. A typical target is the Anglophilia of a certain Baron Shinkawa, who sedulously apes not only the lifestyle but even the mannerisms of an English gentleman: "no matter what kind of ironic or sarcastic comment
he made, the Baron mumbled it in the English manner, with an expressionless face, so that no one heard him.\textsuperscript{59}

These heavily ironic, bitingly satiric tones begin to verge on bad taste and cruelty where Westerners are involved, as in this caricature portrait of a group of elderly Western women at a garden party:

Elderly Western women, oblivious to the fact that their dresses were unfastened behind them, swung their wide hips and emitted shrill laughs. In their hollow, piercing eyes were blue or brown pupils which looked one knew not where. They spoke with great emphasis, opening their dark mouths so wide one could see their tonsils. And they immersed themselves in their conversations with shameless enthusiasm. With their crimson manicured fingernails, they snatched up small, thin sandwiches, two or three at a time. Suddenly one of them turned to Honda and, after informing him that she herself had been divorced three times, asked if Japanese divorced a lot too.\textsuperscript{60}

5. Critical evaluation of the work in the light of its nihilist philosophy

The tetralogy, then, may be said to argue the case for nihilism with consummate skill, using every aspect of its novelistic technique. And, as Lionel Trilling has pointed out, there is a definite aesthetic pleasure to be had from seeing a case well argued, whether in literature or in philosophy.\textsuperscript{61} But what bearing does this central argument of the tetralogy have, once identified, on the questions which critics have raised regarding the work's literary value?

The fundamental critical problems of the tetralogy relate
mainly to its use of the idea of reincarnation. Firstly, there is the brute problem of credibility. To base a literary work on the doctrine of reincarnation was no doubt appropriate in the age of the *Hamamatsu Chûnagon monogatari* (eleventh century), the work which inspired Mishima's use of this idea, but in the present secular age it seems likely that a novel based on such an esoteric religious concept will alienate many readers from the outset. This is especially true with *The Sea of Fertility* because many of the untoward coincidences which link the four novels seem to rest on a particularly naive interpretation of how reincarnation functions. The reader's credibility is strained by the fortuitous manner in which Honda reencounters the three later incarnations of Kiyoaki, by discovering the same telltale birthmark of three moles under their left armpits! The same may be said of the way in which each hero or heroine is fated to die at twenty, as if following a predetermined schedule. Or the way in which the Thai princess of the third novel remembers her previous incarnations as a Japanese. The problem is partly, of course, one of reader psychology. How readily each reader accepts such supernatural occurrences depends to some extent on his own psychological makeup—say, his "scientific-mindedness" on the one hand versus his capacity for "suspension of disbelief" on the other. But it also depends to a great extent on how convincingly they are presented by the writer, and within what context. Few readers would object to the use of the supernatural in the Gothic stories of a Henry
James or an Edgar Allen Poe: these writers take care to establish the proper mood and atmosphere to lull the reader into a dream-like state in which the rules of everyday rationality no longer seem to apply. But *The Sea of Fertility* is not a Gothic novel, nor even primarily a "tale of the supernatural": it aims to give an objective, realistic portrait of three-quarters of a century of modern Japanese history and, beyond that, of the nature of reality itself. Thus Mishima, in using elements of the supernatural in such a work, is faced with a special problem of credibility, which disturbs even some readers born into the Hindu/Buddhist cultural sphere. Miyoshi Yukio, for instance, has stated bluntly that, because of this, the tetralogy impresses him as a "counterfeit" (*koshiraemono*). Indeed, one critic has even suggested that Mishima himself, by the third novel, "may have grown uncertain about or perhaps bored with the whole idea of transmigration".

This leads to another major critical problem: the unevenness in quality of the four novels. Critics disagree as to which of the novels is the best (though most would probably vote for the first), but there is a general consensus that the third is the worst. The reasons given for this supposed failure have much to do with the problems discussed earlier as inherent in the novel of ideas. In view of the almost universal critical distaste the work has inspired, it is ironic that Mishima himself considered it to be the key novel of the four. But his reason for thinking so becomes clear when we view the tetralogy in its proper light as a work of philosophical fiction.
The third novel is meant to provide the philosophical foundation for the others. Thus the long disquisitions on the various Theravada and Mahayana Buddhist concepts of reincarnation, which many critics have objected to,66 no doubt were seen by the author as essential to his ultimate purpose in writing the tetralogy.

It may be urged in Mishima's favor, in fact, that all of these criticisms betray a certain narrowness of view, whether of *The Sea of Fertility* in particular or of novels in general. One may regret with Mary McCarthy the demise of the capacious nineteenth-century view of the novel, which included philosophical disquisitions as well as many other elements considered "extra-literary", and one may even hope that Mishima's example might inspire a rebirth of this traditional view. But the most important point is that, within the tetralogy itself, the religious and philosophical elements are by no means extraneous; they are an integral part of the work's total aesthetic effect.

The fictional use made of reincarnation and its concomitant philosophy can be properly understood, in fact, only in the light of the tetralogy's underlying nihilist world-view. *The Sea of Fertility* is not a Hindu/Buddhist novel, any more than *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* is a Zen novel. The Hindu/Buddhist elements appear not for their own sake but symbolically or metaphorically, in support of the work's central nihilist argument. Thus their literal truth is easily disposed of by the final scene, in which Honda realizes that his acceptance
of reincarnation as a literal fact, at least in the form of the continuity beyond death of a personal ego, has been a naive illusion. But the symbolic truth of reincarnation, as experienced so vividly by Honda at Benares, his nightmare vision of human existence as an eternal treadmill, a meaningless but inescapable round of life and death—this remains as a central part of the tetralogy's final message, and is given much the same nihilist implications as Nietzsche's idea of "eternal recurrence".67

Thus it is not quite fair to single out the third novel of the tetralogy and attack it for being overloaded with philosophy. The Temple of Dawn is not a single novel but part of a series, and should be judged as such. One must take into account the process of mutual illumination at work between this and the other novels. Not only does its philosophy illuminate the other novels but also the other novels illuminate its philosophy. In particular, one cannot understand the full implications of its discussions of the Yuishiki ideas of reincarnation, no-self and the world-as-illusion until the final scene of the fourth novel, Honda's experience of nothingness.

Thomas Mann, a writer whom Mishima much admired, and whose Biblical tetralogy, Joseph and His Brothers (1933-43), perhaps inspired Mishima with the desire to write his own tetralogy, once pleaded with his readers to read his magnum opus, The Magic Mountain, twice: "Only so can one really penetrate and enjoy its musical association of ideas. The first time, the..."
reader learns the thematic material; he is then in a position to read the symbolic and allusive formulas both forwards and backwards." The point might be urged just as strongly for *The Sea of Fertility*, since it is composed with the same kind of "musical association of ideas", the same kind of Wagnerian structure of leitmotifs, as is Mann's great novel. (And Wagner's own tetralogy of music-dramas, *The Ring of the Nibelungs* [1854-74], by the way, may be regarded as the structural archetype of all such works.) At any rate, one wonders how much of the objection to the philosophic content of Mishima's tetralogy is merely the first reaction of impatient modern readers who might change their minds if they gave the work a second reading?

B. The Making of a Nihilist: Confessions of a Mask

1. The final scene

Though *The Sea of Fertility* was written in the late 'sixties, at the end of Mishima's career, and *Confessions of a Mask* was written in the late 'forties, just as his career was getting under way, there are significant points of similarity between their final scenes. The *Confessions* also ends with a devastating satori by the viewpoint character, an experience of nothingness which precipitates the collapse of the elaborate structure of illusion that he has laboured to erect throughout the novel. It is another clear example of the novelist applying "hammer to mask", though in this case it is not a mask of
religious doctrine but of social convention, the "mask of normalcy". During the latter half of the *Confessions*, the protagonist/narrator, who is much more transparently Mishima's alter ego than is Honda, has been trying desperately to disguise his homosexuality, even from himself. Thus he has been half-heartedly courting a girl named Sonoko, and has even managed to convince himself that he might love her. In the last scene he takes her to a low-class American-style dance-hall, for Mishima a prime symptom of the degeneracy of postwar Japan (again the omnipresent Coca-Cola), which thus sets the appropriate mood for the final experience of nothingness, in much the same way as did the desecrated landscape around Nara in *The Sea of Fertility*.

Instead of dancing with Sonoko, though, the protagonist soon becomes lost in rapt contemplation of the muscular, hirsute torso of a half-naked young tough with a peony tattooed on his chest. He is "attacked by sexual desire" and soon assailed by the kind of sadistic, homo-erotic fantasies which have troubled him since boyhood: the half-naked young man would get into a fight with a rival gang, a dagger would pierce his splendid torso, and his blood-soaked corpse would be carried back into the dance-hall for the protagonist's delectation. Suddenly snapped out of these fantasies when Sonoko talks to him, the protagonist experiences a devastating moment of self-realization:

In this instant something inside me was broken in two by a cruel force. As if a thunderbolt had struck and
cleaved apart a living tree. I heard the miserable collapse of the structure I had been building with all my energy up to now. I felt I had seen the instant when my existence was transformed into some kind of terrible "non-being". 70

2. The nihilist implications of the scene

The experience of nothingness which ends the Confessions may seem strictly psychological, whereas that which ends The Sea of Fertility also has a definite ontological dimension: Honda is convinced not only of his own unreality but of the unreality of everyone he has known, and of the world in general. No doubt the ontological dimension is more clearly delineated in The Sea of Fertility, largely through the use of the idealist philosophy of Yuishiki Buddhism. But the world of the Confessions is already philosophically idealist: nothing exists here outside of the mind of the protagonist/narrator. Just as Honda builds his vision of metempsychosis out of his desire for personal immortality, so the protagonist of the Confessions, using Sonoko as his prop, creates his own world of storybook romance out of his desire for normal masculinity. Since both of these elaborate structures of illusion are strictly products of the individual mind, a psychological experience of nothingness suffices to bring them crashing down. In this sense the protagonist/narrator's experience of "terrible non-being" serves the same function as Honda's "place of no memories, of nothing at all". 71 Both bring about the precipitous collapse of the world of the novel, which is the mental creation of the viewpoint character. And these collapses form the climactic
finales of both novels. This is what gives to Mishima's endings their theatrical flair. It is almost as if the author, like some malevolent deus ex machina at the work's conclusion, steps onto the stage with his own characters and, wielding his nihilist's hammer, smashes to pieces the very masks which, up to now, he has so painstakingly crafted. Once the mask falls away, of course, all that remains is a gaping void.

The fact that the psychological experience of nothingness in the Confessions also has ontological implications is further confirmed by the novel's closing lines, which again bring to mind the closing lines of The Sea of Fertility:

As I stood up, I stole another look at the chairs in the sun. The group had apparently gone to dance, leaving their chairs to stand empty in the blazing sunshine. Some kind of drink had been spilt on the tabletop, and gave off glittering, terrible reflections. 73

Though the scene is rather more secular—a dance-hall courtyard instead of a Buddhist temple garden—there is the same sense of vacancy, the same lack of human presence, and the blaze of sunshine giving an impression of nature as a ruthless, overpowering force. This is the other side to Mishima's philosophic idealism: a vision of the brutal, insentient objectivity of the world, and of the nothingness at the centre of that world, a nothingness perceived as malevolent because ultimately it undermines and destroys everything that is good in human life, all of man's dreams and hopes and visions.

3. Anticipations of the final scene earlier in the novel

This sense of the malevolence at the core of reality is
a central theme of the Confessions and is closely associated with the novel's main philosophical argument: the protagonist's deterministic view of the formation of his own character as a sado-masochistic homosexual. The emotional coefficient of this philosophic idea is the palpable state of fear which pervades the whole novel, a paranoid sense of the world as constantly impinging on and threatening the self.

Early in the first chapter the protagonist/narrator tells us that, since childhood, his "ideas regarding human existence have never strayed from the Augustinian notion of predestination". And, indeed, the memories he recounts from his early years all support his claim that: "I was handed, so to speak, the menu of the sum-total of my life-problems before I could even read it." Lest the reader have any doubt on this score, he recalls that he first experienced homosexual urges when he was a mere four years old, and goes on to give detailed accounts of a series of such experiences throughout his childhood. Similarly, with his masochistic and sadistic urges, he recounts, for instance, how already as a boy he derived a quasi-erotic pleasure from imagining his own violent death and, still more, from imagining the violent deaths of handsome fairytale princes. Thus, before he knew what was happening, his sexuality was corrupted by violence, directed either inwards or outwards. And he even calls upon the authority of a nineteenth-century German sexologist, Magnus Hirshfeld, to substantiate his view that "the sadistic and homosexual impulses were inseparably
linked with each other in the overwhelming majority of homosexuals, especially congenital homosexuals. Whether or not there really is such a phenomenon as a "congenital homosexual", the point is that, for the purposes of the novel, the protagonist is claiming that he is homosexual through no fault of his own, and therefore also sadistic through no fault of his own. Both his homosexuality and his sadism were inflicted upon him by the malevolence of the life-force itself. This enables the young author to see himself as an innocent victim or, more romantically, as a tragic hero, and explains why he not only feels sexually attracted to the tortured figure of the young Roman martyr, St. Sebastian, but is able to identify with him. By an almost wondrous act of legerdemain, juggling his philosophy in the one hand and his psychology in the other, the young Mishima is thus able to make his nihilism serve his narcissism and to fashion from his deterministic philosophy a very appealing "tragic mask" to be worn upon his debut as an autobiographical novelist.

The cosmic implications of the protagonist's "tragic destiny" are already evident early in the novel, when he remarks regarding his first experience, at four, of the erotic attractiveness of another male: "The fact that this was first manifested to me in the form of a night-soil man is 'allegorical'. Because excrement is a symbol of the earth. And because I am sure that what called to me then was the malevolent love of the Earth Mother." Similarly, when, at the age of four also, he
is told that a beautiful knight in a picture which bewitches him is actually a girl dressed up as a man--Joan of Arc--in his disillusion he feels that this is the first "'revenge by reality' I had encountered in my life, and it seemed a cruel one"—again, as if "reality" itself were a malevolent force intent on making him suffer. This cosmic paranoia rises to a kind of crescendo at the close of the first chapter, though, when the protagonist is made to feel a "joy close to terror" by watching the Dionysian frenzy of a summer festival. The savage gods who dispose of men's lives seem here to brazenly flaunt their power, and to the young romantic nihilist it is both a negative and a malevolent power. As the portable shrine, the omikoshi, comes into view, he is filled with a "confused feeling of uneasiness":

Around the omikoshi there hung an atmosphere of venomous calm, like the air of the tropics. It seemed an ill-intentioned torpor, swaying hotly above the naked shoulders of the young men. Inside the red and white ropes, within the railings of black lacquer and gold, behind the gold door that was tightly shut, there were four square feet of pitch-black darkness, and, at this high noon of an early summer's day, when there was not a cloud in the sky, this perfect square of empty night, swaying side to side and continuously tossed up and down, openly lorded it over the world.

This sumptuous but ominous vision, this hypostatization of a malevolent nothingness, captures so brilliantly the essence of Mishima's world-view—or, at least, of the world-view presented in his novels. What festers dangerously at the core of reality, like some radioactive mineral at the core of a nuclear reactor, is not merely nothingness but a nothingness of evil
intent (akui, one of Mishima's favorite words). Here we see clearly the difference between Mishima's nothingness and the plenum void of Buddhism, the benevolent source of all creative power. Already in this early novel, Mishima's concept of nothingness is clearly nihilistic.

As in the case of Honda's experience of nothingness, in fact, we may judge its true character by the effect it has on the human beings who come into contact with it. The young men carrying the omikoshi seem possessed by the demonic force that resides within the shrine. They crash into the protagonist's garden and "delightedly trample down the shrubbery". Their Dionysian abandon, the expression on their faces of "the most licentious and undisguised intoxication in the world", causes deep distress to the young artist's Apollonian mind: their in-toxicated expressions "both startled and distressed me, filling my heart with limitless suffering". This is not to say, of course, that Shintoism is a nihilistic religion, any more than Buddhism is; the scene tells us more about the protagonist's paranoid state of mind than about the innocent high spirits of a Shinto summer festival. The point is that, within the context of this novel, Shintoism functions as a nihilist symbol, just as Buddhism does in The Sea of Fertility and The Temple of the Golden Pavilion.

Continuing with the theme of the inescapable, predestined nature of his sado-masochistic homosexuality, in the second chapter the narrator/protagonist describes a more active phase
of his sex-life, which began when, as a twelve-year-old, he found himself aroused by pictures not of naked women but of naked men, preferably in torment. Again he finds that homosexual pleasure is inextricably linked, for him, with sadistic pleasure, and he indulges in the most outrageous fantasies of managing a "murder theatre" in which muscular young men are slowly tortured to death for his amusement. These fantasies reach an abominable climax at the end of the chapter, when he imagines, in gruesome detail, that one of his classmates, "an excellent swimmer, with a strikingly good physique", is strangled and then sliced up like a side of beef, to be eaten.

The self-disgust which even our young nihilist professes to feel at his own fantasies, combined with his jealousy of the superior masculinity of an older youth, Omi, with whom he has fallen in love, inspire him finally to try to break free from his "tragic destiny", and to become a "normal" male. His struggles in this direction are recounted over the last two chapters of the novel. He manages to fashion a "mask of normalcy" with which he almost deceives even himself but, as we have seen, this mask is torn away in the novel's final scene and he must wear again the "tragic mask" of his nihilistic determinism, the mask through which he utters these very "confessions".

4. The novel as argument: the aesthetic functions of the work's nihilist philosophy

Perhaps because the Confessions is a single novel rather
than a tetralogy, and perhaps because the author meditates therein on the meaning of a single life—his own—rather than on the meaning of the lives of a group of fictional characters, the work is organized along the lines of a philosophic argument more clearly than *The Sea of Fertility*. The basic proposition of this argument—a deterministic view of the origins of the protagonist's sado-masochistic homosexuality—is presented, as we have seen, early in the novel, and the memories of his sexual awakening which follow are marshalled together like a series of "proofs" in support of this leading proposition. It is perhaps no coincidence that, at the time when Mishima wrote the novel, he had just graduated from law school: it is organized somewhat in the manner of a legal brief. For the evidence it presents of the malevolence of the life-force, it may be regarded as the "case for the prosecution". On the other hand, for the evidence it presents of the blamelessness of the protagonist, it may be regarded as the "case for the defense". Thus the "confessions" of its title is rather misleading; it is really more of an *apologia pro vita mea*.

The novel—or, anyway, the English/French/Russian novel as we have known it up to the present century—has usually given the appearance, at least, of following a primarily inductive procedure. That is, the novelist has seemed to marshal together a potentially infinite number of facts and details concerning characters, settings and plots that interest him, then organize them into an overall narrative structure,
and only then, if at all, derive from this amorphous mass of material a leading argument or theme. To go the opposite route, to set out with an argument and then present the specific details of the novel as so much evidence in support of this argument, would probably have seemed an excessively artificial procedure, fatal to the novel's lifelikeness or verisimilitude. Dickens may have set out, in Bleak House (1853), to prove the inhumanity of the courts of chancery, or Tolstoy, in War and Peace (1869), to explode the myth of the "great man's" role in history, but the main organizing principle of both these great novels still is not the argument but the story; the arguments emerge in full only after the stories have been told.

In the Confessions, as we have seen, Mishima follows the reverse procedure: he presents his main argument at the beginning of the novel and all that follows is directly apropos to this argument, as evidence either pro or contra. Undoubtedly this "deductive" procedure produces a certain sense of artificiality, of the novel as something more like a "case history" than a "slice of life", but it also gives to the work a certain sense of objectivity, as well as a remarkably well-integrated structure—qualities rare indeed in any autobiographical novel, but in the Japanese autobiographical novel in particular. As Mishima himself told his editor, in writing the Confessions he had no intention of producing the kind of "conventional ich-roman we have grown so accustomed to".84

In an essay on the methodology of his own novels, Mishima
points to the importance of the critical, oppositional spirit in the development of the novel in general. He notes that even the very first modern Western novel, *Don Quixote* (1605), "was born from a criticism of earlier chivalric romances."

In the context of its own tradition, the *Confessions* too assume this critical, oppositional role, in regard to what is the dominant form of modern Japanese novel, the *shi-shôsetsu* or "I-novel". Indeed, the work could be regarded as an "anti-*shi-shôsetsu*", because, on the one hand, as a "confessional" novel, it seems to fall very much within the *shi-shôsetsu* tradition (*kokuhaku shôsetsu* or "confessional novel" being another term for *shi-shôsetsu* but, on the other hand, its "deductive" procedure seems purposely to confound at least the Japanese reader's expectations of what constitutes an autobiographical novel. The *Confessions* may thus be regarded as both a product of and a critique of the *shi-shôsetsu* tradition, in the same way as *Don Quixote* was both a product of and a critique of the tradition of chivalric romance.

In a 1981 round-table discussion on the *Confessions*, Tsuge Teruhiko, trying to explain the overwhelming impression of originality which the novel gave readers on its first appearance in 1949, suggests that, in those days, it was something very new for a Japanese writer simply not to write a *shi-shôsetsu*. Further, what above all distinguished this work, according to Tsuge, from *shi-shôsetsu*, even though it was autobiographical, was the objectivity of its point of view:
the dispassionate way in which the narrator dissects his own psyche, even applying to himself, at times, the scientific theories of modern psychology. Noguchi Takehiko, while agreeing with Tsuge on the unusual objectivity of the novel's viewpoint, sees this not merely in psychological but in larger metaphysical terms: if the novel was simply about its narrator's homosexuality, then it would be a shi-shōsetsu; but actually the homosexuality is used as a "metaphor" of something larger: the hero's "existential remorse"—just as, in a later novel, The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, the hero's stuttering symbolizes his alienation. In his book on Mishima written over a decade earlier, Noguchi had also viewed the homosexuality, more narrowly, as a "metaphor" of the hero's alienation from postwar Japanese society.

The essential way in which the Confessions differs from a conventional shi-shōsetsu is that it seems to have, to use Mishima's own word, buntai: a structure of language created out of the struggle to express a universal, objective and consistent world-view. It is not intended as an image of merely one man's life, but as a symbol of life itself. Thus, for instance, as Noguchi points out, the hero's homosexuality is secondary to the novel's main point. Though the Confessions may be regarded as an apology for the hero himself, it is by no means an apology for homosexuality per se—in the manner of, say, Gide's Corydon (1924). On the contrary, the force of the novel's central argument very much depends on a negative view
of homosexuality. The more undesirable it seems to be a homo­
sexual, the stronger the narrator's case against the gods who
made him one. Thus he takes advantage of every opportunity to
reinforce this negative view—most conspicuously, by associat­
ing his homosexuality with his blood-lust. Throughout the first
part of the novel, there is a rising crescendo of negativity
in his self-portrait, which reaches its climax in his "fantasy
that may be considered the very worst of which man is capable"—
namely, his fantasy of slicing up and eating one of his class­
mates. The narrator may try to deceive the reader with such
conventional expressions of moral repugnance, but actually he
is playing a cunning, duplicitous game here, having rigged the
rules in his own favor. Since he views his own character and
behavior as predestined, the darker his self-portrait, the
brighter his image as a "tragic hero", an innocent victim of
fate. Mishima obviously relished such paradoxes, and his work
is rife with them.

The surface air of objectivity in the style of the Confes­
sions, then, is also, in a sense, deceptive. While the narra­
tor may seem to present a ruthlessly detached, uncompromising,
bleakly realistic image of himself and of the world which made
him, it is also an image very much subject to his own will and
ego—and, indeed, to his own paranoia. Obviously he takes a
perverse consolation in imagining himself the victim of malevo­
lent cosmic forces, a romantic, sentimental— not to say inflated
—self-image. "Perverse", in fact, in both senses of the word.
This self-image as victim or martyr also affords him a kind of masochistic sexual pleasure, as is most evident in the "climactic" scene of his masturbation by the seashore. Here he becomes sexually aroused by identifying himself with St. Sebastian, and assuming the "languid" death-pose of the Roman martyr, arms stretched above his head. When the narrator, in fact, speaks early in the novel of his attraction towards "'tragedy' in the most sensuous meaning of the word", the non-masochistic reader may wonder exactly what that meaning is, never before having associated tragedy with sensuality. But the seashore masturbation scene provides a vivid illustration, and shows how, in Mishima's work, there is a strange alliance between nihilism and sexuality. This alliance emerges most clearly in Confessions of a Mask, a study of his own sexuality, but it runs through all his works, and accounts for the constant association of the most negative aspects of life—violence, destruction, torture, humiliation, death itself—with sexual pleasure. In the Confessions, then, the apparently objective nihilist world-view is put to some subjective uses indeed. It might be termed, somewhat paradoxically, a "romantic" nihilism, since it bolsters the Promethean self-image of the narcissistic narrator. The words Honda applies to himself, in fact, could also be applied to the narrator/protagonist of the Confessions: he uses his philosophy "merely to serve his self-love". Nevertheless, this psychological use to which the philosophy is put does not detract from its aesthetic use.
The philosophy still shapes the work with a formal discipline rare in such autobiographical novels.

A common complaint against the shi-shōsetsu, particularly from Western readers, regards its general "formlessness", its digressive, random quality, which often makes it seem that the author includes the most trivial events for no better reason than that they actually happened to him. Edward Seidensticker, for instance, describes the typical Japanese I-novel as an "unformed reminiscence" and as a "form of autobiographical jotting that may scarcely seem to deserve the name fiction at all".94 Whatever the justice of such criticisms, there can be no doubt that, in the Confessions, Mishima wrote an autobiographical novel which is not at all formless, which is, in fact, shaped with such precise discipline that each detail of the work relates centripetally to its core argument, so that everything has a larger meaning and nothing seems included merely "because it happened". Events are not arranged randomly or merely chronologically as in many autobiographical novels; there is a definite inner logic to their arrangement, since each represents a further progression in the argument. And this form of narrative progression, associatively, by argument rather than by story-line, allows for abrupt transitions from incident to incident without any disturbance to the reader, since no causal connection between the incidents need be established. All of which gives the novel an unusually tight structure, but without resorting to a conventional plot-line. The way Mishima
accomplished this was by taking a "deductive" approach, by using his own life as a "case history" in support of a certain argument, that of nihilistic determinism. Whatever one may think of this argument, or of the unsavory psychological uses to which it is put, one cannot gainsay its effectiveness from a strictly aesthetic point of view.

C. The Nihilist as Aesthete: The Temple of the Golden Pavilion

1. The final scene of the novel

In the final scene of The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (Kinkakuji, 1956), Mizoguchi, the narrator/protagonist, commits an act of arson. It is no ordinary act of arson: he burns down one of the great architectural treasures of Japan, a five-hundred-and-fifty-year-old pavilion which is foliated in gold. What makes his action seem all the more outrageous is that Mizoguchi is not some stray pyromaniac but a monk at the very Zen temple to which the pavilion belongs. And his action is carefully planned. Indeed, he boasts about this: "I want my scrupulous attention to detail to be recognized." He assembles all the flammable materials that he owns—mattress, quilts, mosquito netting, meditation cushion—and stealthily carries them one night, along with three bundles of straw, from his living quarters over to the golden pavilion. After some hesitation, an attack not of remorse but of inertia, he sets fire to them, changes his mind about destroying himself along with
the pavilion, and then escapes to a mountain north of his temple. Far from feeling remorse, he feels "just like a man who settles down for a smoke after his job is done: I wanted to live". An unusually positive ending for a Mishima novel!

The structure of The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, Mishima's most accomplished novel, is even more pronouncedly "optical" than that of the Confessions or The Sea of Fertility. The whole novel is "written towards" the final action, and may be regarded as Mishima's interpretation of why this action—an actual event of 1950—took place. This is not to say, though, that the work is merely a "documentary" or "non-fiction" novel.

In the first place, Mishima's choice of material—a mad monk who destroys a cultural treasure—was an inspired one: it is so well suited to his peculiar world-view and his particular talents that it seems to have sprung full-blown from his own imagination. Secondly, and most importantly of course, Mishima's use of this material is skillful and even ingenious. To have been provided with this incident which symbolized so well the nihilistic mood of postwar Japanese youth was, for Mishima as writer, a definite piece of luck. But he was given only the bare bones; he had to flesh them out with the power of his own intellect and imagination.

The whole novel, indeed, consists of this "fleshing out". In brief, the way Mishima puts flesh on Mizoguchi's bones is by turning him into an aesthete who is also a highly intelligent nihilist. By the final scene it becomes clear, in fact,
that his aestheticism is the source of his nihilism, a passive nihilism which alienates him from the world, as symbolized by his stuttering, and prevents him from taking action. The all-important equation in the novel, and the philosophical argument on which the whole structure is based, is that given in the final scene: "Nothingness was the structure of this beauty." (Kyomu ga kono bi no kōzō datta no da.) The fatal attraction the pavilion exerts on Mizoguchi is thus the attraction of nothingness; beauty is a void which, like a vortex, sucks the aesthete in and drains him of his will to act. In Mizoguchi's (and Mishima's?) unique, if paranoid, world-view, even beauty is perceived as ultimately a sinister, malevolent force. Only by destroying the pavilion can he release himself from the grip of its nothingness and be free to live--and to act. The psychological struggle involved in the resolution of this philosophical dialectic is evident in the final scene.

After Mizoguchi has assembled all his flammable materials inside the pavilion, and needs only to set the match, he makes the mistake of pausing for a moment to admire its beauty for one last time. It is now that he has his vision of the nothingness of the pavilion's beauty and feels that "the problem of the incomprehensibility of the golden pavilion's beauty, which had troubled me so much in the past, was now halfway solved". And his "solution" is as follows:

...if one examined the beauty of the [pavilion's] details, one found that this beauty certainly did not end with any detail, was not completed with any detail, because, whichever detail one looked at, it held with-
in it a hint of the beauty of the next detail. The beauty of each detail in itself was filled with uneasiness. This was because, while it dreamt of completion, it never attained it, but was enticed on to the next beauty, an unknown beauty. Each hint of beauty was connected to another hint of beauty, and so all those hints of beauty which did not exist became, so to speak, the theme of the golden pavilion. Such hints were signs of nothingness. Nothingness was the structure of this beauty. Thus, the incompletion of the details of the pavilion's beauty naturally hinted at nothingness, and this delicate structure, made of the thinnest lumber, shuddered in anticipation of nothingness, like a pendant trembling in the wind.

Mizoguchi's final experience of nothingness threatens to undermine him in the same way as similar experiences undermine Honda and the protagonist of the *Confessions*. He is overcome by "violent fatigue" and a sense of the futility of the action he is about to take. He remembers what his nihilist friend Kashiwagi had told him: "what changed the world was not action but knowledge". To have imagined the deed was enough; there was no need to act it out physically. "Action for me now is no more than a kind of superfluity."

Ironically, Mizoguchi is rescued from what is, in Mishima's as in Nietzsche's eyes, the heresy of passive nihilism, and transformed into a "manly" active nihilist, by his memory of a Zen exhortation, which includes the famous line: "When you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha!" The effect of these stirring, but easily misconstrued, words on the unbalanced Mizoguchi is electrifying:

The words snapped me out of the powerlessness I had fallen into. Suddenly my whole body overflowed with power. Which is to say: one part of my mind stubbornly kept telling me that the action I soon had to perform was meaningless, but my new-found power had no fear of meaninglessness. Indeed, it was because the act was meaningless that I must do it.
Whereupon he dashes to the Golden Pavilion and, for the first time in his life, achieves a satisfying act of self-expression. Having turned the hammer of his nihilism outwards, he finds that, unlike other Mishima heroes, he now has no need to turn it against himself. This explains the great contrast in emotional tone between the final scene of The Temple of the Golden Pavilion and the final scenes of the Confessions and of The Sea of Fertility: relief or catharsis versus devastation, life-affirmation versus life-negation. Whereas the two previous characters were overcome by nothingness, Mizoguchi overcomes nothingness, ironically, by an act of destruction. Thus, as we have seen, he decides against suicide, escapes to a nearby mountain, and relaxes over a smoke, as if after a job well done. Life now has new savor for him, and, indeed, as he tells us rather complacently in the last words of the novel, he is now determined to live. (...ikiyō to watakushi wa omotta.)

This does not mean, though, that Mizoguchi ceases to be a nihilist. His act of destruction may hardly be regarded as a "positive" act. Rather he becomes an "active" instead of a "passive" nihilist, and this frees him from the forces, both psychological and ontological, which have been oppressing him -- the principal among which is the strangely enervating power of beauty.

2. The nihilist dialectic throughout the novel

The dialectical tension between active and passive nihilism, so clearly expressed in the final scene of the novel, is adumbrated in various forms from the very beginning. The key
incident of the first chapter, for instance, Mizoguchi's frustrated attempt to make contact with a neighboring girl, Uiko, expresses the same tension. After becoming as obsessed with her beauty as he already is with the beauty of the Golden Pavilion, he hides in the darkness by the side of the road early one morning, waiting for her to ride by on her bicycle. When finally she appears, he runs out to stop her. She stops, but he finds himself suddenly overcome by a wave of passive nihilism, which renders him incapable not only of acting but even of speaking:

At that moment I felt myself turn to stone. Will, desire—everything became stone. The outer world again took on a concrete existence all around me, without any connection with my inner world. The "I" who had stole out of his uncle's house, put on his white sneakers, and ran along a road still shrouded in dawn darkness up to this Zelkova tree—that "I" had only made its inner self run here at such a furious speed. In the roofs of the village houses, whose outlines were faintly visible in the dawn light, in the black grove of trees, in the black peak of Aobayama, even in Uiko who stood before me, there was, to a terrible degree, a complete lack of meaning. Without my participation, reality had been bestowed upon this world, and, with a weight I had never experienced until now, this great, meaningless, pitch-dark reality was given to me, was pressed down upon me. 106

Standing helplessly in front of Uiko, unable even to utter a word, he is humiliated by her scorn: "She cycled round me, as if dodging a stone." 107

Later in the novel this scene is repeated in another form when Mizoguchi finds himself unable to act out his lustful fantasies on a girl provided by his nihilist Mephistopheles, Kashiwagi. This time, though, the agent of passive nihilism
is not an experience of general meaninglessness but the Golden Pavilion itself, a vision of which renders him even sexually impotent. And again the girl reacts with scorn. The scene thus not only echoes his earlier experience with Uiko but also prefigures his later experience, in the novel's final scene, of the life-negating power of the pavilion itself.

The fact that Mizoguchi perceives his own passive nihilism as a grave affliction accounts for the strange pride he feels after being forced by an American soldier to trample on his girlfriend's stomach, thus inducing an abortion. Though he cannot take the full "credit" for this action, since it was forced on him, nevertheless the incident does prove that he, a man of the inner world, is at least capable of action. And it is action which has considerable repercussions in the outer world—not only the murder of an unborn child but also the placing of his Superior into a compromising position. In the topsy-turvy world of his nihilist values, the action thus represents his first important triumph as a fledging man of action. And the very evil of it only amplifies his unaccustomed sense of power:

That action which, at the time it was committed, had not felt like a crime, that action of trampling on the woman, had gradually begun to shine in my memory. This was not only because I knew that the woman had suffered a miscarriage because of it. The action had sifted into my memory like a shower of gold dust, and had begun to emit a brilliant glitter that continually pierced the eyes. The glitter of evil. Yes. Even if it was only a trivial evil, still I was now endowed with the clear awareness that I had committed evil. That awareness was hung like a medal on the inside of my chest.
What this ongoing dialectic between active and passive nihilism makes clear, then, is that Mizoguchi's final act of destruction is simply a necessary condition of his psychic health. He is faced with the choice of becoming an arsonist or a suicide. Since, in the final scene, he chooses the former, he is also able, in this scene, to renounce the latter. Through his use of this dialectic, Mishima himself achieves a triumph in the kind of ethical paradox which appealed to both the lawyer and the rebel in him:

Nothing stimulates the novelist's imagination more, challenges his ability more, and inspires his creative urge more, than a crime that seems indefensible in the light of ordinary morality. In such a case, the novelist takes pride in his courage to render a different verdict, though the rest of the world may condemn him. Perhaps the criminal, in his unrepentant pride, is the harbinger of hitherto unknown values. In any case, a novel reveals its uniquely ethical nature at a crisis like this one. 110

The fact that Mishima viewed the novel as a moral instrument may itself seem highly paradoxical, considering his nihilism, but Nietzsche, the principal philosopher of nihilism, was also primarily a moralist. Nietzsche's morality, of course, was not the conventional Judeo-Christian morality of Western civilization, but a new set of values supposedly "beyond good and evil" to justify the willful behavior of the active nihilist, the power-hungry Übermensch. Mizoguchi, pitiable figure that he is, is Mishima's own version of an Übermensch. He is presented as such partly, no doubt, in ironic jest, and partly out of the thirty-one-year-old Mishima's enfant terrible desire to shock the public, but also, there can be no doubt, with some
genuine conviction that he represents a new kind of nihilist moral hero.

3. Critical evaluation of the work in the light of its nihilist philosophy

The historical actuality of the novel's central action, and the great outrage which this action aroused in the hearts of all patriotic and beauty-loving Japanese, some to have produced some confusions between life and art in the critical reaction to *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. The danger arises when critics fail to distinguish sufficiently between the actual historical incident and the symbolic use which Mishima made of it. Consequently, the moral outrage which the mad monk's action provoked is transferred to Mishima, who seems in his novel to justify the burning of national treasures as a form of "self-expression". Needless to say, moral outrage is not the state of mind most conducive to a fair estimation of the novel's aesthetic value.

Surprisingly, the judgements of some of the most eminent of contemporary Japanese critics seem to have been clouded by such moralistic considerations. Nakamura Mitsuo, for instance, objected that Mishima had turned "an outrageous criminal act into a young aristocrat's intellectual prank". And even the late "Dean" of Japanese critics, Kobayashi Hideo, seems to have been swayed by similar sentiments when he declared that Mishima should have "killed off" Mizoguchi at the end. No doubt many readers likewise find their sense of "poetic justice"
offended by Mizoguchi's insouciant, self-congratulatory attitude after he has performed his act of arson, and would prefer to see him punished—by remorse at least if not by death. A Western critic, Donald Keene, on the other hand, perhaps because he is capable of a more detached attitude towards Japanese national treasures, is quite willing to overlook the moral issue, and even argues that: "It is a measure of Mishima's success that he persuaded readers that a deplorable event—the destruction of a priceless work of art—was justifiable in terms of the liberation of one man."\textsuperscript{113} Keene's claim, though, besides being false (the above Japanese critics, for instance, obviously were not so easily "persuaded"), is based on the same naive confusion of the real incident with Mishima's fictional, symbolic use of it. \textit{The Temple of the Golden Pavilion} cannot be said to "justify" the actual act of arson of 1950 for the simple reason that Mizoguchi is not Hayashi, the actual arsonist, but an \textit{alter ego} of Mishima himself, and Mizoguchi's action is given a symbolic, philosophical significance which Hayashi's action, apparently committed "on impulse", in no way possessed.\textsuperscript{114} If Mishima himself had set fire to the Golden Pavilion, then perhaps his novel could reasonably be regarded as an "apology for arson". But since he was in "real life" the most ardent defender of Japanese culture among the writers of his generation, perhaps it would be safer to regard his defense of the firing of cultural treasures as more symbolic than literal.
Incidentally, Keene's description of the novel as a "powerful, inevitable tragedy" is also based on the same art/life confusion. The actual event of 1950 was no doubt regarded as a national tragedy by most Japanese, but within the context of this novel it becomes a symbol of the triumph of active over passive nihilism. The novel's conclusion is the opposite of tragic, since tragedies end with the hero's death but this work ends with his resolution to live. Although admittedly this is a rather odd way to put it, the novel would be better described as a success story with a happy ending—and, of course, it is Mishima's supreme achievement in irony to have made it so.

A more serious charge against the novel than its moral culpability is that it functions too exclusively on the level of philosophical argument, and thus neglects the psychological realization of its characters. One of the strongest presentations of this argument is made by Miyoshi Masao, who charges that the novel "evades consequentiality by the most subtle means". By which he means that: "What happened earlier is connected with what comes later only thematically, not novelistically--that is, not historically, psychologically, or causally." To illustrate his point, Miyoshi notes that the reader is given no idea of how a rough-hewn monk like Mizoguchi ever acquired such a sophisticated aesthetic sensibility: "I am not insisting that Mizoguchi's aesthetics is 'incredible', given his origins and education, but am arguing that The Golden Temple simply disregards the job of making it appear probable or even feasible in the light of his background."
It seems to me, though, that Miyoshi falls into the "literalist fallacy" almost as deeply as those critics who would transfer their moral outrage from the real arsonist to Mizoguchi. Of course the novel does not offer a realistic psychological portrait of the pyromaniac as aesthete—the very idea seems ludicrous. In demanding that it do so, Miyoshi, an expert on the nineteenth-century English novel, seems to be guided too much by nineteenth-century conventions of psychological realism. The Temple of the Golden Pavilion is obviously not meant to be "realistic" in that sense, but then neither are many of the other major novels of the twentieth century. What, for instance, are the precise psychological origins of the Kafka hero's guilt? Why is the Sartre hero overcome by nausea towards the physical world? Why does Camus' outsider shoot the Arab? In the nihilist universe of such modern philosophical fiction human psychology is not always made to appear "probable or even feasible" in the light of the character's background. Characters often are offered more as symbols than as literal human beings. Thus Mizoguchi may be taken as a symbol of the passive nihilist struggling to become an active nihilist, and most of the other characters of the novel may likewise be taken as symbolic active or passive nihilists, or, as Ueda Makoto has said, as "people of the inner world (the Superior, Kashiwagi, most of the other acolytes) and people of the outer world (the Naval Engineering School student, Uiko, Tsurukawa, the American soldier), with the latter group eventually winning
Mizoguchi...to their side". In this way the characters themselves function as contending forces in the novel's philosophic dialectic between active and passive nihilism. This is not to say, of course, that they are completely devoid of psychological reality, mere ciphers in a philosophical equation. But neither are they full or round characters in the traditional sense, recognizable human beings who seem to exist independently of the author's mind, or of the novel's central argument. What reality they do have clearly derives from the author's own psychology: they are all, to some extent, his alter egos. Thus the simple answer to Miyoshi's objection is that no reader need look into Mizoguchi's background to account for his sophisticated aesthetics, since their obvious source is the author himself. And any reader not unduly influenced by nineteenth-century conceptions of the novel will know this. It is a natural part of the conventions of this kind of novel. Admittedly the result is a certain psychological narrowness, since the only psychology expressed by the novel is that of the author himself. But all this means, in the end, is that the philosophical dimension takes precedence over the psychological dimension, since the psychology of the characters, as we have seen, plays its role in the unfolding of the novel's central philosophical argument. And this is only to be expected in a work that is primarily, after all, a philosophical rather than a psychological novel. Mishima did prove on several occasions that he was capable of greater psychological range—most
conspicuously, in After the Banquet (Utage no ato, 1960), in which the heroine, Kazu, radiates "open good nature" and bursts with "energy and enthusiasm", is about as unlike the typical Mishima hero as anyone could possibly be. By the same token, though, After the Banquet is not a philosophical novel and does not give expression to Mishima's nihilist world-view.

What Miyoshi's objection ultimately comes down to, then, is an objection to the philosophical novel per se. This is evident in his choice of words—in his complaint, for instance, that: "What happened earlier is connected with what comes later only thematically, not novelistically—that is, not historically, psychologically, or causally." Here Miyoshi betrays the same prejudice against ideas as "extra-literary" or "inartistic" that we found earlier in various Anglo-Saxon writers. Thus the strange antithesis he sets up between the "thematic" and the "novelistic". Why, we might ask, is the connection of events in a novel thematically any less "novelistic" than their connection "historically, psychologically, or causally"? Surely the thematic structure of a novel is as integral a part of its artistry as its plot-line or its character-psychology. And in a philosophical novel it is only natural, as we have seen, that this thematic structure take precedence over all the other aesthetic elements.

Rather than carp over what the novel is not, and was not meant to be, perhaps the critic would do better to celebrate what it is, and to point out the significance of Mishima's
achievement, especially within the Japanese context. The Temple of the Golden Pavilion is the most successful of Mishima's philosophical novels, no doubt because in that act of cultural arson he found the most powerful objective correlative of his nihilist world-view and, more specifically, of the conflict between active and passive nihilism. Centred on this single dramatic action, and on the dialectical tensions which precede that action, the novel thus attains a unity, intensity and dramatic interest rare in a work which also engages in such a weighty philosophical discourse. This was no small achievement, especially in view of the fact that, to accomplish it, Mishima had to go against pretty much the entire Japanese literary tradition. As he himself was well aware:

With respect to the conversations in my novels, I believe I have already freed myself to a considerable extent from Japanese fastidiousness. Japanese writers enjoy displaying their delicate skill at revealing in an indirect manner, by means of conversations, the personalities, temperaments and outlook on life of their characters; but conversations that are unrelated to the personalities and temperaments of the characters, conversations that are read for their content alone and, finally, long conversations that fuse into the same tempo with their descriptive passages, are the special quality of the novels of Goethe, and of the German novel in general. 121

Much as Mishima looked to a German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche, to help him define the dualistic polarities of his nihilist thought, so also he looked to the German tradition of the philosophical novel, from Goethe to Mann, for his model of the kind of novel which could give expression to that thought. In doing so he significantly widened the perimeters of the modern Japanese novel.
D. Conclusion

Nihilism was originally a product of the nineteenth-century West, and continues as a major force in modern Western thought, threatening to undermine the traditional theology, metaphysics and morality of Western civilization. Mishima's nihilism has some distinctly Western elements, especially in its use of such Nietzschean dualistic concepts as active and passive nihilism and the Apollonian and Dionysian principles. Mishima was also strongly attracted to Nietzsche's idea of the nihilist superman, the man of iron will, beyond good and evil, and to the German philosopher's exaltation of Greek paganism, of the cult of the body and of the Greek concept of man as a tragic hero. But Mishima also liked to find precedents for his nihilism within his own Japanese tradition. He was, after all, an extreme nationalist, and no doubt was loath to be considered a "foreign" thinker. Thus, in his Introduction to the Hagakure (Hagakure nyūmon, 1967), for instance, he depicts the Tokugawa samurai moralist, Yamamoto Jōchō, as an admirable "active nihilist". And he deals in a similar way with Yōmei-gaku and those revolutionaries influenced by this militant form of neo-Confucianism, such as Ōshio Heihachirō. Also, he sought out nihilistic elements in Buddhism, especially in Zen and in the Yuishiki school, and even in Shintoism. While there may be some quasi-nihilistic aspects to these traditional modes of thought, and to Japanese culture in general, it is obviously anachronistic to regard them as "nihilist" in the modern sense.
of the term. The Buddhist idea of nothingness, for instance, refers to a completely different reality than that of the nihilist idea.

The simple fact of the matter is that Mishima's worldview was essentially Western, and it was exactly this which enabled him to write Western-style philosophical novels. While his affinities with traditional Japanese thinkers may thus be suspect, still he does have strong affinities in his nihilism with other modern Japanese novelists, who were also Western-influenced. The very first modern Japanese novelist of importance, Futabatei Shimei, in fact, imbibed nineteenth-century Russian nihilism directly from its source, translating Turgenev, and the effects of this may be seen in his novel, The Drifting Cloud (Ukigumo, 1886-89), a study in nihilist malaise. Mori Ōgai, the Japanese novelist whom Mishima admired above all others, and whose spare, disciplined style he consciously imitated, was also strongly influenced by German literature and wrote philosophical and historical stories whose themes often approach the nihilistic. Indeed, if we survey the whole of serious modern Japanese literature, we find that the view of life it presents is certainly dark if not actually nihilistic. This applies also to Mishima's "teacher" and patron, Kawabata Yasunari, whose nihilism, though, is not expressed in such explicit philosophical terms as Mishima's, and is tempered with an exquisite traditional aestheticism. In other words, Mishima's nihilism per se is by no means an isolated phenomenon, and may even be taken to
represent a fairly common mood in modern Japanese literature, if in a rather extreme form. But what is definitely uncommon is the manner in which he articulates this mood, the philosophical shape he gives to it.

In terms of psychological scope Mishima never progressed far beyond the shi-shōsetsu (I-novel), the dominant form of the modern Japanese novel, since most of his characters are alter egos of himself, imbued with aspects of his own psychology, and his novels as a whole are expressions of his personal worldview and its concomitant emotional state. In terms of style, structure and intellectual interest, however, his novels far surpassed the conventional shi-shōsetsu, and they did this mainly through the aesthetic functions of their nihilist philosophy. In each of the three cases examined here, a somewhat different aspect of the nihilist philosophy is emphasized: determinism in Confessions of a Mask, the triumph of active nihilism in The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, the triumph of passive nihilism in The Sea of Fertility. But in each case the central philosophical argument is used to confer an exemplary order on the structure of the novel as a whole, and to imbue the style of the novel with a sense of ironic detachment. The various ideas the central argument generates are also a fertile source of intellectual interest. Though the pleasure these novels afford is often more cerebral than emotional or sensual, it is no less "aesthetic" for all that, whether it be the pleasure of a witty aphorism or of an absorbing and well-
reasoned argument.

Actually, a better understanding of Mishima as a nihilist philosophical novelist would be had by placing him in the context of modern Western literature. This could also provide the basis of a fascinating study in comparative literature, but here, unfortunately, I am able to offer only the briefest summary. The first significant literary use of nihilism was in nineteenth-century Russian literature, especially in the novels of Turgenev and Dostoevsky. But, unlike Mishima, these two Russian novelists do not write from a nihilist viewpoint; they merely present characters who profess to be nihilists. Mishima is much closer to the later Russian novelist, Artzybashen, who in a novel such as Breaking-Point (U poslednei cherty, 1911-12), actually writes out of a nihilist point of view, advocating nothing less than universal suicide!\(^{124}\)

On the other hand, Mishima differs from later European nihilist novelists such as Sartre, Beckett and Robbe-Grillet in that he makes no real attempt to write an "anti-novel" from which all conventional elements of plot, character and setting have been expunged. Of course, it may have been more consistent with his nihilism to write such novels, but Mishima seemed to have little talent for experimental writing.\(^{125}\) Rather he chose to give expression to his nihilism, as we have seen, through the conventional form of the philosophic novel, in the German tradition of Mann, Hesse and, originally, Goethe. That there were certain unresolved tensions involved in this
choice, though, may account for the "destructive impulse" he sometimes displayed towards his own creations. As we have already noted, he seemed to enjoy building elaborate houses of cards and then knocking them down—a tendency that reaches its grand climax at the end of *The Sea of Fertility*. But if, as a nihilist, he was dissatisfied with the conventionalities of his own novels, this was at least a creative dissatisfaction, in that it produced those striking moments of reversal and collapse—as if all supports are suddenly removed—which recur throughout his major novels.
Chapter One

Notes


3. op.cit., pp.5-6.

4. op.cit., p.123.


7. op.cit., p.283.


9. op.cit., p.42 and p.54.

10. op.cit., p.66.

11. op.cit., p.41.


13. op.cit., p.31.


15. Quoted in McCarthy, p.3.


17. For an account of these two opposing tendencies in early Shôwa literature see Odagiri Susumu, Shôwa bungaku no seiritsu (Tokyo: Keisô shobô, 1965).


23. *Mishima Yukio zenshū* [hereafter MYZ] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1973-76), vol.19, p.646. All translations from the Japanese my own unless otherwise specified but, for readers who would like to refer to the published English translations of Mishima's novels, I also give page references to the paperback editions of these, in brackets, as follows: (*The Decay of the Angel*, trans. Edward G. Seidensticker, New York: Pocket Books, 1975, p.246.)
25. ibid.
33. op.cit., p.18.
34. op.cit., p.19.
40. ibid.
41. MYZ vol.19, p.484. (Decay, p.110).
43. ibid.
44. MYZ vol.19, p.70. (Dawn, pp.54-5).
45. MYZ vol.19, p.78. (Dawn, p.62).
46. MYZ vol.19, p.114. (Dawn, p.94).
47. MYZ vol.18, p.110. (Spring Snow, p.93).
48. MYZ vol.18, p.113. (Spring Snow, p.95).
49. MYZ vol.19, p.617. (Decay, p.221).
51. For instance, Tsuge Teruhiko in a round-table discussion with Miyoshi Yukio, Noguchi Takehiko and Matsumoto Tōru, in Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū (vol. 26, no.9, July, 1981), pp.31-7.
52. MYZ vol.19, p.63 and p.79. (Dawn, p.48 and 63).
54. Quoted in Masao Miyoshi, Accomplices of Silence (Berkeley, Univ. of Calif., 1974), p.95.
55. For an excellent study of Ōgai's "literature of ideas" see Richard John Bowring, Mori Ōgai and the Modernization of Japanese Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1979), pp.125-94.
57. MYZ vol.19, p.646. (Decay, p.246).
58. MYZ vol.19, p.647. (Decay, p.247).
59. MYZ vol.18, p.136. (Spring Snow, p.119).
60. MYZ vol.19, p.292. (Dawn, p.252).
62. See above *Kokubungaku zadankai*
70. *MYZ* vol.3, p.350. (Confessions, pp.252-3).
76. *MYZ* vol.3, p.168. (Confessions, p.8).
77. *MYZ* vol.3, p.171. (Confessions, p.12).
78. *MYZ* vol.3, p.185. (Confessions, p.30).
79. *MYZ* vol.3, p.185. (Confessions, p.31).
86. op.cit., p.155.
88. See above *Kokubungaku zadankai*, p.7.
89. ibid.
90. op.cit., pp.8-9.
98. ibid.
101. ibid.
102. ibid. (*Temple*, p.280).
112. Quoted in above *Kokubungaku zadankai*, p.22.
116. ibid.
117. ibid.
118. Ueda, Modern Japanese Writers, p.223.
120. Miyoshi, Accomplices, p.160.
125. On this point see Keene, Dawn, p.1204.
I. Introduction: the Psychology of Mishima's Novels

A. Nihilism and Psychology

Nihilism relates to psychology in two general ways, which we may distinguish as: 1. the psychology of the nihilist himself, and 2. the nihilist view of psychology.

1. Firstly, nihilism may be regarded as in itself a particular psychological state, subject, of course, to diverse definitions, but characterized in general by an extremely sceptical and negative mental attitude and a mood either of bleak despair or of profound indifference—the despair of someone for whom life has lost all meaning, or the indifference of someone who has lost even the capacity to care. To these moods of passive nihilism should be added, too, the hysterical euphoria an active nihilist such as Mishima's hero, Mizoguchi, experiences in accomplishing an act of destruction. But this euphoric mood, of course, is only transitory; it is soon replaced by one of the more basic nihilist moods, which are entirely negative. The paradoxical quality of the keynote mood of nihilism—"the pathos of 'in vain'"—was well captured by Nietzsche in his famous definition of a nihilist:

A nihilist is a man who judges of the world as it is that it ought not to be, and of the world as it ought to be that it does not exist. According to this view, our existence (action, suffering, willing, feeling) has no meaning: the pathos of "in vain" is the nihilists' pathos—at the same time, as pathos, an inconsistency on the part of the nihilists. 1
Some writers on nihilism go further and describe it not merely as a psychological but as a psychopathological state, and one that infects an increasing number of people in modern society. Nietzsche himself, in fact, was a prophet of this view and, since he regarded the advent of nihilism as a historically inevitable consequence of the loss of authority by Judeo-Christian civilization, he wished to hasten the process in the hope that, the sooner the nihilist "fever" reached its climax, the sooner Western man could recover his psychological health. But Nietzsche was only the first great psychologist to take this psychopathological and sociopathological view of nihilism. As Charles Glicksberg says:

Nietzsche conceded that nihilism could be rightfully classified as a species of disease. Freud arrived at the same conclusion. And Jung argued that "meaninglessness inhibits fullness of life and is therefore equivalent to illness". Nietzsche sought to cure himself of this metaphysical mania that reduced him at times to a state of absolute despair.

2. Secondly, the term "nihilist psychology" may refer, more objectively, to various concepts of human psychology which appear nihilistic. Surely one of the most radical of these is the view that consciousness itself, or the intellect itself, is a form of disease, since its ultimate product is passive nihilism, which brings about a paralysis of the will. The idea is an old one--it forms a leitmotif of Shakespeare's Hamlet, for instance: Hamlet is held back from taking revenge upon his uncle because of the morbid over-development of his intellect. Though no doubt it would be anachronistic to do so, one could regard the play as a parable of the conflict between
the forces of active and passive nihilism within Hamlet's mind:

Thus conscience does make cowards of us all;  
And thus the native hue of resolution  
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,  
And enterprises of great pith and moment  
With this regard their currents turn awry,  
And lose the name of action. 4

Nor, of course, is this the only expression of a nihilistic attitude in Shakespeare—his plays are full of them, though he could not have known of the concept of "nihilism" per se. But has any writer ever given a more powerful and terrifying expression to the nihilist world-view than King Lear?

Nietzsche, though, was the first to give systematic expression to the philosophy and psychology of nihilism, including the idea that the intellect itself is a disease. Thus he presented the paradoxical spectacle of "the intellectual as a protagonist of anti-intellectualism", using his formidable intellect to argue in favor of instinct over reason.5 In this also he was to be echoed, as we shall see, by Mishima.

Of more immediate relevance to literature, though, and especially to the novel, is the nihilist anti-psychology of the self: its concept of the inner void, its denial of the metaphysical category of being, its negation of human identity. Again, as with the nihilist idea of the nothingness of the external world, there is a superficial resemblance between this idea of inner nothingness and certain Buddhist/Christian mystical concepts of the inner void. But, again, the two ideas are
not to be confused, because, at least in emotional terms, they refer to entirely different experiences. The nihilist experience of the inner void is hardly characterized by mystical rapture—nor is it followed by an uprush of positive creative energy, such as, for instance, a Christian mystic like St. John of the Cross gives such exquisite expression to in the poems that followed his own "dark night of the soul". As his English translator Roy Campbell has said, these poems are songs of "the soul in rapture at having arrived at the height of perfection, which is the union with God by the road of spiritual negation". Or, as another commentator on the Spanish poet/saint points out, the Christian unio mystica is a "beatific nothingness where all that the soul was is 'forgotten'".

In the nihilist experience of the inner void, needless to say, there is nothing "beatific". To quote Helmut Thielicke once more: "The decisive point is not only that nihilism asserts the vacuum, the nihil, the nothing, but the assertor himself is oppressed and afflicted by his own nothingness; in psychiatric terms, he is oppressed by the breakdown, the decay of his 'self-world', his loss of the centre." And, again, nihilism "leads to the destruction of the self. The self is 'unselfed', in Kierkegaard's sense, and becomes merely a representation of a thing or an energy, with all the consequences of self-annihilation that this involves."

The consequences of what we might call this "depersonalization" or even "dehumanization" of the self, this transmogri-
fication of the self into a "thing or an energy", are, of course, plainly and abundantly in evidence throughout the whole of modern literature. On the one hand themes of alienation, anomie and absurdity have become commonplace; on the other hand the traditional aesthetic element of character has all but vanished from the serious modern novel. Commenting on this latter trend, Baruch Hochman, in his perspicacious study, *Character in Literature*, remarks:

Character has not fared well in our century.... Over the past fifty years the characters of literature have, in the works of our most innovative writers, often been reduced to schematic angularity, vapid ordinariness, or allegorical inanity. The great writers of early modernism fulfilled the Romantic program of individualism and created a gallery of unprecedentedly complex characters, but their heirs have deliberately subordinated the role of character in their work. And they have done so with the conviction that neither life nor literature can effectively accommodate rich, full-bodied, interesting, and sustained manifestations of character—of embodied human being or viable personal identity. If Samuel Beckett, for example, has a vital theme beyond the blabbification of language, it is the emptying out of the self and the loss of its meaning. And if postmodernism has a range of bugaboos that it attacks as fictive, character as a substantial reality is not the least of them. Postmodernist writers not only challenge the cogency of character as a category but actively work to dismantle it as an operative element in their stories. 10

Of course, nihilism *per se* is not the only cause of this erosion of or antagonism towards character in the modern novel. But the social and intellectual phenomena which Hochman lists as contributing factors—the suppression of individuality by mass societies, the increasing dominance of life by impersonal technologies, the undermining of traditional humanist ideas of the stability and reality of character by such modern notions
as that of the unconscious--certainly are also contributing factors in the rise and spread of nihilism. If, as Martin Heidegger claimed, in the contemporary world "nihilism is in the most varied and most hidden forms 'the normal state' of man", then no doubt the same forces which account for this fact also account for the diminution of character in the modern novel.

As Hochman points out, modern psychology itself must be considered as one of these forces. Freud's psychology, for instance, if not actually nihilistic, at least has close affinities with nihilism. Freud acknowledged Nietzsche as his precursor in the discovery of the unconscious, and, as with Nietzsche, this discovery led Freud to take a deterministic view of human behavior, to view it as guided more by unconscious animal instinct than by conscious morality or reason. Freud's later quasi-metaphysical doctrine of the "death instinct", the so-called "nirvana principle", first expounded in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920), seems especially nihilistic in tenor. Mishima himself, in fact, seemed to regard Freudian psychology as one of the two major twentieth-century offshoots of Nietzsche's nihilism--the other being fascism.

B. Mishima's Psychology and the Psychology of his Novels

As already suggested in Chapter One, the relation between Mishima's own psychology and the psychology of his novels is an intimate one indeed--despite "fictional" appearances, every bit as intimate as in the case of a writer of shi-shôsetsu.
Just as, for instance, William Sibley speaks of the "Shiga hero", a thinly disguised alter ego of the author who appears in all his major works, so also we might speak of the "Mishima hero", who is basically a spokesman of Mishima's nihilism, and who incorporates within his psychology various aspects of Mishima's own "nihilistic" psychology. Though other varieties of character do appear, generally they lack the psychological reality of these central nihilist characters. Sometimes Mishima employs the expedient of "fracturing" himself into several different parts and apportioning these parts among several different characters--one presumes, for the sake of variety. The most conspicuous example of this occurs in the work he referred to as his "study of nihilism", Kyôko's House (Kyôko no ie, 1959), in which he supposedly divides himself into four parts: a painter representing sensitivity, a boxer action, an actor narcissistic self-awareness and a businessman nihilistic worldly wisdom. As Noguchi Takehiko has pointed out, this pattern of four "types" may also be seen to be repeated in the heroes of the final tetralogy: Kiyoaki representing sensitivity, Isao action, Ying Chan narcissistic self-awareness and Tôru nihilistic worldly wisdom. But does this kind of self-fragmentation really introduce psychological variety? As Mishima's own categories suggest, the resulting characters are often over-simplified "types" rather than complex, full-blooded human beings. This is particularly true of the "man of action" types, flat, wooden characters such as Isao who do not really partake of
the author's psychology but are merely idealized icons representing the kind of man he would like to be. On the other hand, those characters who do come alive, and who do attain to an interesting degree of complexity, all seem to partake of essentially the same nihilist psychology. As Donald Keene remarks of the four heroes of Kyôko's House, for instance: "the four men seem curiously uniform in outlook, in no way suggesting (as Mishima had intended) that they stand for a whole generation." Mishima himself, in fact, pointed to the underlying nihilism which accounts for this sense of uniformity:

The characters in the book run about in one direction or another as their individual personalities, their professions and their sexual tendencies command them, but in the end all roads, no matter how devious, lead back into nihilism, and each man helps to complete the sketch-map of nihilism that Seiichirô first proposed.

Though Mishima referred to Kyôko's House specifically as his "study in nihilism", what is explicit in this novel, which was a resounding critical failure, is, as we have seen, implicit in other of his works—which achieved greater critical success perhaps for the very reason that they were not so explicitly or schematically arranged as his "sketch-map of nihilism". Likewise, when Mishima justified his study of nihilism in Kyôko's House by saying that the "spiritual state known as nihilism is essentially emotional in content, and it is therefore more appropriate for a study to be made in the novel of a novelist than in the theoretical researches of the scholar," he might just as well have been talking of the psychology underlying most of his major novels, which are similarly
pervaded by nihilist states of emotion, as much as by nihilist patterns of thought and behavior.

Given, then, this uniformity of the psychology of Mishima's novels, and its close affinity with the author's own psychology, the "biographical" approach to critical analysis, the search for life/work parallels, an approach favored so predominantly by Japanese critics, seems particularly appropriate in Mishima's case, as it does in the case of the mainstream writers of the *shi-shôsetsu*. Readers are naturally curious about a writer's psychology, and in Mishima's case this natural curiosity is piqued all the more by the fascinating contradictoriness of his Dionysian/Apollonian psychology: on the one hand, a rather spectacular Molotov cocktail of explosive elements, everything from political fanaticism to narcissistic machismo to sado-masochistic homosexuality; and, on the other hand, the compulsive orderliness and workaholic habits of an exemplary civil servant (which he once was), matched by the strict conventional-mindedness of a dutiful son and responsible family man, who lived with his parents up to the day of his death, at the age of forty-six. (This convention-loving, bourgeois side to Mishima is well expressed, also, by his approval of Thomas Mann's dictum that "writers should look like bankers"; an injunction which he did his best to conform to throughout his life.)

Apart from this fascination of the author's psychology *per se*, a reader might also presume that some acquaintance with that psychology will deepen his understanding of the author's
work, especially when, as in Mishima's case, those works give expression largely to that psychology. Certainly it seems relevant to speculate, for instance, on the psychological origins of Mishima's nihilism. Taking a clue from the Confessions, we might point to his unusual childhood, during which he was forcibly cut off from his mother's love and jealously over-protected by his neurotic and dictatorial grandmother, who taught him to fear the outside world. If psychoanalytically inclined, no doubt we would find here the roots of his narcissism, his sado-masochistic homosexuality and his paranoia, each of which, in turn, fed into his nihilism.

If, on the other hand, we were historically inclined, we might point to Mishima's affiliations with the Japan Romantic School (Nippon Roman-ha) during the war, a group of mystical ultranationalists whose creed that death and destruction were the highest values in life certainly qualified them to be regarded as active nihilists, as much so as their German allies, those Nazis who liked to regard themselves as nihilist supermen, the legitimate heirs of Nietzsche. Or, again from a historical perspective, we might consider Mishima's plight in post-war Japan, his feelings of being an outsider or even an "anachronism" at the ripe old age of twenty-one! As Noguchi Takehiko pointed out in his seminal study of Mishima, the strange young man with his "aesthetics of blood" and his "metaphysics of death" felt very much at home in war-time Japan, where blood, death and destruction were very much the order
Thus, paradoxically—and in sharp contrast to those older men who had actually tasted the reality of battle--for the rest of his life Mishima romanticized those glory-days of war-time, looked back to them with intense nostalgia, and even, in the end, tried vainly to resurrect them. Thus his espousal of "active nihilism". On the other hand, the socialist and liberal-humanitarian values prevalent in post-war Japan were not at all to his taste; they allowed no scope to his appetite for blood, death and destruction, nor to his aristocratic pretensions, nor even to his emperor-worship, which he regarded as the cornerstone of Japanese culture. Thus his "passive nihilism". It could be said that the emperor's renunciation of his godhead played a similar symbolic role in the development of Mishima's nihilism as the "death of God" played in the development of nineteenth-century European nihilism--the removal of the cornerstone of all traditional values.

No doubt all of these psychopathological and historical elements of Mishima's experience contributed to the formation of his nihilism, as reinforcing if not as causal factors, and the actual formulation of that nihilism in intellectual terms certainly was facilitated by his wide readings in European literature and philosophy. We could also point to less obvious but perhaps no less significant biographical factors, such as his troubled relationship with his father, a fanatic admirer of Hitler who tried to suppress his son's literary creativity and force him to channel his energies into a more "responsible"
profession, such as that of a government bureaucrat; or the early death of his beloved sister, which, Mishima claimed, had a more devastating effect on him than Japan's defeat in the war.25

The purpose of the present chapter, though, is to delineate the psychological background not of Mishima's own nihilism but of his protagonists'. The two are no doubt closely affiliated, but ultimately only the latter is of aesthetic relevance. And this is fortunate. An author's life is "open-ended", but his work is a "closed system", and thus subject to more conclusive analysis. Whatever the real psychological origins of Mishima's nihilism, all that need concern us in the analysis of his novels are the origins discernible in the novels themselves, as a dynamic element in their structure.

The point here is not to uphold the now old "new critical" doctrine on the strict separation of "life" and "work", nor to deny that acquaintance with an author's psychology or life can deepen our understanding of his work. The point is simply that, with a writer such as Mishima, the tendency is strong to overidentify the work with the life, even to regard the two as interchangeable—as Henry Scott Stokes does, for instance, when he uses the Confessions as primary biographical source-material—so that questions of aesthetic value tend to get swamped by questions of biographical interest. This is unfortunate, because the aesthetic value of Mishima's major novels is considerable. To assess that value correctly, one must regard each novel as ultimately a self-contained unit,
not as a running commentary on the author's life. One must proceed on the assumption that the author has provided, within the novel itself, all the information necessary for its understanding and appreciation; no extraneous "supporting evidence" should be needed. Otherwise one would have to assume that the novel was unfinished.

Although the psychology of Mishima's novels is, by and large, a mirror-image of his own, this does not mean that it is entirely uniform or unchanging. During the three decades or so of his writing career, there were, of course, some modifications in his own psychology—most conspicuously, his complete about-face from passive introvert to active extrovert. And these changes are clearly reflected in his work: for instance, in his later glorification of some revolutionary activist heroes. But, perhaps more importantly, Mishima's attitude towards psychology itself also changed. In an early novel such as the *Confessions*, the narrator seems to accept, quite uncritically, the "scientific" approach of modern Western psychology and psychoanalysis, even using it, like a scalpel, to dissect his own psyche, and seeming to hope for some therapeutic relief thereby. By the final tetralogy, though, the attitude towards orthodox Western psychology has changed entirely: it is not merely sceptical but adversary. And this, of course, is quite in keeping with the overall movement towards a stricter, more developed form of nihilism. The four novels are pervaded by an anti-psychological, anti-subjective view of the self which vitiates the psychological
reality of the characters. But it must be admitted that this works towards Mishima's purpose, which is to demonstrate the illusory nature of human identity—the "void behind the mask".

C. Psychology in a Japanese Context

Any Western critic who would presume to deal with Japanese psychology—whether the psychology of the author himself or of his characters—must ultimately confront the question of whether Western psychological theories are universally applicable, or whether he must learn a new system of specifically Japanese psychology. The Japanese, after all, are an odd lot—centuries of isolation in the hot-house or even pressure-cooker atmosphere of their tight little islands have produced in them perhaps the most idiosyncratic national psychology in the world. What other people bow and smile so much, work so indecently hard, or cut their own bellies open in the gruesome way that Mishima did? How, then, can one apply to them with any confidence psychological theories developed in the West, and which even in the West are by no means universally accepted? Psychology, after all, has not yet reached the stage of being a universal science with the same standards of verifiability as, say, physics or chemistry.

The most satisfactory, common-sensical solution of this problem to date, it seems to me, has been provided by Doi Takeo, a Freudian psychoanalyst who has practised in both Japan and the United States. Doi takes a balanced, median position on the issue of universal versus national psychology. On the one hand, he argues that the "typical psychology of a
given nation can be learned only through familiarity with its native language", and he makes good use of such Japanese terms as *amae* (dependency) to illustrate the special characteristics of Japanese psychology. On the other hand, he asserts that "human psychology does not vary so very greatly from place to place. Though it may appear different, it invariably rests on common foundations." And he points out, for instance, that even Westerners feel the need for *amae*, dependency or passive love, which corresponds to Freud's "the child's primary object-choice", but that this need is generally suppressed in Western culture, in which the individual is urged to be self-reliant; whereas it is encouraged in Japanese culture, in which the individual is taught to depend on a group. Conversely, Doi also recognizes the applicability of such Freudian concepts as the Oedipus complex to Japanese culture.

Many aspects of Doi's psychology of *amae* are of obvious relevance to the psychology of Mishima's novels—and of Mishima himself. One important example: it may be easier for a Westerner to understand the seeming anomaly of Mishima's emperor-worship through Doi's analysis of this peculiar Japanese institution as the "ideology of *amae*". Before Japan's defeat in the Pacific War, the emperor was the "spiritual center of society"; all Japanese were "His Majesty's children", dependent on the emperor. Thus the post-war collapse of the emperor system as an ideology also "undermined the authority of the moral concepts that had bound together Japanese society
so far" all based on the psychology of *amae*. Thus Mishima's espousal of a return to emperor-worship, while no doubt impractical, still was not, as it might first appear to Westerners, an atavistic or romantic pose, but quite a rational response to a perceived decline in Japanese morale. From this perspective also, it seems more likely that the emperor's renunciation of his godhood was an important factor in the onset of Mishima's postwar passive nihilism. And it must be said, in fact, that he showed some prescience in anticipating Doi's diagnosis of the psychological significance of this event.

In the present chapter I have also tried to adopt a middle-ground approach in dealing with Japanese psychology, drawing on both psychoanalytical theory and on Doi's psychology of *amae*--and balancing the two, it is hoped, with some modicum of common sense.

II. The Sex Life of a Nihilist: the Psychology of the Confessions

A. An Active/Passive Psychology

Viewed strictly in terms of its psychology, *Confessions of a Mask* is, without doubt, Mishima's most successful novel, a powerful and fascinating psychological self-portrait. Since the *Confessions* is also his most directly autobiographical novel, its conspicuous success on this level seems to confirm what was implied earlier, that the psychology of Mishima's novels takes on reality as it approaches the author's own
psychology, and, conversely, tends to lose reality as it grows distant from him. In this sense, then, he is no different from a writer of shi-shôsetsu or "lyrical novels"; except that the philosophical thrust of his novels, their constant groping after general truth, confers on them a certain impersonality and objectivity of tone. In the Confessions, for instance, he approaches his "self-analysis" not so much with the gentle, sympathetic touch of a poet as with the ruthless efficiency of a man of science: his intent was, as he boasted to his editor, to "turn upon myself the scalpel of psychological analysis" in order to "dissect myself alive".

And "dissect" himself he certainly did. Few writers outside of the Marquis de Sade or, more recently, Jean Genêt have revealed their fantasy-lives with more devastating honesty. The "inner parts" which stand exposed are sometimes, like most inner parts, rather gruesome to look upon, including as they do scenes of homosexual sadism, autoerotic narcissism and even cannibalism. Since this was Mishima's début work in the post-war literary world—not his first novel but the novel which made his reputation—one suspects that he was out to shock his readers, a tried and true way for any ambitious young writer to draw attention to himself. If so, his strategy was brilliantly successful—the work made him famous literally overnight. But the Confessions is by no means a mere piece of sensationalism. The philosophic detachment of its narrative tone, and the "classical" restraint and beauty of its literary style, effectively counterbalance the coarse or shocking
nature of its subject-matter. Here already, at the outset of Mishima's career, we find an excellent example of an essential aspect of his art, the kind of equilibrium he liked to establish, as a play of creative tensions, between classical form and decadent-romantic content, Apollonian order and Dionysian chaos.

Though a critic such as Noguchi Takehiko tries to downplay the role of the narrator/protagonist's homosexuality, seeing it as merely a "metaphor" of his general alienation, comparable in this way to Mizoguchi's stuttering in The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, on the level of the novel's psychology the hero's homosexuality is obviously the central fact, from which everything else proceeds. To downplay this fact is to underestimate the author's achievement in writing a novel which functions as well on the psychological as on the philosophical level. The question of which came first--the psychology or the philosophy--is perhaps a "chicken and egg" question, but in this post-Freudian age perhaps most of us would opt for the psychology as primary, since its main components are formed long before the individual is intellectually competent enough to philosophize. On the other hand, in an intellectually mature person, as the woeful history of nihilism shows, the adoption of a certain philosophy can certainly have a profound effect on that person's psychological state. At any rate, in the case of the Confessions, the fact that the psychology and the philosophy are intimately related, regardless of which is primary, is made abundantly clear throughout.
The narrator/protagonist's depiction of himself as a narcissistic, sado-masochistic homosexual seems to conform quite closely to the Freudian model. Although no actual mention is made of Freud's theories, reference is made, as an aside in brackets, to the findings of Magnus Hirschfeld:

(It is an interesting coincidence for me that Hirschfeld singles out "pictures of St. Sebastian" among all works of art as the special favorite of homosexuals. It is easy to conjecture from this that in the overwhelming majority of homosexuals, especially congenital homosexuals, the homosexual and the sadistic urges are inextricably linked.) 37

Hirschfeld was a late nineteenth-century German sex pathologist who, along with Krafft-Ebing and a number of other German psychiatrists, devoted much research to the problem of homosexuality, perhaps because of its prevalence among the Prussian officer class. Freud, in turn, drew heavily on the data gathered by these earlier researchers in forming his own theories on the "sexual aberrations", as he himself acknowledged.38

But an important difference between Freud and Hirschfeld—or, at least, Hirschfeld as interpreted by Mishima—lies in the former's rejection of the idea of "congenital inversion". While not categorically denying the role played by physical constitution and heredity,39 Freud, of course, placed great emphasis on certain conditioning factors of early childhood which determine the individual's sexual "object choice". In regard to homosexuality, for instance, he observed that:

Although psychoanalysis has not yet given us a full explanation for the origin of inversion, it has revealed the psychic mechanism of its genesis and has
essentially enriched the problems in question. In all the cases examined we have ascertained that the later inverts go through in their childhood a phase of very intense but short-lived fixation on the woman (usually on the mother) and after overcoming it, they identify themselves with the woman and take themselves as the sexual object; that is, proceeding on a narcissistic basis, they look for young men resembling themselves in persons whom they wish to love as their mother has loved them.... They thus repeat through life the mechanism which gave origin to their inversion. 40

On the level of the novel's philosophical argument, as we have seen, the narrator of the Confessions prefers to transfer blame from his family to some larger force, nature or the entire cosmos, for his "tragic destiny"—and thus resorts to such ideas as "congenital inversion" and the "Augustinian theory of predetermination". No doubt he does so not only to spare his family but also to widen his argument, to give its philosophic nihilism more universal implications. But, at the same time, he does provide ample evidence for a narrower, more strictly Freudian interpretation. And a Freudian interpretation does not really change the gist of his central argument: that he is a blameless victim, that he was handed "the menu of the sum-total of my life-problems before I could even read it."41

Indeed, one might even claim that, without the advantage of a Freudian perspective, much of the material presented in the novel would be difficult to understand or even to accept. Freud's idea of infant sexuality,42 for instance, an idea which once aroused much indignant resistance, receives vivid confirmation in the Confessions: the narrator's first experience of homosexual arousal occurs when he is a mere four years old. The nature of his "object choice" in this instance is also
significant from a Freudian point of view: a night-soil man, a ladler of excrement. The narrator himself, again, prefers to find a larger, philosophic meaning here: "excrement is a symbol for the earth. And...I am sure that what called to me then was the malevolent love of the Earth Mother." But one may also discern a more specific psychological meaning: the attraction to excrement common among homosexuals fixated in what Freud calls the "anal-sadistic phase". And, more particularly, one might suspect that the model for the narrator's paradoxical idea of the "malevolent love" of an overpowering mother-figure was the jealous, over-protective love of his grandmother, a love that was "malevolent" in the lasting effects it had on his character.

If one looks in the narrator's early childhood for what Freud referred to as "the mechanism which gave origin to [his] inversion", one finds almost a classic, textbook case. The only unusual element is that here the primary object choice is not so much the mother as the grandmother, but one should note that in the above quotation Freud claims only that the fixation is "usually on the mother". Even though it is the grandmother in this case, the intensity of the relationship still cannot be doubted:

My parents lived upstairs. Giving the excuse that it was dangerous for a baby to be raised upstairs, grandmother took me from my mother's arms when I was forty-nine days old. My bed was lined up beside her sickbed, and I was raised in her sick-room, constantly closed up and stifling with the stench of sickness and old age.

The grandmother makes exclusive demands on the boy's affections, and she also overprotects him:
Worried about my weak constitution and also that I might learn bad things, grandmother forbade me to play with the local boys, so that my only playmates, besides the maids and nurses, were three girls she had chosen from among those of our neighborhood. 46

Thus, when he is taken to play with a girl cousin, who expects him to act like a boy, he already feels obliged to wear a "mask" of masculinity--to pretend, for instance, to enjoy war-games--and recognizes already that "it was exactly what people saw as my true self that was really playacting". 47

It is hardly surprising, then, that the boy, raised in this exclusively, oppressively feminine atmosphere, both identifies strongly with women--as revealed most conspicuously when he dresses up as the female performer Tenkatsu 48--and harbors a romantic longing for men--especially those "rough", low-class men who represent the opposite extreme to his grandmother's ideal of aristocratic gentility.

His abnormal intimacy with his grandmother continues until his twelfth year, when his father "finally reached the belated decision to claim me back into his own household". 49 When this happens, his grandmother acts for all the world like a jilted lover:

Grandmother embraced my photograph day and night, weeping profusely, and if I broke our agreement that I would stay with her one night a week, she would immediately throw a fit. At thirteen I had a sixty-year-old lover who loved me with a wild, inordinate passion. 50

The effeminacy, passivity and paranoia so inevitably produced in the protagonist by his bizarre childhood all come to the fore in the first great erotic experience of his life, when he "falls in love" with his virile older classmate, Omi. 51
But the ambiguity of his feelings about playing the passive, feminine role in relation to the older, stronger boy is evident from the start. There is a strong suggestion of "penis envy" in the way Omi is first presented: as a young man of superior potency, who is "a man of experience" (with girls) and whose "thing is so big!" In the scenes which follow great emphasis is placed on his feet and hands, and on his socks and gloves—all, as Freud pointed out, familiar phallic symbols. This series of phallic motifs is brought to a head in the climactic scene in which the protagonist fights with Omi for possession of a swinging log. The scene is charged with a high-tension sexuality, both because of the strongly phallic character of the log itself, which "swung back and forth rhythmically, with a battering-ram motion" and because of Omi's aggressive posture as he stands astride the log: "his posture made him look exactly like an assassin brought to bay". The protagonist's contradictory feelings as he mounts the log are partly sexual, in a masochistic/erotic way: a desire to yield himself to the mastery of the stronger boy, to be slain by this handsome "assassin"—indeed, as he confesses, "an impulse toward suicide". And, as Omi teasingly flutters his gloved fingers at him, this masochistic urge is amply satisfied: "In my eyes [his fingers] were the sharp points of a dangerous weapon about to pierce me through." But there is another side to the protagonist's motivation in daring to mount the log: a jealous desire to possess this symbol of phallic potency for himself, to himself become the
active, dominant male. This willful, power-hungry aspect of
his psychology also shows itself in his sadistic fantasies,
culminating in the imagined act of dining on his fellow class-
mate. What Freud has to say on the inextricable relation of
sadism and masochism—and even on the connection of the former
with cannibalism—seems entirely apropos here:

Sadism and masochism occupy a special place in the
perversions, for the contrast of activity and passivity
lying at their bases belongs to the common traits of
the sexual life.
That cruelty and the sexual instinct are most intimately
connected is beyond doubt taught by the history of civil-
ization, but in the explanation of this connection no
one has gone beyond the accentuation of the aggressive
factors of the libido. The aggression which is mixed
with the sexual instinct is, according to some authors,
a remnant of cannibalistic lust—that is, a partici-
paton of the domination apparatus....
The most striking peculiarity of this perversion lies
in the fact that its active and passive forms are re-
gularly encountered together in the same person. He
who experiences pleasure by causing pain to others in
sexual relations is also capable of experiencing pain
in sexual relations as pleasure. A sadist is simultan-
eously a masochist, though either the active or the
passive side of the perversion may be more strongly
developed in him and thus, represent his preponderant
sexual activity. 58

Surely we might discern, in the sadistic/masochistic, act-
ive/passive dialectic of Mishima's pathological sexuality, the
psychological coordinate, if not the psychological source, of
his lifelong obsession with the active/passive dialectic of
philosophic nihilism. His entire life and work may be seen in
terms of his struggle to overcome the passivity, effeminacy—
and fear—which were the natural heritage of his childhood.
By sheer force of will, the sickly, effeminate boy turned him-
self into a muscle-bound warrior who, on the last day of his
life, wielded his samurai sword to inflict wounds on some of the highest-ranking officers of the Japanese Self-Defense Force, before dying himself like a traditional hero, by seppuku. The victim had become the victimizer, the terrorized the terrorist—sadly, it seems that Mishima felt that he had to be either one or the other.

The active/passive dialectic may not seem so explicitly a part of the central philosophic argument of the Confessions as it is of the later novels, but actually the determinism which does form its central argument may be seen as another expression of the protagonist's passivity, enabling him to regard himself as a victim of fate. Viewed in this light, the novel culminates, as does The Sea of Fertility, in the triumph of passive nihilism, since the protagonist proves, in the end, incapable of overcoming his homosexuality—thus confirming, as we have seen, his nihilistic determinism.

Though the active/passive dialectic may function only implicitly on the philosophical level, on the psychological level it is quite explicit. After the protagonist succeeds in toppling Omi from the swinging log, there is a noticeable increase in the active, aggressive aspects of his behavior. When Omi helps him to his feet, dusts him off and then takes him by the arm, the protagonist looks up into his face "as if reproaching him for taking me by the arm". In this moment of rejection of Omi's amae, he has already begun to rebel against his role as the junior partner, the passive admirer. This willful impulse asserts itself in a more decisive way
shortly afterwards in the scene where the protagonist watches Omi perform some exercises on the horizontal bar. The sight of Omi's muscular body, and especially of the abundant growth of hair in his armpits—a sure sign of his superior masculinity!—arouses the protagonist's sexual desire, but also quite another emotion, "the opposite of joy", is "unexpectedly released" within him:

It was jealousy. A jealousy intense enough to make me give up my love for Omi. Probably the need for the Spartan self-training that arose in me from about this time was related to those circumstances. (My writing of this book is already one expression of this need.) Because of my weak constitution and the way I had been overprotected since infancy, I had become a child who was afraid to look people directly in the face, but from this time I became obsessed by a single motto: "You must become strong!" 61

And, somewhat absurdly, he begins to overcompensate for his shyness about looking people "directly in the face" by "glaring fixedly into the face of any passenger whatsoever on the trains in which I commuted back and forth to school".62

The hunger for power, then, takes precedence in the protagonist's psychology over the hunger for love. He is quite prepared to "renounce" his love for Omi so as to suppress the passive side of his own nature and himself take on an Omi-like power. As noted in the previous chapter, the protagonist of the Confessions, though a homosexual himself, takes a very negative view of homosexuality, and thus is able to regard himself as a victim of fate. The psychological motive of this self-contradictory attitude—which obviously generates much of his inner tension—emerges clearly in the dynamics of his rela-
tionship with Omi: what he rejects so fiercely about his homo-
sexuality is the passive and powerless position it places him in. This accounts for the rather odd fact that, though the novel largely concerns the protagonist's homosexuality, it does not actually depict any homosexual encounters between him and another male. In this sense, it is not a very active *vita sexualis*—even by the rather tame standards of Mori Ōgai. The closest the protagonist comes to real physical contact is his tussle with Omi on the swinging log—an encounter more symbolically than literally sexual. The closest he comes to real sexual activity is masturbation. He admires other men from a distance and enjoys masturbatory fantasies which involve those men, but he avoids actual contact with them because, given his shy disposition and his poor physique, this would inevitably place him in an inferior, passive and powerless position. In his fantasies, on the other hand, he is free to assume the position of dominance; he transforms himself in a moment from masochistic victim to sadistic torturer. Thus the overwhelming richness and power of his fantasy-life. Throughout the entire novel, indeed, his fantasy-life assumes a more convincing, more substantial reality than his "real" life—both for the reader and for the protagonist himself. Even in the very last scene, he forgets the existence of the girl beside him, Sonoko, as he fantasizes about a half-naked young tough. The whole episode of his real-life courting of Sonoko is, in fact, the weakest part of the novel. His heart is just not in it, and the writing inevitably reflects this lack of any real interest
or excitement. The truth is that the protagonist's heart is just not in any real relationship with other other people, whether male or female. Like many writers, he is essentially a solipsist: he wants to observe others from a safe distance, perhaps make use of them in his fantasies, write about them, but not to allow them to impinge on his intellectual detachment—which, for a writer, is an important source of power. The *Confessions* seems to imply that the ideal form of sexual activity for such a writer is the self-contained one of masturbation. Thus the sexual high-point of the novel, the only time when the protagonist experiences anything like sexual ecstasy, is when he masturbates on the seashore while narcissistically admiring his own body, which he identifies with the bodies of Omi and St. Sebastian.⁶³

From a Freudian perspective, it is significant in this connection also that the protagonist mentions his writing as part of his new "Spartan-style self-training".⁶⁴ The *Confessions* is, among other things, Mishima's "portrait of the artist as a young man" and, like Joyce's *Portrait*, it provides a clear example of how a writer sublimates his sexuality into his art. It is no coincidence that the protagonist's most powerful sadistic fantasies—of his "murder theatre" and of his cannibalistic feast—occur shortly after his "break-up" with Omi and his resolve to actively develop his own masculinity. What cannot be enjoyed in reality can be freely enjoyed in his imagination. Furthermore, since he is a writer, he is able to bestow a very real substance onto the products of his imagination—an accom-
plishment which gives him a sense of power over the world, and even wins for him an actual position of power in the world: since, for instance, a novel such as the *Confessions* will earn him the status of a famous writer. Adopting such a strategy, the artist satisfies, as Freud pointed out, both his taboo desires and his will-to-power:

The artist is originally a man who turns from reality because he cannot come to terms with the demand for the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction as it is first made, and who then in phantasy-life allows full play to his erotic and ambitious wishes. But he finds a way of return from this world of phantasy back to reality; with his special gifts, he moulds his phantasies into a new kind of reality, and men concede them a justification as valuable reflections of actual life. Thus by a certain path he actually becomes the hero, king, creator, favourite he desired to be, without the circuitous path of creating real alterations in the outer world. 65

We might note, though, that as Mishima aged he became dissatisfied with such vicarious literary satisfactions, which created no "real alterations in the outer world". Like the hero of *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, he longed to perform some action which would propel him from the inner world into the outer world, and thus alleviate his sense of unreality. He would become a real historical personage, an active force for social change, and not a mere purveyor of ineffectual fantasies. "For poetry makes nothing happen...." as W.H. Auden once wrote, 66 and Mishima, though coming from the opposite end of the political spectrum, felt this just as deeply. But the ambition to "make things happen" proved to be a dangerous one for a man who was, after all, an impractical dreamer, a man of the inner world, an artist. It resulted not in any real social
change, of course, but "merely" in another work of art—albeit a rather low caliber of theatrical farce.

Such grandiose ambitions, though, are still far from the mind of the protagonist of the *Confessions*. He is sufficiently preoccupied trying to come to terms with the violent seesawings of his psyche between the passive pole of masochistic experience and the active pole of sadistic fantasy. And his relationship with what Freud called the "reality principle" is still an uneasy one. The basic pattern of this relationship was already established early in his childhood when, as we remember, he was shocked to discover that Joan of Arc was actually female: he considered this "the first 'revenge by reality' I had encountered in my life, and it seemed a cruel one, especially on the sweet fantasies I had cherished about his death."*67* Already, then, reality is perceived as a malevolent force which continually threatens to undermine his psychological stability by destroying the structure of fantasy upon which it rests. The most violent of these "reality-shocks" comes at the very end of the novel when, as we have seen, the inner reality of his homosexuality suddenly shatters his masquerade of normalcy. Thus, although he is able to escape to some extent from his passive position in his relations with other men—by cutting himself off from them and by indulging in sadistic fantasies involving them—in his relations with reality in general he remains the passive victim. The novel's conclusion shows that, despite all his efforts to develop the more active side of his nature, he has been unable to expunge the root-cause of
his passivity: his homosexuality. Though in fantasy he may be a sadist or even a "normal" male, in reality passive, masochistic homosexuality remains, to use Freud's words quoted above, his "preponderant sexual activity".

Unable either to accept himself as he is or to become the kind of man he wants to be, the protagonist naturally takes to the wearing of masks. He is desperate to hide his "true self" not only from the world but from himself. The "true self" behind those masks thus becomes a force every bit as threatening as external reality: it might break through at any moment and subject him again to the role of passive victim. Just as, on a philosophic level, the nothingness of external reality is perceived in Mishima's novels not as a simple nothingness but as a threatening, malevolent force, so also, on a psychological level, with the void behind the mask. Thus, when the protagonist's "true self" reveals itself at the end of the Confessions, he perceives it only as a "terrible non-being", a kind of inner chaos which threatens his mental stability. Suddenly confronted by this frightening inner reality, he must struggle heroically, using all the controlling powers of his intellect, to keep it in check: "I closed my eyes and, in an instant, had gained a grip on my frozen sense of duty." In Freudian terms, he brings the superego ("duty") into play to control the errant power of the id.

Perhaps we may discover here the reason why Mishima ultimately abandoned psychology. In the Confessions he used a "scalpel", as he said, to dissect his own psyche, and what he
found was not particularly to his liking. It was as if he had opened up a Pandora's box of disturbances to his delicate mental stability—and, it seems, without any lasting therapeutic benefit. He would never again open that box so widely, and eventually, by the time of his final tetralogy, he would close it up completely. No doubt this helped him to maintain his masculine "masquerade", which grew more exaggeratedly "virile" as the years went by, but it also meant that he would never again write another novel which possessed the psychological depth and power of the *Confessions*.

B. Mishima's Active/Passive Psychology in a Japanese Context

However "Western" Mishima and his fictional alter egos may be on an intellectual level—in terms of their nihilist philosophy, for instance—on an emotional and psychological level, of course, they remain quintessentially Japanese. As we have seen, this does not mean that there are no universal elements in their psychology—elements subject to Freudian interpretation, for instance—but it does mean that their psychologies may be better understood when the specifically Japanese context, with its particular emphases on some psychological elements more than on others, is taken into account.

The view of life as a contest of active and passive, male and female, yin/yang principles is, of course, a very ancient Chinese/Japanese mode of thought, dating back at least to the *Book of Changes* (*I ching*, circa early first millennium B.C. in its first form). The idea of an active/passive psychological
dialectic is entirely consonant with this tradition. Mishima's attempt to extirpate the passive aspect of his nature is understandable, of course, as an overcompensation for the excessive passivity induced in him by his childhood. But, had he consulted this ancient traditional wisdom, he might have learned that it would also be a mistake to go too far in the opposite direction; that psychological health depends on the proper balance of the active and passive, male and female principles, and that any attempt to completely suppress one side or the other would inevitably result in psychological distortions.

Indeed, East Asian culture has always emphasized, if anything, the value of passivity, associating it with the highest forms of spirituality. One may see this, for instance, in the Taoist ideal of "non-action" (wu-wei, mui), and in the Buddhist practise of sitting meditation (zazen), especially in Dōgen Zenji's more passive form of "just sitting" (shikan-taza). In consciously adopting such a passive state of mind, the meditator grows increasingly familiar with his "true self". Or, as D.T. Suzuki and Erich Fromm have pointed out in their *Zen Buddhism and Psychoanalysis*, this may also be interpreted in modern psychological terms: by assuming a passive attitude the meditator allows the contents of his unconscious to become conscious—which is also the therapeutic goal of psychoanalysis. But Mishima, as we have seen, had a great fear of the unconscious, as well as an intense loathing for all forms of passivity. This no doubt explains why he became increasingly anti-spiritual—or anti-psychological—as he aged. In his final work, as
we shall see, passivity is regarded as the source of all evil; the passive characters, Honda and Tôru, become thoroughly corrupt. Action, on the other hand, is idealized; even if it is ultimately meaningless, it enhances a man like Isao's moral stature. On a symbolic level, the Mishima hero's fear of water and attraction towards fire (as in The Temple of the Golden Pavilion) may also be understood in yin/yang terms: water is a traditional symbol of the passive principle and fire of the active principle. The following account of the creation of the universe, for instance, comes from the Huainan Tzu (second century B.C.), but was also used as a preface to the Nihon shoki (720), one of the first works on Japanese history:

After a long time the hot force of the accumulated yang produced fire and the essence of the fire force became the sun; the cold force of the accumulated yin became water and the essence of the water force became the moon. 71

It is significant, too, that in the ideal "training camp for writers" which Mishima once imagined, elaborate provisions would be made for the writer's physical and intellectual training, but none at all for his spiritual training--there would be no zazen or any of the other spiritual disciplines advocated in East or West. 72 In his own life Mishima devoted much effort to the cultivation of his body and his intellect, but he neglected his psyche. As a result, he presented the odd spectacle of a man who possessed a splendid physique and a highly sophisticated intellect but who, on the psychological and spiritual levels, was pitifully immature. Physical strength,
after all, does not equal overall well-being—nor does knowledge equal wisdom. In the end, of course, he paid a high price for his immaturity, in terms not only of his life but also of his work. What the great novelists of the past communicated to their characters was not merely some "authentic" psychological details, whether culled from their own psyche or from elsewhere; what they communicated above all was their own fullness of being, a quality which may be defined perhaps only by its presence or absence, but which is indispensible for the creation of full-blooded, life-like characters. Psychological verisimilitude alone is not enough. One may see this clearly in the Confessions: many of the details of the protagonist's psychology are absolutely convincing, but still he remains a fragmentary figure, real in his fantasies, but insubstantial when he steps out into reality—to court Sonoko, for instance. What Mishima could communicate even to this character, his own alter ego, was a sense not of fullness of being but of inner emptiness, of "fearful non-being". In this, of course, he was not alone. As Baruch Hochman points out in the passage quoted earlier, the crisis in "character" in the modern novel is but a symptom of the general spiritual crisis in modern world civilization.

Though the traditional yin/yang cosmology is of obvious general relevance to Mishima's active/passive psychological dialectic, it may also be better understood when viewed within the more specifically psychological context of the "structure of amae", the adhesive force which holds Japanese society
so tightly together. *Amae* is dependent, passive love, the kind of love which, as Doi Takeo points out, Freud associated with homosexuality. Doi himself argues that, though *amae* is not confined to homosexual relations, "the essence of homosexual feelings is *amae*", since the homosexual is continually striving to recapture the relationship of passive love he enjoyed with his mother. This is exactly why, of course, the Mishima hero struggles against his own homosexuality, his own need for *amae*—and angrily rejects, for instance, Omi's offer of *amae*. By doing so he hopes to develop a *jibun*, an independent self, for, as Doi points out, "a man who has a *jibun* is capable of checking *amae*, while a man who is at the mercy of *amae* has no *jibun*".

But other aspects of the Mishima hero's psychology indicate clearly that he has not really outgrown his need for *amae*, and that his rejection of *amae*, his attempt to develop an independent self, costs him dearly in psychological terms. His sadistic urges, for instance, may be seen as a typical symptom of a frustrated desire for *amae*—and even, too, his cannibalistic urges. Doi points to the various Japanese verbs according to which one man is said to eat (*kuu*), drink (*nomu*) or lick (*nameru*) another man as an expression of "various assumed attitudes of superiority or contempt in dealing with the other person":

Japanese is not, of course, the only language that uses verbs originally connected with food in reference to human relationships, but what is interesting in the case of Japanese is that they all imply a lack of *amae*. The man who "eats", "drinks", or "licks" others seems active and confident on the surface, but inside he is alone and helpless. He has not really transcended *amae*; rather, he behaves as he does in order to cover up a lack of *amae*. For example, a speaker who "swallows" his audience is a man who would otherwise tend to be "swallowed" by it instead, and assumes an overbearing attitude in order to
avoid this happening. It is the same with "eating" people, (in the case of "eat or be eaten" in particular, the struggle becomes a matter of life or death). 76

It is clear from this, then, that the Mishima protagonist's sadistic and cannibalistic fantasies are an expression both of a frustrated desire for *amae* and of the resultant paranoid will-to-power. The need to subjugate others arises, of course, from the fear of others, and, as Doi points out, this fear of others (*taijin kyôfu*) is another salient characteristic of the *amae*-frustrated mentality.77 The child who is over-dependent on his mother's *amae* fears strangers because he knows they will not treat him with the same indulgence. This "stranger anxiety" (*hitomishiri*) was instilled in the Mishima protagonist, as we have seen, by his over-protective grandmother, so it is hardly surprising that, in later life, he shys away from real contact with other people.

What Doi has to say on the *amae*-frustrated person's sense of being the injured party, his "victim mentality" (*higaisha ishiki*), is even more obviously applicable to the psychology of the *Confessions* protagonist.78 The whole purpose of his central argument, as we have seen, is to present himself as a victim of fate—even to the extent of identifying himself with the Christian martyr, Saint Sebastian. In this respect the *Confessions* itself may be regarded as an appeal for the reader's *amae*—in the same way as are most shi-shôsetsu—and, though we are touching here on the delicate issue of reader psychology, this may account for the novel's tremendous popularity in Japan.
The protagonist's determinism, in fact, more or less guarantees that he will never outgrow his need for *amae*, however much he resents it. As Doi points out, Western individualism was based on the "myth" of free will, and now that this myth seems to have been undermined by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud—in other words, by nihilist determinism—even modern Western man has begun to see himself as the passive victim of fate, and thus to express a greater need for *amae.*

Thus the Mishima hero's nihilism too—at least in its passive form—frustrates his attempt to outgrow the psychology of *amae*. He is caught between his desire for freedom on the one hand and his disbelief in freedom on the other—his view of human beings, for instance, as mere "puppets". But Doi also points to the traditional way out of this cul-de-sac, as allowed for by the system of *amae*: "For the Japanese, freedom in practise existed only in death, which was why praise of death and incitements towards death could occur so often." Needless to say, Mishima's heroes always feel strongly attracted to this "way out" and many of them actually take it—as did, ultimately, Mishima himself.

C. The Aesthetics of Fear

If there is one emotion which dominates the *Confessions* more than any other, it is the primal emotion of fear. Noguchi Takehiko has described the *Confessions* as Mishima's "confession of terror", a terror caused by his sense of alienation
It seems to me, though, that a more fundamental terror "confessed" by the novel is the terror caused by the protagonist's own self-alienation. What fear in a human being could be more fundamental than the fear of oneself? The "Mishima psychology", at least as expressed in his novels, is pervaded by all kinds of fear: fear of the sea, fear of the gods, fear of other people, fear of the life-force—and so on almost ad infinitum—but what the Confessions clearly shows is that all of these fears originate in a fear of the self—or, in Freudian terms, a fear of the unconscious. The whole novel, as we have seen, is structured around the protagonist's recognition of his own inability to escape from his in-born psychology as a passive homosexual, and the fear and resentment which this realization arouses colors his perception of everything else, even of the very nature of reality. Since he cannot escape his own psychology but only, as it were, "hide" it behind a mask, life becomes a frightening, precarious contest between reality and illusion, with his psychological well-being depending on the maintenance of illusion. Since reality is thus perceived as a kind of illusion-smashing hammer, naturally he fears it in all its manifestations, whether internal or external. But the objective fears can really be understood only in relation to the subjective fears: for instance, the fear of the sea, a constant motif in Mishima's novels, and which occurs most conspicuously in the Confessions in the seashore masturbation scene, may seem a meaningless, irrational fear unless regarded in its true light: as an "objective correlative" of
his fear of the unconscious.

In his famous essay on "Art and Neurosis", Lionel Trilling argues against those critics such as Edmund Wilson who "find the root of the artist's power and the source of his genius in neurosis". Trilling's arguments no doubt are just: whatever the mysterious source of creativity may be, it is obviously something more than, if not something entirely distinct from, neurosis, since not all neurotics are creative artists. Nevertheless, even Trilling is obliged to admit that "the expression of a neurotic or psychotic conception of reality is likely to be more intense than a normal one". It is exactly such intensity which is the aesthetic product of the mood of fear which pervades the Confessions, and which accounts for the power and originality of its imagery. Without this intensity the novel would lose its high literary value; it would be reduced to the level of a mere documentary "case history" or a dry philosophical argument in favor of nihilist determinism. A novel, after all, cannot live by argument alone; it needs an emotional as well as an intellectual component. In the Confessions, it is mainly fear which plays this role: it is the natural and necessary emotional concomitant of the determinist nihilist philosophy.

Perhaps the most conspicuously original aesthetic effect produced by this "mood of fear" is the anti-lyrical tone of the novel's treatment of nature. The phenomenon of anti-lyricism is not unknown, of course, among modernist Western writers— one thinks, for instance, of T.S. Eliot's famous line in his
ironically entitled, "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": "...the evening is spread out against the sky/Like a patient etherized upon a table". But nature lyricism is the very soul of traditional Japanese literature. In the traditional Japanese literary mind nature occupies a position almost as sacred as that of God in the traditional Western literary mind--and, like the Western God, it is viewed as a source of salvation. Thus the Mishima protagonist's view of nature as a frightening, malevolent force seems particularly startling and original in a Japanese context.

Such natural features as snow, cherry blossoms and the sea, for instance, could always be counted on to evoke positive lyrical emotions in the traditional Japanese writer, but in the Mishima protagonist the feelings they arouse are entirely negative. As he looks down on snow-covered Tokyo from an elevated train, to him the snow seems "like a filthy bandage hiding the wounds of the urban scene". Or, as he watches the sea just prior to masturbating before it, he has a brilliant, albeit paranoid, perception of an "attacking" wave as a self-decapitating guillotine:

Soon something awoke and rose up within [the wave's] green hood. The wave rose up after that, and revealed the whole of the sharp blade of the huge ax of the sea, about to strike the beach. This dark-blue guillotine fell, sending up a spray of white blood. Then, for a moment, the back of the wave, seething and falling, pursued its own decapitated head, meanwhile reflecting the unearthly blue of the sky, a pure blue such as is reflected in the eyes of a man about to die. 87

This is the literary equivalent of the controlled hysteria one feels in the music of, say, Tchaikovsky and Mahler--and it
is equally as beautiful. Mishima, of course, was not the first artist to sense the intimacy of the relation between beauty and terror, or, on a somewhat different level, between eroticism and death. He shares these insights with, for instance, the nineteenth-century European "decadent romantics"—exactly those artists castigated by Nietzsche as "passive nihilists" who expressed the death-wish of an aging civilization. Nietzsche's favorite target was, of course, Richard Wagner, whose music-dramas were full of scenes of Liebestod which, to Nietzsche, were the very epitome of the decadent passive nihilist desire to escape from the tensions of life into a blissful nothingness. Similarly, in Mishima's works one may find ample evidence that the tendency of his protagonists towards passive nihilism is grounded in a basic fear of life. And not only is their nihilism so intimately connected with this fear, but also their sense of beauty; their aesthetic motto might well have been taken from Rilke:

...For beauty is only the beginning of a terror we can just barely endure, and what we so adore is its calm disdaining to destroy us. Every Angel brings terror.

There are moments in the Confessions, though, when the protagonist's cosmic paranoia seems to threaten to overwhelm his sense of beauty. Perhaps the most shocking to a Japanese sensibility is his reaction to the bloom of cherry-blossoms in the last springtime of the war. As in The Sea of Fertility so often—beginning with the irony of its title—the very prodigality of nature is perceived as a threatening, invasive and even
malevolent power:

Nature's free bounty and wasteful extravagance had never seemed so bewitchingly beautiful as this spring. I had the unpleasant suspicion that nature had come to reconquer the earth. For the brilliance of this spring was not a common thing. The yellow of the rape blossoms, the green of the new grass, the glowing black of the cherry-tree trunks, the canopy of heavy blossoms which weighed the branches down, somehow all of these were reflected in my eyes as the brilliance of colours charged with malevolence (akui). It was, so to speak, a bonfire of colours.

Admittedly this is a war-time vision, but if we compare the Mishima protagonist's reaction to nature's fertility, unconquerable even in war-time, with that of Ibuse Masuji's narrator in *Black Rain* (*Kuroi ame*, 1966), who gratefully welcomes the reappearance of nature's power even after the devastation of Hiroshima, then we realize that the Mishima protagonist's paranoia is by no means necessitated by the war-time situation.

The fear which colours the protagonist's perceptions of nature also, of course, distorts—and intensifies—his vision of practically everything else. What any "normal" person would regard as the innocent high spirits of young men participating in a Shinto summer festival, for instance, he regards, as we have seen, as "the most licentious and undisguised intoxication in the world", the sight of which "both startled and distressed me, filling my heart with infinite suffering." Similarly, whereas most people would welcome a return to peace-time normalcy after a war is over, the protagonist perceives something sinister and threatening even in this:

For me, and for me alone, what this meant was that frightening days were beginning. It meant that the "everyday life" of human beings—the very mention of
which made me shudder, and which, also, I had always been fooled into believing would never come—already that "everyday life" would begin tomorrow for me, too, whether I liked it or not. 93

The protagonist/narrator's paranoid psychology thus may be said to have a definite aesthetic effect: it makes for both emotional intensity and a vivid, original imagery. And, in a less direct way, the irony which pervades the narrative tone may also be regarded as its product. Irony, after all, protects the mind from being overwhelmed by fear: it is a "distancing" device, and thus affords the sufferer some sense of detachment from his suffering, some momentary freedom from his sense of being trapped by fate. (Is this not why the world's greatest ironists, writers such as Swift and Hasek, have appeared among peoples such as the Irish and the Czechs, who have suffered so much from oppression by their larger neighbors?) In the passage quoted above, for instance, at the same time that one feels the narrator's very real fear, one also feels his enjoyment of the delicious irony of the fact that he, and he alone (as he emphasizes), welcomes war and fears peace. There are, in fact, many such occasions throughout the novel when one senses that he not only fears his own paradoxical nature, but also revels in it: as with Oscar Wilde—who was, by no coincidence, one of Mishima's favorite authors—his delight in his own contradictoriness, a contradictoriness which seems inherent in the homosexual psyche, is exactly what makes him such a supreme ironist, and such a fine coiner of aphorisms.
III. The Nihilist's Will to Power: the Psychology of The Temple of the Golden Pavilion

Though The Temple of the Golden Pavilion is probably Mishima's most successful novel as a whole—as is the general critical opinion—strictly in terms of its psychology it may seem to fall short of Confessions of a Mask. The fantasy-life of its hero, Mizoguchi, is not nearly so vivid or of such absorbing interest as that of the Confessions' protagonist: it consists mostly of semi-philosophical musings on the strange, oppressive power of the golden pavilion's beauty. And, as Miyoshi Masao has pointed out, the novel lacks a certain kind of psychological realism or verisimilitude, in that, for instance, no account is given of how such a humble country monk could have developed a philosophical intellect and an aesthetic sensibility of such rare sophistication. This psychological "vagueness" or abstraction must be attributed to the fact that the protagonist/character is not a literal portrait of Mishima himself, still less of the actual arsonist, but something in between, a fictionalized alter ego of the author. Had Mishima intended to present a documentary-style psychological portrait of the real arsonist, no doubt he would have supplied more concrete "background information", and also assigned to the monk the kind of mediocre intelligence he undoubtedly possessed. The novel might then have gained in "psychological realism", but just as surely it would have lost in philosophical brilliance. On the other hand, if Mishima had
presented the protagonist as a literal self-portrait, no doubt he would have supplied more detailed and convincing background information, as in the Confessions, and also readers would have accepted the protagonist's intellectual brilliance more readily. But this, of course, was impossible, since it was Hayashi, not Mishima, who had actually burned down the pavilion.

A lack of psychological verisimilitude, though, does not necessarily imply a lack of psychological truth. Such truth must exist not at the periphery of a novel's concerns but at the core of the central problem it addresses. In The Temple of the Golden Pavilion the central psychological problem revolves around a question of motivation: why would a Zen monk destroy a cultural treasure which belonged to his own temple? By transposing his own active/passive psychic conflicts onto this monk, Mishima managed to answer this question with a convincing psychological veracity.

The active/passive psychological dialectic, indeed, is more clearly and dramatically presented in Mizoguchi than in the Confessions protagonist. The polar oppositions in his psyche are more extreme: he is more neurotically introverted but, at the same time, more capable of exploding into real destructive action. In this sense, indeed, he is Mishima's most interesting male character: his most "well-rounded", multi-dimensional creation, neither completely passive like the Confessions' protagonist or Honda, nor completely active like Isao or some of the other "martial" heroes the later
Mishima was so fond of depicting. By the same token, Mizoguchi also proves capable of psychological development, evolving throughout the novel from a passive to an active state of mind—and this too is unprecedented in a Mishima hero.

Because Mizoguchi's fantasy-life is not emphasized as much as that of the Confessions' protagonist, the novel may seem to deal more with what Freud calls "ego psychology" than with the psychology of the unconscious—that is, for instance, with the strategies consciously adopted by Mizoguchi to protect and assert his ego in the world. Similarly, the source of his inner conflicts is not so obviously his struggle against a wayward libido—which, for Freud, is the sine qua non of all genuine neurosis. Though he has trouble relating to women, and though he suffers from an excessively passive disposition, still he is not explicitly presented as a homosexual. Freud used the term "ego psychology" to disparage the "individual psychology" of his breakaway disciple, Alfred Adler, and, indeed, it is Adler's psychology which does seem to apply most appropriately to Mizoguchi—and to Mishima himself.

The active/passive psychological dialectic plays an even more central role in Adler's psychology than in Freud's. And this is hardly surprising, since Adler's psychology is even closer than Freud's to Nietzsche's: he agreed with Nietzsche that the "will to power" is the basic driving force of human psychology—not, as with Freud, the sex-drive or libido. From this Adler developed a psychological system of "inferiority-superiority dynamics" which is the modern psychological
expression **par excellence** of Nietzsche's philosophy of passive and active nihilism. Given these "nihilist roots" of Adler's psychology, then, it is no coincidence that it seems entirely apropos to Mishima and his protagonists.

For Adler the source of neurotic conflict, then, is not thwarted sexuality but frustrated will to power. But he also views this in conventional masculine/feminine terms, as defined by society: "the apparent double-life of the neurotic ('double vie', 'dissociation', 'split-personality', of many authors), is definitely grounded in the fact that the psyche partakes of both feminine and masculine traits". Though these "traits" are masculine and feminine only as arbitrarily determined by social convention, still the child who feels himself burdened by an excess of "feminine traits" may consequently overcompensate with an exaggerated "masculine protest":

The deep-rooted feeling that permeates the folk-soul and which has always awakened the interest of poets and thinkers, that evaluation and symbolizing of types of phenomena as "masculine" and "feminine", although seemingly arbitrary and yet coinciding with our social life, impresses itself early upon the infant mind. Thus the child, with occasional variations, regards the following as masculine: strength, greatness, riches, knowledge, victory, coarseness, cruelty, violence and activity as such, their opposites being feminine. The normal craving of the child for nestling, the exaggerated submissiveness of the neurotically-disposed individual, the feeling of weakness, of inferiority protected by hyper-sensitiveness, the realization of actual futility, the sense of being permanently pushed aside and of being at a disadvantage, all these are gathered together into a feeling of femininity. On the contrary, active strivings, both in the case of a girl as of a boy, the pursuit of self-gratification, the stirring up of instincts and passions are thrown challengingly forward as a masculine protest. On the basis of a false evaluation, but one which is extensively nourished by our social life, there thus develops
a psychical hermaphroditism of the child, "logically" dependent upon its inward opposition. From within itself is then unfolded that frequently unconscious urge toward a reinforced masculine protest which is to represent the solution for the disharmony. 98

Needless to say, Mishima's entire life may be seen as an ever more exaggerated "masculine protest" against his "feminization" in childhood. And it is hardly surprising that his works also give expression to this "protest"—The Temple of the Golden Pavilion more powerfully than any other.

Though Mizoguchi is not overtly homosexual, he certainly possesses enough of the "feminine traits" referred to by Adler to burden him with an enormous inferiority complex. As he himself admits:

I was physically weak and was always defeated by others at running or on the horizontal bar; in addition, I was a congenital stutterer, and this made me all the more introverted. 99

As Noguchi Takehiko has pointed out, Mizoguchi's stutter functions in much the same way as the Confessions' protagonist's homosexuality: it alienates him from the world of "normal" people. 100 With a stutter, of course, this is even more literally the case, since it impedes the flow of language, the main medium of interpersonal communication. Adler, in fact, mentions stuttering as one of the defects typical of the neurotic in childhood, and because of which he was "frequently subjected to humiliation, or made the object of ridicule, for which he was often punished and which rendered him socially unfit". 101 This was exactly the case with Mizoguchi: "Some of the naughtier children would mock me by imitating a stuttering priest as he
stutteringly read the sutras.\textsuperscript{102}

Added to Mizoguchi's feelings of weakness, then, is a feeling of social ostracism—or what Adler describes, in the above passage, as a "sense of being permanently pushed aside".\textsuperscript{103} Indeed, Mizoguchi is quite literally "pushed aside" after his pathetic attempt to make contact with Uiko—part of whose name, significantly, means "activity" (\textit{ui} 有) as opposed to "inactivity" (\textit{mui} 無), an antithesis made frequent use of in Zen Buddhist philosophy: "She cycled round me, as though she were dodging a stone."\textsuperscript{104} Thus Mizoguchi's rejection by Uiko symbolizes his rejection by the world of activity, "\textit{ui}", in general, and his failure to break out of the subjective realm of inactivity, "\textit{mui}".

Interestingly enough, Adler also mentions "the realization of actual futility" as one of the feelings which are "gathered together into a feeling of femininity".\textsuperscript{105} This, of course, is the mood of passive nihilism, the prime obstacle to any kind of action, and, as we saw in the first chapter, it is the mood which Mizoguchi must struggle against throughout the whole novel, and which, right to the end, almost forestalls his transformation into a man of action.

The other side of Adler's "inferiority/superiority dynamics" is the neurotic's compensatory aggressiveness in fact or fantasy: "This feeling of inferiority is the cause of his continual restlessness as a child, his craving for action, his playing of rôles, the pitting of his strength against that of others, his
anticipatory pictures of the future and his physical as well as mental preparations.\textsuperscript{106} [emphasis mine] Mizoguchi's "masculine protest" begins early: when a young hero visits his school, an officer cadet from a naval engineering school, and is surrounded by younger admirers, Mizoguchi cannot contain his jealousy. He becomes obsessed with the short sword which dangles from the cadet's waist—a traditional symbol of male potency—and he covets it for himself, with a suggestion of the same kind of "penis envy" which the Confessions' protagonist feels towards Omi:

\begin{quote}
I wanted my pride to be something visible so that, no matter who looked at it, they would know it was mine. For instance, the short-sword which hung from his waist was exactly such a thing. This short-sword, which all the students were admiring, was really a beautiful ornament.\textsuperscript{107} Scorned by the handsome hero as a stutterer, and as a future Buddhist priest rather than a warrior—a man with the passive role in wartime of burying a hero such as himself, who expects to die soon for his country—Mizoguchi takes revenge by defacing the "beautiful black scabbard" of the cadet's sword. This, of course, is a pattern of behavior which he will repeat later, but on a much larger scale: since he is not "man" enough to possess the object of beauty, he proves that he is "man" enough to destroy it. (Note that with the golden pavilion too, he destroys it only after the Superior has decided not to accept him as his successor, thus frustrating his desire to "possess" the pavilion in a more positive way.)
\end{quote}

No doubt the same psychic mechanism also accounts for the strange "joy" Mizoguchi feels in performing his most sadistic
act of the novel: trampling with his boots on the stomach of a pregnant prostitute. In its initial impetus the act is passive, since it is done in submission to the command of an American soldier. Thus Mizoguchi's initial "sense of disharmony". But once he begins to perform the act, he realizes that it is quite in harmony with his own will—and, indeed, satisfies some deep need within him. Having been rejected by Uiko, the woman he most desired, he is now able to assert his dominion over women in general by an act of aggression—and, to his delight, he finds that the woman's body passively "responds" to his "masculine" action:

The sense of disharmony I felt the first time I stepped on her changed, the second time, into a bubbling joy. I thought to myself: this is a woman's stomach, this is her breast. I had never imagined that another person's flesh could respond with such elasticity, like a ball. 108

The author himself is perfectly aware of the two poles of this active/passive dynamic, and his penetrating insight into the way they function is well revealed in the following passage:

A youth such as I, as may easily be imagined, came to embrace two antithetical forms of the will-to-power. I loved descriptions of tyrants in history. If I were a stuttering, close-mouthed tyrant, my vassals would anxiously watch my every expression, and would live in constant fear of me. There would be no need to justify my cruelty in clear, smooth words. My taciturnity alone would justify every kind of cruelty. I enjoyed imagining, on the one hand, how I would punish, one after the other, those teachers and fellow students who always treated me with contempt; and, on the other hand, how I would become a great artist, a monarch of the inner realm, possessed of a quiet, clear vision. My outer appearance was poor but, in this sense, my inner world was richer than anyone else's. Was it not natural that a boy like me, who laboured under some kind of ineradicable drawback, should think of himself as a secretly chosen one? Somewhere in this world,
I felt, a mission awaited me—though I myself still did not know what it was. 109

Mizoguchi's messianic—or megalomaniac—sense of his "mission" corresponds to what Adler calls the neurotic's "imagined goal, an attempt at a planned final compensation" for his feelings of inferiority. 110 In Mizoguchi's case the ultimate form this takes is the burning of the pavilion but, from a psychological point of view, the precise form of the "final compensation" is irrelevant:

Whether a person desires to be an artist, the first in his profession, or a tyrant in his home, to hold converse with God or humiliate other people; whether he regards his suffering as the most important thing in the world to which everyone must show obeisance, whether he is chasing after unattainable ideals or old deities, over-stepping all limits and norms, at every part of his way he is guided and spurred on by his longing for superiority, the thought of his godlikeness, the belief in his special magical power. In his love he desires to experience his power over his partner. In his purely optional choice of profession the goal floating before his mind manifests itself in all sorts of exaggerated anticipations and fears, and thirsting for revenge, he experiences in suicide a triumph over all obstacles. In order to gain control over an object or over a person, he is capable of proceeding along a straight line, bravely, proudly, overbearing, obstinate, cruel; or he may on the other hand prefer, forced by experience, to resort to by-paths and circuitous routes, to gain his victory by obedience, submission, mildness and modesty. 111

Awkward and ineffectual in his relations with people, the stuttering introvert Mizoguchi naturally seeks rather to "gain control over an object"—not just any object, of course, but one of the most highly prized objet d'art in the whole of Japan. He can make it his own and assert his power over it only by destroying it—and by doing so he achieves the most spectacular "masculine protest" of any of Mishima's heroes. His action is
thus "justified" as much by his neurotic psychology as by his nihilist philosophy; and, indeed, the demands of both are satisfied by the final conflagration.

By referring to Adler's "ego psychology", then, we may corroborate the fact that Mishima has sketched, in Mizoguchi, a psychological portrait of remarkable depth and reality, convincing in all its details—and which, most importantly, maintains its consistency even while undergoing dynamic development. It is a character worthy of Dostoevsky, for, despite great inner tensions and contradictions, it never loses that "integrated unity" which, according to Adler, accounts for the "tremendous effect exerted upon us by Dostoevsky's personages". And Mishima accomplishes this by skillful manipulation of an active/passive psychological dialectic transposed, it seems, from the core of his own psyche.

IV. The Nihilist's Vacant Self: the Anti-Psychology of the Sea of Fertility Tetralogy

In Towards a Genealogy of Morals (Zur Genealogie der Moral, 1887), Nietzsche discusses what he considers to have been the origin of "bad conscience":

I take bad conscience to be a deep-seated malady to which man succumbed under the pressure of the most profound transformation he ever underwent—the one that made him one and for all a sociable and pacific creature. Just as happened in the case of those sea creatures who were forced to become land animals in order to survive, these semi-animals, happily adapted to the wilderness, to war, free roaming, and adventure, were forced to change their nature. Of a sudden they found all their instincts devalued, unhinged.... All instincts that are not allowed free play turn inward.
This is what I call man's interiorization; it alone provides the soil for the growth of what is later called man's soul. Man's interior world, originally meager and tenuous, was expanding in every dimension, in proportion as the outward discharge of his feelings was curtailed. The formidable bulwarks by means of which the polity protected itself against the ancient instincts of freedom (punishment was one of the strongest of these bulwarks) caused those wild, extravagant instincts to turn in upon man. Hostility, cruelty, the delight in persecution, raids, excitement, destruction all turned against their begetter. Lacking external enemies and resistances, and confined within an oppressive narrowness and regularity, man began rending, persecuting, terrifying himself, like a wild beast hurling itself against the bars of its cage. This languisher, devoured by nostalgia for the desert, who had to turn himself into an adventure, a torture chamber, an insecure and dangerous wilderness—this fool, this pining and desperate prisoner, became the inventor of "bad conscience".113

The gist of this magnificent piece of rhetoric, then, is that all psychological conflict is a result of the suppression of man's natural aggressive instincts by "civilization"; if the human being's instincts are not allowed a healthy outlet, they will turn inwards, with disastrous psychological consequences. This is an idea which, of course, was taken up again by many later psychologists. But, whereas a later psychologist such as Freud advocated the cultivation of a "superego" to keep the instincts in check, or Adler the cultivation of a sense of "social interest", Nietzsche himself seemed to feel a strong "nostalgia for the desert", and, in Beyond Good and Evil (Jenseits von Gut und Böse, 1886) he advocates an "aristocratic" or "master" morality which would allow "self-glorification" and free expression of the will to power.114 And, against the "loathsome sight of perversion, dwarfishness, degeneracy" presented by modern man, whose "savage instincts" have been "domesticated", he opposes an image of those fearsome but admirable
"noble races" who gave full vent to their aggressive instincts --and among whom he includes, no doubt to Mishima's satisfaction, the "Japanese nobility":

Once abroad in the wilderness, they revel in the freedom from social constraint and compensate for their long confinement in the quietude of their own community. They revert to the innocence of wild animals: we can imagine them returning from an orgy of murder, arson, rape, and torture, jubilant and at peace with themselves as though they had committed a fraternity prank--convinced, moreover, that the poets for a long time to come will have something to sing about and to praise. Deep within all these noble races there lurks the beast of prey, bent on spoil and conquest. This hidden urge has to be satisfied from time to time, the beast let loose in the wilderness. This goes as well for the Roman, Arabian, German, Japanese nobility as for the Homeric heroes and the Scandinavian vikings. 115

Nietzsche's opposition to "bad conscience", and his idealization of the "blond beast", formed, of course, the basis of his advocacy of "active nihilism", which he conceived as an essentially life-affirming philosophy, in contrast to the life-denial of "passive nihilism". 116 The moral and political implications of this view I shall consider later; what I am concerned with here are the strictly psychological implications. In brief, what Nietzsche seems to be saying is that psychological depth, the "soul", or what he calls "man's interior world", is almost entirely the fabrication of a "civilized", "decadent" society, and that the pure "man of action" produced by stronger, freer peoples feels no need for this kind of subjectivity. Thus "psychology" itself--both the science and the phenomena it studies--is a symptom of the disease of civilization, an evil by-product of peace and passivity; only war and activity have the power to "cure" us of psychology.
Whether or not Nietzsche's ideas tell us anything about psychology in general, certainly they do tell us much about his own psychology. While this is not the place for an in-depth psychological portrait of this complex and tragic man who, as if in ironic comment on his own doctrine of "self-glorification", ended up a raving megalomaniac, nevertheless it is an interesting--and perhaps significant--fact that the psychology of the "father" of modern nihilism shares many features with the psychology of a latter-day nihilist on the other side of the earth--Mishima himself. When Adler coined the term "masculine protest", he might well have been thinking of the man who taught him so much about the "will to power", Friedrich Nietzsche. Like the young Mishima, the young Nietzsche was an extreme variety of the "sensitive plant". He lost his father at an early age, so that, like Mishima, he was raised as an over-protected "mother's boy". It was Nietzsche's mother, in fact, who nursed him for years after his final mental breakdown. Nietzsche was also severely "feminized" in other senses of the word as used by Adler: he was slight in stature, weak in constitution, and nervous in temperament, so that, again like Mishima, he had ample opportunity to develop a massive inferiority complex vis-à-vis other males. This was no doubt compounded by his conspicuous failure in both love and war. Although not overtly homosexual, he had trouble relating with women and never married. Like Mishima in the Pacific War, Nietzsche proved to be unfit for service in the Franco-Prussian War--a decided irony in both men's cases, considering their idealization of "martial" virtues and the "warrior" spirit. But, of
course, that is exactly the point. Both were over-compensating in fantasy for perceived "deficiencies" in reality. In Nietzsche's writings, as in Mishima's, one may detect the shrill tone of a "feminized" man trying to assert his "masculinity" in the only way he understands masculinity to be asserted: through violence, cruelty, aggression, destruction—or, in other words, through active nihilism.

A position strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche's is expressed in the second novel of the tetralogy by Masugi Kaidô, Isao's Shinto mentor. Like Nietzsche, in fact, Kaidô views Buddhism as the principal historical form of passive nihilism, an insidious anti-life philosophy which teaches men to pacify their aggressive instincts rather than to indulge them, and which thus "deprived the Japanese of their original Yamato spirit, and their manliness".118

Masugi Kaidô's dislike of Buddhism was famous. Since he belonged to the Atsutane school [of Shinto] this was natural, and he denounced the Buddha and Buddhism to his students exactly in Atsutane's words. He despised and ridiculed Buddhism because it did not affirm life, and thus also did not affirm one's great duty to die [for the Emperor]; and, again, because Buddhism did not make contact with the "life of the spirit" and thus never arrived at the Imperial Way, the true way in which "life" attains "cohesion". The idea of karma itself was a philosophy of evil which reduced everything to nihilism. 119

Kaidô's "karma", of course, plays the same role as Nietzsche's "bad conscience": it inhibits men from acting out their aggressive instincts. As Kaidô himself claims: "...men's minds were made effeminate by the Buddhist tales of karma".120 The fact that Kaidô's view of Buddhism is actually Mishima's is confirmed by what happens to Honda over the course of the final two novels:
Kaidō's contention that Buddhism is a "philosophy of evil" which reduces "everything to nihilism" exactly foretells what will become of Honda because of his experience of Buddhism and of the land of its origin, India. Having been "corrupted" by these experiences, he is unable to feel any enthusiasm for Japan's war effort, even after the excitement of the "victory" at Pearl Harbor:

...when the vision of Benares arose before him, every kind of brilliant heroism lost its lustre. Perhaps the mystery of reincarnation had paralyzed his spirit, robbed him of his courage, convinced him of the nullity of all action—and finally, made him use all his philosophy only to serve his self-love? 121

And the full extent of his "corruption" becomes evident in post-war Japan. Though always a passive observer rather than a participant in life, in his younger days the object of his observation was at least an admirable one, whether the romantic adventures of Kiyoaki or the heroic adventures of Isao. But now he becomes a pitiful caricature of himself; he loses all his former dignity as an observer of noble or beautiful things and becomes a mere voyeur, spying on lovers through a peep-hole or from behind a bush in a public park. His final experience of Buddhism demoralizes him even further, and the tetralogy ends, as we have seen, with his mood of passive nihilist despair.

Honda, then, may be said to pay dearly for his passivity, a passivity only deepened by his contacts with Hindu-Buddhist spirituality. At the same time that he serves as a "bad example", though, he also serves as the author's mouthpiece, and thus is
made completely aware of the reason for his suffering. Honda, in fact, gives full expression to the anti-psychological, anti-subjective view of the self which was the final outcome of Mishima's lifelong struggle with the active/passive psychological dialectic.

Though Honda plays the role of the principal "passive" character throughout the tetralogy, he is by no means given the kind of rich interior life enjoyed by the Confessions' protagonist—or even by Mizoguchi. Indeed, he carefully steers clear of the "Pandora's box" of the psyche. Though he seems to accept the Buddhist doctrine that the small, personal self is unreal, he does not seem to feel any counterbalancing compulsion to search within for a larger, cosmic Self or "Buddha-nature" which might fill the resulting vacuum. Indeed, his search for knowledge throughout the tetralogy is rigidly external: he travels to India and Thailand, studies Hindu and Buddhist philosophy in an academic way, but never makes any serious attempt to practise the kind of introspection Hindu/Buddhist teachers recommend. Even his final "enlightenment" comes from an external source: he does not discover for himself that "all is illusion"; the Abbess tells him so. Which inevitably raises the question: why should he believe her? The scene is thus not as convincing psychologically as it might have been.

Honda's "anti-subjectivity" emerges also in his rejection of psychoanalysis—again in great contrast to the Confessions' protagonist, whose whole purpose is to "psychoanalyze" himself,
in the hope of finding some therapeutic relief from his inner conflicts. Honda repudiates, for instance, the psychoanalytical notion that the analysis of one's dreams can lead to self-discovery: "Of course, Honda had read various of the Viennese psychoanalysts' books on dreams, but it was hard for him to accept the theory that one really wished to betray oneself." In his denial of the unconscious, of the deeper self that is expressed in dreams, one may sense his fear of depths, of anything not visible to the naked eye—for he is, after all, the "objective" observer par excellence. If he cannot see something, he refuses to believe in its existence. In the tetralogy as a whole, dreams function mainly as a linking device between the various novels: Kiyoaki, for instance, dreams that he will meet Honda again "under the waterfall" in his next life; Isao, in turn, dreams that he will be reincarnated as a Thai princess. Thus dreams have only an "external" meaning; they do not reveal anything about a deeper, hidden self.

That Honda's own sense of self becomes progressively "objectified" as he ages is made clear in an important passage of the tetralogy's final volume, in which he also acknowledges the reason for his "failure" in life:

When he thought that self-consciousness had to do only with the self, Honda was still young. He was still young when he called "self-consciousness" only that consciousness of a substance like a black, spiny sea urchin floating in the transparent cask of the self. "Always churning, like a violent current." While he had learned that in India, it had taken him thirty years of daily life to actually realize its truth. As he grew older, self-consciousness became consciousness of time.... Minute by minute, second by second, with what a faint consciousness of existence did people slip through a never-returning time. With age one learnt
for the first time that there was a density, even an intoxication, contained in each drop. The beautiful drops of time, like the thick drops of a wine brought out for a special occasion.... And time was being lost as blood is lost. All old men shrivelled up and died. As payment for having failed to stop time in that wonderful period when, though the person himself did not know it, the rich blood was causing a rich intoxication.

That was it. Old men learnt that time held intoxications. But already when they learnt this there was not enough liquor left to cause intoxication. Why had he not tried to stop time? 125

Here the objectivity of the self, its total identification with "time", is shown to be the basis of that other Mishima doctrine, the necessity of an early suicide. The self takes on reality only by acting out a role in history, which is time on a mass scale. Thus it is fruitless to try to find some absolute, unchanging identity by examining the "substance like a black, spiny sea urchin floating in the transparent cask of the self". One can attain only a brief, glorious selfhood by acting while still endowed with the energy and courage of youth, and by cutting off the flow of time—of oneself, in other words—at this point so that it may remain intact and fixed forever in the national memory. The heroic Isao, of course, achieves this kind of "immortal" selfhood. But Honda does not realize all this until too late: his time, like his blood, has almost all dripped away; he no longer has enough of it to make a fit offering to the gods. The despair that overwhelms him in old age comes from his realization that, because of his passivity, he has never achieved real selfhood.

The other example of the evil effects of passivity offered by the tetralogy is Tôru, the "hero" of the final novel. As several critics have pointed,126 Tôru actually may be regarded
as Honda's "double", so close are the two in their "decadence" or passive nihilism. The main difference is that, whereas it takes Honda the whole of a long lifetime to manifest fully the evil effects of his passivity, Tôru already reveals these at an early age. The reason is no doubt that this particular "observer" has been an observer of the sea—he works at a signal station on the Izu beach—and he has been palpably infected with its "evil". The sea here serves a double symbolic function: as suggested by the tetralogy's title, it is a symbol of the nauseous fecundity of the life-force, the ceaseless round of birth and death which Honda glimpsed at Benares:

Tôru again focussed his lens on the beach. As they became charged, little by little, with the evening shadows, the waves became hard and impenetrable. The light was stained more and more by an evil will [akui], and the colour of the underside of the waves took on a sadder, gloomier tone.

Yes. Tôru thought that, as they crashed ashore, the waves were an open embodiment of death itself. When he thought so, somehow they began to seem so. They were mouths open wide at the moment of death. From the rows of bared white teeth, numberless threads of white saliva were extracted, and the mouths, agape in agony, were beginning to gasp. Dyed purple in the twilight, earth was a cyanotic lip.

Death suddenly plunged into the wide-open mouth of the dying sea. As it repeatedly revealed numberless deaths in this open way, the sea was like a policeman who hurriedly picked up corpses and hid them from public view.127

But the sea also symbolizes the equally "nauseous" depths of the psyche, the dreaded unconscious, which the young Honda perceived as "a substance like a black, spiny sea urchin floating in the transparent cask of the self".128 Thus Tôru too, gazing through his telescope, suddenly is overcome by the sense that he has caught a glimpse of something forbidden, something which exists in the depths not only of the sea but of his own
mind:
At that moment Tôru's telescope picked up something it should not have. He felt that a separate world suddenly appeared in the wide-open mouth of the tormented wave. It was not likely that he would see an hallucination, so what he saw must have been real. But he did not know what it was. Perhaps it was something like a pattern accidentally drawn by microbes in the sea. The light which flashed in the dark interior opened up a separate world, but he was sure that he remembered having glimpsed this at some time—perhaps it had something to do with incalculably distant memories. If he had lived a past life, perhaps it was that. Anyway, Tôru did not know what connection it had to that thing he always tried to see one step beyond the clear horizon. If it was a tangle of various seaweeds, dancing as they were sucked up into the belly of the breaking wave, then perhaps the world depicted in that moment was a miniature of the slimy pink and purple creases and irregularities of the disgusting and nauseating depths of the sea. 129

Tôru's ultimate fate, like Honda's, seems an ironic punishment for his passivity: he goes blind after a failed suicide attempt, and thus loses his only means of relating with the world: his eyes.

Unlike The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, The Sea of Fertility has no single character who embodies the active/passive dialectic in his own psyche; thus its characters tend to be more static than dynamic. The dialectic is "divided" between an active and a passive group of characters, but this scheme works well only in the first two novels. Here the "active" characters, Kiyôaki and Isao, though too "flat" to be of much interest psychologically, at least are "active" enough, the first as a lover and the second as a terrorist, to counterbalance Honda's passivity. Neither is retrained by fear of "karma" or "bad conscience"; both are innocent of all subjectivity or psychological depth, and thus, in both cases, the
will to act is not impeded by any sense of inner conflict: Kiyoaki acts freely upon his sexual instincts, as Isao on his aggressive instincts. Of course, they pay for their impetuosity by dying young, whereas the more cautious, calculating Honda lives to a ripe old age. But there can be no doubt as to which of these fates the author considers preferable: age for Mishima is not merely an aesthetic crime but a moral one, because a man's ability to act is undermined by age as surely as his physical beauty. Even Isao's father, for instance, who supposedly shares his son's patriotic ideals, lays himself open to the world's corruption by failing to take action and achieve a glorious death while still young. Thus he is shown as a middle-aged man accepting bribes from the corrupt capitalist Kurahara, Isao's enemy, and later he even betrays his own son to the authorities.

Though the contrast between Honda and the "tragic heroes" of the first two novels is thus a strong one, in the final two novels there is a marked decline even in this kind of "dramatic tension". No doubt this accounts for much of the conspicuous drop in quality over the tetralogy's latter half, which many critics have remarked upon. The Thai princess who is meant to be the "heroine" of the third novel, The Temple of Dawn, is an insubstantial figure whose only distinction seems to be her sexual promiscuity—and she makes an unheroic exit after being bitten by a snake. Honda's relations with her are sporadic and seem lacking in any real significance. Similarly Tôru, the protagonist of the final novel, is, as we have seen, too
much like Honda himself to function as the "active" term of the novel's psychological equation.

Thus it cannot be said that the scheme of dividing the active/passive dialectic between two opposing groups of characters succeeds for the tetralogy as a whole. On the one hand, a character who is either all "active" or all "passive" tends to be a flat character. On the other hand, Mishima was unable to maintain even this kind of antithesis over the course of four novels. Perhaps he felt obliged to introduce some variety into the four reincarnated "heroes", and the only way he could do this was to make them more passive. Thus, for instance, by turning the stalwart Isao, the epitome of active masculinity, into the lecherous Thai princess, the epitome of passive femininity, he certainly introduces a startling reversal, but he also upsets the larger active/passive balance between Honda and the "heroes".

It seems, then, that Mishima paid dearly in aesthetic terms for his latter-day "rejection" of psychology. Despite the considerable sophistication of its philosophic argument, and of the fictional structure based on that argument, on the level of its character-psychology The Sea of Fertility gives one an undeniable impression of superficiality. In this sense this most ambitious of Mishima's works, the work obviously intended as the crowning achievement of his career, is, unfortunately, much inferior to the two earlier works discussed in this chapter.
Chapter Two
Notes

5. Glicksberg, p.25.
9. ibid.
18. ibid.
22. See the biographies by Nathan and Scott Stokes, referred to above.
25. Quoted in Nathan, p.78.
28. op.cit., p.103.
29. op.cit., p.20.
30. op.cit., p.156.
31. op.cit., p.57.
32. op.cit., pp.59-60.
35. Quoted in Nathan, p.94.
40. op.cit., p.560.
41. MYZ vol.3, p.173. (Confessions, p.15).
42. Freud, Basic Writings, p.580.
43. MYZ vol.3, p.168. (Confessions, p.8).
44. Freud, Basic Writings, p.597.
45. MYZ vol.3, p.166. (Confessions pp.5-6)
46. op.cit., p.181. (Confessions, pp.24-5).
47. op.cit., p.182. (Confessions, p.27).
49. op.cit., p.189. (Confessions, p.37).
50. ibid.
51. op.cit., p.206. (Confessions, p.61).
52. op.cit., p.197. (Confessions, p.49).
53. op.cit., p.198. (Confessions, p.50).
54. Freud, Basic Writings, pp.566-7.
56. op.cit., p.211. (Confessions, p.68).
57. op.cit., p.211-2. (Confessions, p.69).
58. Freud, Basic Writings, p.570.
60. MYZ vol.3, p.213. (Confessions, p.70).
61. op.cit., pp.219-20. (Confessions, pp.79-80).
62. op.cit., p.220. (Confessions, p.80).
64. op.cit., p.219. (Confessions, p.79).
65. Quoted in Wellek and Warren, Theory of Literature, p.82.
67. MYZ vol.3, p.171. (Confessions, p.12).
68. op.cit., p.350. (Confessions, p.253).
69. ibid.
74. op.cit., 118-20.
75. op.cit., p.19.
76. op.cit., p.32.
78. op.cit., p.130.
79. op.cit., pp.94-5.
81. Doi, p.95.
83. Lionel Trilling, "Art and Neurosis", in *The Liberal Imagination*, p.163.
84. ibid.
86. MYZ vol.3, p.201. (*Confessions*, p.54).
96. op.cit., p.111.
98. op.cit., pp.21-2.
102. MYS p.224. (Temple, p.23).
104. MYS p.229. (Temple, p.30).
106. op.cit., p.13.
111. op.cit., p.7.
112. op.cit., p.288.
117. For an excellent critical biography of Nietzsche, see Hollingdale's *Nietzsche*, referred to above.
119. op.cit, p.633. (Runaway Horses, pp.240-1).
120. ibid. (Runaway Horses, p.241).
125. MYZ vol.19, p.484. (Decay of the Angel, p.110).
126. See "Mishima Yukio no sakuhin o yomu", in Kokubungaku kaishaku to kyōzai no kenkyū (July, 1981), p.36.
127. MYZ vol.19, p.464. (Decay of the Angel, pp.91-2).
128. MYZ vol.19, p.484. (Decay of the Angel, p.110).
130. See, for instance, the Kokubungaku zadankai referred to in note 126, pp.32-3, or Keene, Dawn to the West, pp.1209-15.
Chapter Three
Hammer to Mask

I. Introduction: Nihilism, Morality and Politics

In order to establish the affinities between Mishima's moral/political thinking and the wider nihilist moral/political tradition, we must first examine that tradition.

If the notions of a "nihilist philosophy" and a "nihilist psychology" seem paradoxical, in view of nihilism's anti-philosophical and anti-psychological bias, the idea of a "nihilist morality" must seem completely contradictory. Nihilism would seem by definition indifferent if not actually hostile to all moral values. One recalls, for instance, Nietzsche's notoriety as an "antichrist", his vituperative attack on Christian humanism as a "slave morality". Whether we regard him as a moralist or an anti-moralist, though, Nietzsche still was centrally concerned with moral issues. The moral focus of his principal works is evident in their very titles: Beyond Good and Evil, On the Genealogy of Morals, The Will to Power, and even Thus Spoke Zarathustra--which, as its title suggests, aims to be a kind of quasi-religious counter-gospel of a "new morality". Nietzsche himself was well aware of the logical inconsistency of his position as a "nihilist moralist", but since, with him, the demands of life took precedence over the demands of logic, he was quite willing to sacrifice the latter for the sake of the former. Confronted by what Johan Goudsblom calls the "nihilist problematic", which he defines as the "complex of the urge for truth, the loss of truth and moral uncertainty", Nietzsche
readily opted to "rid himself of the urge for truth" and thus free himself for life--irrational, meaningless but glorious life, which, to him, was equivalent to the will-to-power when uninhibited by a "slave morality".\(^1\) Since, in Nietzsche's view, the "man who reflects more deeply knows that he is always wrong, no matter how he acts and judges"\(^2\), the man who wants to live an active life had better not concern himself too much with considerations of "good and evil". The "deed is everything"\(^3\).

It was out of his struggle with the "nihilist problematic", and in an attempt to resolve the contradictions in his nihilist moral system, that Nietzsche developed his concepts of "active" and "passive" nihilism. He defines these two polarities in the notation-form of his posthumous work, *The Will to Power* (Der Wille zur Macht, 1901):

Nihilism. It may be two things:--

A. Nihilism as a sign of enhanced spiritual strength: active Nihilism.
B. Nihilism as a sign of the collapse and decline of spiritual strength: passive Nihilism. [emphases in the original]\(^4\)

Nihilism, he continues, "reaches its maximum of relative strength, as a powerful destructive force, in the form of active Nihilism"\(^5\). On the other hand:

Its opposite would be weary Nihilism, which no longer attacks: its most renowned form being Buddhism: as passive Nihilism, a sign of weakness...the synthesis of values and goals (upon which every strong culture stands) decomposes, and the different values contend with one another: Disintegration, then everything which is relieving, which heals, becalms, or stupefies, steps into the foreground under the cover of various disguises, either religious, moral, political or aesthetic, etc. [emphases in the original]\(^6\)

And, in another passage, Nietzsche emphasizes further the
aggressive, destructive—and illogical—character of active nihilism:

Nihilism is not only a meditating over the "in vain!"—not only the belief that everything deserves to perish; but one actually puts one's shoulder to the plough; one destroys. This, if you will, is illogical; but the Nihilist does not believe in the necessity of being logical.... It is the condition of strong minds and wills; and to these it is impossible to be satisfied with the negation of judgment: the negation by deeds proceeds from their nature. Annihilation by the reasoning faculty seconds annihilation by the hand. [emphases in the original] 7

Thus Nietzsche envisioned a solution to the "nihilist problematic" mainly in moral—or anti-moral—terms. European civilization could escape the blight of passive nihilism which, according to Nietzsche, was about to descend upon it, only by a transcendence or "transvaluation" of all its traditional, instinct-inhibiting moral values:

All attempts made to escape Nihilism, which do not consist in transvaluing the values that have prevailed hitherto, only make the matter worse: they complicate the problem. 8

The social/political danger of any attempt at a "practical" application of nihilist moral principles might seem obvious. Prior to Nietzsche, though, when nihilism first appeared as a social/political movement in mid-nineteenth century Russia, its tone was rather mild by modern standards, and its goals often quite "constructive". The early Russian nihilists were not, for the most part, hardened cynics who believed in nothing. On the contrary, as Ronald Hingley points out, "they mostly believed passionately in something, if only in a hotch-potch involving revolution, the Russian peasant, Chernyshevsky, some kind of Socialism, the idea of progress, science, materialism
and so on". The literary prototype of these "gentlemen nihilists" was Yevgeny Bazarov, the hero of Turgenev's Fathers and Children (Ottsy i deti, 1861), who is simply one of those typical post-Darwinian scientific materialists for whom, as D.S. Mirsky says, "the dissection of frogs was the mystical rite of Darwinian naturalism and anti-spiritualism". Bazarov's friend Arkady defines a nihilist modestly as "a person who does not take any principle for granted, however much that principle may be revered". And, despite his radical scepticism, Bazarov proves, in the end, that his heart is "in the right place"—by falling in love with a kind-hearted woman and by dying a noble death.

But this "tameness" or "gentility" of the Russian nihilists, whether in reality or in fiction, did not last long. It seems that, as all moral inhibitions are progressively eroded by nihilist scepticism, "destruction for a cause" soon turns into "destruction for its own sake". On this point Charles Glicksberg concurs with Lewis Mumford: "the cult of nihilism tends swiftly to grow into a cult of violence and terror on the political scene, 'expressing a total contempt for life'". Certainly the history of Russian nihilism seems to bear this out. Within eight years of the publication of Turgenev's great novel, the notorious Sergey Nechayev had committed the "first Nihilist murder of importance", and thus inspired another great "nihilist" novel, Dostoevsky's Devils (Bésy, 1873) --though, understandably, Dostoevsky took a much harder line towards the nihilists than had Turgenev. Nechayev already
represents what might be regarded as active nihilism in its ultimate phase, in which violence and destruction are valued for their own sake. The earlier nihilists, as Ronald Hingley writes:

...preached destruction often enough, but chiefly as a means to an end, the necessary prelude to some dimly conceived, but fervently desired new order. Still, one often seems to discern a powerful death-wish beating behind the high-minded sentiments with which they rationalized such urges. In Nechayev's case this death-wish (death for others rather than himself) was openly preached and effectively practised. No one went further in urging destruction for its own sake without any nonsense about creating a better world. Nechayev explicitly claimed to have 'an entirely negative plan...total annihilation'. This formula, repeated ad nauseam with minor variations, more or less makes up his message to the world. 14

To convey some sense of the tenor of Nechayev's thinking, one could do no better than to quote from his Catechism of a Revolutionary:

Day and night he [the revolutionary] must have only one thought, one aim: pitiless destruction. He pursues his aim coldly and relentlessly, and must be prepared to perish himself, as also to destroy with his own hands anyone who stands in his way. 15

Of course, it is not always easy to distinguish between murder for its own sake and murder for a "good cause", or between an active nihilist and a "bona fide" revolutionary. No doubt the victim hardly cares whether his murderer "sincerely believes" he is performing a useful service, or helping to usher in a new utopia. At any rate, to the Russian establishment of the late nineteenth century, and to the European establishment at large, the rash of bombings, assassinations and other terrorist acts which troubled their age as much as ours
were all identified as the handiwork of "nihilists," and, to the more literate among them, perhaps seemed to confirm Nietzsche's dire prophecies about the imminent decline of European civilization. The event which Hingley describes as "the most spectacular coup of the Russian Nihilist movement" occurred in 1881: the assassination of the Tsar himself.

What might be regarded as the "reverse side" of active nihilism—the turning of one's destructive urges against oneself—also flourished among the Russian nihilists. In Dostoevsky's *Devils* the nihilist Kirilov argues that suicide is the supreme expression of individual freedom—a sentiment Mishima was to echo, as we shall see—and the later Russian novelist Artzybashev—a nihilist himself, unlike Dostoevsky—even went so far as to espouse the desirability of universal suicide.

Though in the nineteenth century nihilism was thus associated mainly with extreme left-wing causes, in the twentieth century it has come to be associated more with the opposite end of the political spectrum—a fact which some have ascribed to Nietzsche's influence. Nietzsche himself, of course, was too much of a "poet and dreamer" to take much interest in practical politics, and it should be noted that he expressed great contempt for the arrogance and narrow-mindedness of the German right wing, and particularly for the anti-Semitism that was already gaining ground in the late nineteenth century. Nonetheless, he did feel, like Mishima, an instinctive antipathy towards democracy, socialism or any other form of "humanism" which sought to elevate the "masses" over the élite, and he
listed such tendencies among the contemporary "causes of nihilism" (i.e., of passive nihilism):

The inferior species ("herd", "mass", "society") is forgetting modesty, and inflates its needs into cosmic and metaphysical values. In this way all life is vulgarised: for inasmuch as the mass of mankind rules, it tyrannises over the exceptions, so that these lose their belief in themselves and become Nihilists.

[emphases in original] 21

It must be admitted too that there were certain dangers inherent in Nietzsche's elevation of the active nihilist's will-to-power "beyond good and evil". This was a doctrine which readily lent itself to use—or abuse—by men who ignored the gentler and more subtle aspects of Nietzsche's thought: such as, for instance, that the true "superman" was the man who conquered himself.22 Nietzsche, of course, could not have foreseen that twentieth-century fascists, Nazis and assorted other political terrorists would invoke his name to endow their crimes with an aura of intellectual respectability. But it is an unfortunate historical fact that not only Nietzsche's sister but also some of his leading "disciples"—including even the most eminent, Martin Heidegger, for a time—lent their support to Hitler, and Hitler repaid the favor by erecting a kind of shrine to Nietzsche—so gruesome architecturally that one wit dubbed it "Wagner's revenge".23 At any rate, whether culpable or not, Nietzsche, as the "philosopher of nihilism", has often been singled out as a causal factor in the rise of Naziism. One German scholar of the 'thirties, in fact, described the recent Nazi assumption of power as the "revolution of nihilism", and explained clearly how its typically terrorist
emphasis on "direct action" was related to its nihilist philosophy:

Direct action is defined as "direct integration by means of corporativism, militarism, and myth"; this is to replace democracy and parliamentarism. But the true significance of direct action lies in its assignment of the central place in its policy to violence, which it then surrounds with a special philosophical interpretation of reality. Briefly this philosophical system amounts to the belief that the use of violence in a supreme effort liberates creative moral forces in human society which lead to social and national renewal. ... Violence, says Sorel, is the basic force in life. When all other standards have been unmasked by scepticism of all doctrines, reason itself is robbed of all force. The anti-intellectual attitude of "dynamism" is not mere chance but the necessary outcome of an entire absence of standards. Man, it holds, is not a logical being, not a creature guided by reason or intelligence, but a creature following his instincts and impulses, like any other animal. Consequently reason cannot provide a basis for a social order or a political system. The barbaric element of violence...is the one element that can change a social order.... Hostility to the things of the spirit, indifference to truth, indifference to the ethical conceptions of morality, honor, and equity—all the things that arouse the indignation of the ordinary citizen in Germany and abroad against certain National Socialist measures—are not excrescences but the logical and inevitable outcome of the National Socialist philosophy, of the doctrine of violence. 24

The fact that Hermann Rauschning wrote these words in the mid 'thirties perhaps explains the mildness of his term, "certain National Socialist measures". Needless to say, subsequent history more than confirmed his analysis of the underlying philosophy of Naziism, its readiness to resort to "the barbaric element of violence". Though Rauschning does not mention Nietzsche by name, there could have been no doubt in the minds of his readers as to who was the main philosophical source in Germany of the doctrine that "the use of violence in a supreme
effort liberates creative moral forces". Hannah Arendt is not so reticent: in her 1969 study, *On Violence*, she states unequivocally that "to believe in violence as a life-promoting force is at least as old as Nietzsche".\(^{25}\)

To those who would object that the Nazis were "sincere" nationalists, however misguided, rather than nihilists cynically using nationalism to disguise their destructive ends, one might quote one Ludwig Klages, who once boasted that the Nazis were working "for the extinction of mankind".\(^{26}\) Actually Helmut Thie- licke, in his seminal study of nihilism, disposes of this objection with great cogency:

...National Socialism quite emphatically did not think of itself as a revolution of nihilism. On the contrary, it affirmed certain absolutes. For instance, it made the people (Volk) the absolutely normative court of appeal for all ethics ("What is good for my people is good") and declared the biological bases of history to be the one constant, abiding, and absolute quantity. It was therefore in complete accord with the basic principle of all "isms" in that it made an absolute of certain aspects of creation.

If, then, we declare with regard to such a movement that it is nihilistic, we are saying not only that what it calls an absolute is a pseudo-absolute, a pragmatic composition, but also that the responsible representatives of the movement are quite aware that this is what it is—without, however, betraying the secret. In this case we speak of a camouflaged or "ciphered nihilism."

If we may use recent German history as an illustration, this means that the really dedicated National Socialists knew very well that "people and race" are not the ultimate forces of reality. Nor did they really believe in the idea of personality which is connected with and emphasized in the Führer-principle. For all mass leaders are very definitely cynics and despisers of humanity, since the mass is after all only a conglomeration of disconnected and depersonalized individuals.\(^{27}\)

Albert Camus no doubt exaggerated somewhat when he counted Nietzsche among the three "evil geniuses" who created modern
Europe (the other two being Hegel and Marx), but it does seem to have been a short step from Nietzsche's glorification of power and action to the Nazi's glorification of violence.

II. Nihilism in Mishima's Morality and Politics

I have gone to such lengths to establish the "nihilist genealogy" of Naziism—and of fascism in general—not to discredit Nietzsche but to demonstrate that Mishima's own espousal of extreme right-wing causes, and his readiness to use violence in support of these, places him squarely within the "mainstream" of twentieth-century political nihilism. Indeed, if Mishima's ultranationalism is viewed only within a strictly Japanese context, it may seem an unaccountable anomaly: what could be more eccentric or even quixotic than his struggle to restore the emperor's "deity"? The great majority of postwar Japanese writers and intellectuals identified themselves as liberal democrats, socialists or communists, and thus welcomed the spread of democracy, the "Peace Constitution", the de-deification of the emperor, and the relegation of the military to the status of a "self-defense force". In his perception of all these "reforms" as inimical to the "Japanese spirit", Mishima found himself alone. And his "eccentricity" was given vociferous and perhaps hyperbolic expression in his novels.

In the second novel of The Sea of Fertility tetralogy, for instance, Isao fears that his assassin's will might be weakened by the "poison" of Western humanism:

Watching [Sawa], Isao realized that, before he could throw himself so wholeheartedly into their project, it
would probably be necessary for him to jump over any number of rivers. Among these the dark stream of the dregs of humanism [ningen-shugi no kasu], which flowed ceaselessly like some poisonous discharge from a factory upstream. Behold: the brilliant lights of the factory of the West European spirit [Seiō seishin], operating day and night. The pollution from that factory denigrated the noble will to murder [sûkô na satsui], and blighted the green of the [sacred Shintô] sakaki leaves. 29

There can be no doubt that Isao's sentiments here were also the author's own. To confirm this fact one need only refer to the numerous moral/political essays and manifestoes Mishima wrote over the last decade of his life--up to the very "last testament" he issued before committing suicide. A constant theme of these writings is the pernicious influence which Western liberal-democratic humanism has exerted on the "Japanese spirit". In his Introduction to the Study of Action (Kôdô gaku nyûmon, 1970), for instance, he speaks of the "spiritual death" which has overcome the Japanese since the end of the war:

Extending the life of the body cannot be considered the same as extending the life of the spirit. The life-revering humanism upon which our postwar democracy is founded advocates the safety of only the body and does not inquire into the life or death of the spirit. 30

In the same essay, Mishima similarly criticizes the "New Left" for being tainted with the same "life-revering humanism" as the liberal democrats, and for their consequent incapacity to take violent revolutionary action in the traditional leftist/nihilist manner. Significantly, he expresses this in terms of his familiar active/passive dialectic: "...no longer possessing the active nihilism that once sustained it, [the New Left] will have to drift rather into passive optimism". 31

To combat the pernicious influence of this present "age of languid peace", then, Mishima tried to rekindle "the dying
embers of Japan's warrior spirit", as he said on the first anniversary of the founding of his private army, the "Shield Society" (tate no kai).\textsuperscript{32} According to Paul Wilkinson in his \textit{The New Fascists} (1981):

With its emphases on blind obedience, military discipline and warrior-virtues, Mishima's Shield Society was a replica of the Japanese secret societies of the 1930s and the fascistic German Frei Korps of the inter-War period.\textsuperscript{33}

This is perhaps a slight exaggeration—in their fancy dress uniforms and with their innocent, boyish faces, Mishima's "troops" looked more like "toy soldiers" than hardened 'thirties' fascists, and hardly posed much of a threat to anyone. Nonetheless, Mishima himself probably would have appreciated the comparison—and the implied compliment of being taken so seriously. And he proved on his last day that he was not merely "playing soldier", as many of his literary friends suspected: he was ready to kill and be killed.

Thus Mishima not only wrote about what he perceived as the moral choice between active and passive nihilism: he acted upon it in his own life. Undeniably our knowledge of this fact gives an added piquancy to those passages of his novels in which this all-important moral choice is either described or discussed. Such, for instance, is the passage in which Honda meditates on the meaning of Isao's death:

If one wished to survive, one must not cling to purity as Isao had done. One must not cut oneself off from all avenues of retreat; one must not reject everything. Nothing compelled Honda to reflect on the question of what was the pure, genuine Japan [\textit{junsui na Nippon}] so much as Isao's death. Was it not so that there was no way to really live together with "Japan" other than by rejecting everything, by rejecting and negating even
the whole of present-day Japan and the Japanese people, by this most difficult way of living—and, ultimately, by killing someone and then committing suicide? Everyone was afraid to say so, but had not Isao proved it with his whole life?

Come to think of it, in the purest element of a race there was always the smell of blood and the shadow of barbarism. Unlike Spain, which preserved its national sport of bullfighting despite the protests of animal-lovers throughout the world, Japan wished to wipe out all its "barbaric customs" by the civilization and enlightenment of the Meiji period [1868-1912]. The result was that the liveliest, purest spirit of the race was driven underground, occasionally to erupt with violent force, and thus to become something which people feared more and more as taboo. 34

Here, then, Mishima predicates the need for active nihilism on his perception of the special character of the Japanese people—much, it must be admitted, in the same vein as those Nazis who rhapsodized over the "superior aggressivity" of the "German Folk". Mishima concurs with Nietzsche, too, that the Japanese must be counted among those "noble races" whose blood-lust must be periodically satisfied for the sake of their "spiritual" health. The point is driven home in The Sea of Fertility by the contrast between the aggressive spirit of the kendō team, who supposedly represent the "real Japan", and the gentle, passive spirit of the Thai princes, who, one supposes, represent the "effeteness" and "decadence" of a tropical country whose culture has been thoroughly "corrupted" by Buddhist "passive nihilism":

...Honda feared that the princes' memories of Japan, even if the passage of time had increased their sense of nostalgia, certainly were not good. What had made them feel ill at ease in Japan was their isolation, their lack of fluency in the language, the difference in manners and customs, and also, probably, the theft of their ring and the death of Princess Jin Jan. But what had ultimately alienated them was what also isolated not only ordinary youth like Honda and Kiyoaki but also
the liberal humanitarian youth [jiyû na jindô-shugi-teki na seinen] of the Shirakaba-ha [Literary group]: that threatening "spirit of the kendô team". Perhaps the princes themselves were vaguely aware that the real Japan [hontô no Nippon], unfortunately, existed only weakly among their friends, and far more strongly among their enemies. That uncompromising Japan, haughty as a young warrior in scarlet-braided armor, and, moreover, that Japan as quick as a boy to take offense, a boy who challenged people before they ridiculed him, and charged to his death before they slighted him. 35

The expression, "the real Japan", occurred again, significantly enough, in Mishima's "final address" to members of the Self-Defense Force, in which he exhorted them to "rise together" with him and die together in order to "return Japan to her true form": that is, with a "legitimate" Imperial Army. For the "real Japan, the real Japanese, and the real bushi [warrior] spirit exist nowhere else but in the Self-Defense Forces":36 Or, at least, so Mishima "dreamed",37 but, as it turned out, none of them accepted his invitation, despite the eloquence of his alternately scornful and lyrical rhetoric:

What kind of an army is it that has no higher value than life? Right now we will show you that there is a value higher than reverence for life. It is neither freedom nor democracy. It is Japan, the country whose history and traditions we love. Is there no one who will die by hurling his body against the constitution which has mutilated her? If there is, let us rise together even now, and let us die together. It is in the fervent hope that you who are pure in spirit will once again be men and true bushi that we have resorted to this act. 36

Of course, it is highly unlikely that Mishima himself really expected to win "instant converts" to his cause by this model "revolutionary" speech, or to lead a really effective rebellion against Japan's "liberal democratic" government. Indeed, the very futility of the whole affair made of it a
nihilist action *par excellence*, and thus a much "truer" act of "self-expression" than anything more "effective" would have been. In this respect it resembled the equally "futile" action of Isao—and even Mizoguchi's act of arson. As Mishima himself explained in *Introduction to the Study of Action*:

> From the time of the early Shōwa disorders up to the present, deliberate actions of the Japanese have included various important mysterious elements which westerners could not have attempted or even imagined. And in those political actions of the Japanese there can be seen many striking examples completely contrary to reason and intellect, of unaccountable explosions and behavior resorted to with full acknowledgment of its ineffectiveness.

> Why do Japanese undertake political action which they know to be futile? Yet if an act has really passed the test of nihilism, then even though totally ineffective, it should surprise no one. I can even predict that from now on, to the extent that the action principles of Yang-ming Thought are imbedded in the Japanese spirit, perplexing political phenomena which are incomprehensible to foreigners will continue to crop up in Japan. 38

In the same essay Mishima passionately advocates a return to "Yang-ming Thought" (yōmei-gaku) as an antidote to the "poison" of Western humanism, warning that: "We never really understood the moral basis of the battle when we fought against the west." 39 But what does he mean by "Wang-ming Thought"? He admires, of course, the teaching of the neo-Confucian philosopher on the necessity of uniting "thought and action", but what really inspires him is the example of an "activist" Yang-ming scholar such as Ōshio Heihachirō (1793–1837), who committed suicide after the failure of a rebellion he led on behalf of famine victims. What Mishima admires about such a man is his willingness to act—and to stake his life on his actions—despite his realization of the futility of those actions. In this
sense, claims Mishima somewhat ahistorically, the Yang-ming "revolutionary activists" were not only "mystics" but "active nihilists":

Revolution is action. Because action often leads one close to death, once a person has left the contemplative life and entered the world of action, it is human nature that he must be enthralled by both the nihilism he feels in the face of death and a fateful mysticism. In my opinion, the way to the Meiji Restoration was prepared by National Learning as mysticism and Yang-Ming Thought as active nihilism. The Apollonian National Learning of Motoori Norinaga was distilled by the passage of time into the mystically oriented action philosophy of such men as Hirata Atsutane and Hayashi Oen, and Atsutane's Shintō studies then fostered the passionate activism of the Meiji Restoration shishi [royalists].

We may see clearly in this passage how Mishima views even his own native tradition through the lens of his Nietzschean/nihilist world-view. Similarly in his Introduction to the Hagakure (Hagakure nyūmon, 1967), he presents the samurai moralist, Yamamoto Jōchō (1659-1719), as an active or "manly" nihilist who knew that action was futile and human beings mere puppets, but who, nonetheless, exhorted samurai to "die a fanatic's death":

Jōchō's nihilism creates a world of extremes. Although Jōchō extols human energy and pure action, he sees as futile the final products.

And, again:

Jōchō frequently refers to this life as a puppet existence, to human beings as marionettes. At the very core of his personality is a deep, penetrating and yet manly "nihilism" [in English]. He scrutinizes each moment to extract the meaning of life, but at heart he is convinced that life itself is nothing more than a dream.

It may seem ironic that the ultranationalist Mishima, who so vociferously deplored the "pernicious" influence of the West
on Japan, should interpret the intellectual history of his own country in such transparently Western terms. In the passage on National Learning and Yang-Ming Thought quoted above, for instance, in Nietzschean dialectical terms, as a contest between active and passive nihilisms, or Apollonian intellectual order as opposed to Dionysian passionate chaos. But, actually, Mishima never rejected the whole of Western culture: what he rejected was the democratic, liberal/humanitarian strain of that culture, the strain which—unfortunately from his perspective—had become dominant in the postwar period in both Japan and the West, as a direct historical consequence of the defeat of the Axis Powers in World War Two. Since he associated that strain mainly with England and the United States, we can thus understand the anti-English, anti-American motif running through much of his work—especially the final tetralogy. The "decadence" or "demoralization" of postwar Japan is, as we have seen, associated with its "Americanization"—symbolized, not very originally, by the omnipresence of Coca-Cola—and the cruellest satiric portrait in the work, as already quoted, is that of a group of vulgar and even grotesque American women. But Mishima also reserves particular scorn for native "turncoats" such as the Anglophile Baron Shinkawa, whom Isao plans to assassinate for his "sins".

There was another strain of Western culture, though, which Mishima found much more to his taste: what we might consider the "underside" of our culture, as represented by such a diverse gallery of "diabolical" characters as the Marquis de Sade,
Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Oscar Wilde, Raymond Radiguet, Jean Genêt—and Hitler. Mishima found this whole rogue's gallery "fascinating", and he wrote about them all. Similarly, on a political level, he was not so adverse to Japan's wartime alliance with the Western fascist states as he was to her post-war alliance with the Western liberal democracies. The former alliance, in his view, did not compel the "real Japan" to suppress her "true nature". On the contrary, it encouraged her to return to her "primitive" mythological roots: far from espousing a "sentimental" internationalism, fascism placed great emphasis on the mystique of an individual—and superior—"warrior" race. Thus the Sea of Fertility narrator waxes quite lyrical about the Axis Alliance, and, at the same time, underscores his point by noting that Honda, the decadent intellectual, did not share this "romantic" view:

The Tripartite Alliance between Japan, Germany and Italy angered one section of the Japanese nationalists (Nippon-shugi no hitotachi), and the francophiles and anglophiles, but of course it pleased the great majority of people who liked the West and who liked Europe, and even the old-fashioned pan-Asianists (ajia-shugi-sha). The marriage was not with Hitler but with the German forests, not with Mussolini but with the Roman pantheon. It was an alliance of German mythology, Roman mythology and the Kojiki [Record of Ancient Matters, an early eighth-century compilation of Japanese myths], a friendship between the manly, beautiful, pagan gods of East and West.

There are, of course, historical as well as philosophical and psychological reasons for Mishima's "fascist sympathies". The most impressionable time of his youth was spent during the almost hysterical "war fever" of the heyday of the Axis Alliance—and one might say that Mishima remained true at heart to that
alliance for the rest of his life, almost as if it were closely associated in his mind with the "ideals" of his youth. Indeed, the first major cultural influence on him had come from exactly such a nationalist "romanticism" as that expressed in the above passage. As a precocious teenaged writer during the war he was "adopted" by the "Japan Romantic School" (Nippon Roman-ha), a group of literati who were "nationalist romantics" in the nineteenth-century German style, fanatic patriots who believed themselves to be members of the "superior race" as much as did the Nazis—and who were every bit as nihilist. As Etô Jun has said:

They believed in the value of destruction and ultimately in self-destruction. They valued 'purity of sentiment', though they never defined this; and they called for 'preservation of the nation' by purging selfish party politicians and zaibatsu [business] leaders. They believed that self-destruction would be followed by reincarnation, linked mysteriously with the benevolence of the Emperor. The Japanese, they considered, were superior to all other peoples. 46

Etô's description of the Roman-ha's "plan of action": assassination of "selfish party politicians and zaibatsu leaders", to be followed by suicide and reincarnation, "linked mysteriously with the benevolence of the Emperor", sounds, of course, like a plot-outline of Runaway Horses, the second novel of the tetralogy. More than two decades after the end of the war, Mishima was thus still "paying homage" to the Roman-ha's "ideals". In the Confessions of a Mask too, when Mishima's alter ego declares his "sensual" acceptance of the "creed of death" that was in vogue during the war, 47 he is no doubt referring to the "creed" of the Nippon Roman-ha.

Another crucial early influence was certainly Mishima's
father, Hiraoka Azusa, a fanatic devotee of Hitler and the Nazis. In a letter to a friend written in 1941, when he was sixteen years old, Mishima complained of his father: "He harps on one string only: Nazis, Nazis, Nazis." But, in another letter to the same friend, he admits that, almost against his will, he also became "interested" in this subject:

My father pressed me with books about the Nazis doing this, the Nazis doing that; and so I began reading only such books in his presence, as a kind of camouflage. But gradually I became interested, and began reading essays on the Jewish problem and on Japanism by choice. 

Mishima's "interest" in the Nazis would stay with him: in 1968 he wrote a play with the provocative title, My Friend Hitler (Waga tomo Hittorâ). The play describes--with, as John Nathan says, "a certain admiration for Adolf's adroitness" the way in which the Führer eliminated his more radical "friends", the Brownshirts, on the "night of the long knives" of 1934, and thus--with an irony Mishima could relish--was able to present himself as almost a "middle-of-the-road" liberal. With some mock-bravado, Mishima boasted in the program notes distributed to the audience that the play was an "evil hymn to the dangerous hero Hitler, from the dangerous thinker Mishima". Though he professed to "dislike" Hitler, still he admitted that he was "fascinated" by him.

Of course, much of this is Mishima's role-playing as the enfant terrible of the Japanese literary world, a role he was eager to play not only because he enjoyed shocking the sensitivities of more "conventional-minded" leftist or liberal-humanitarian intellectuals but also because his self-image as a
"dangerous thinker" enhanced his machismo aura. And, because of its very "eccentricity", his "fascism", if such it may be called, also functioned as an excellent device for attracting attention. Mishima was always hungry for attention, and it may be significant that the period of his rightest activism—the 'sixties, the last decade of his life—was also the period of a marked decline in his popularity, beginning with the immense critical failure of Kyôko's House (Kyôko no ie, 1959), a massive novel he had intended as his magnum opus.

But certainly there were deeper reasons for Mishima's attraction to the extreme right wing. When viewed within the context of his nihilism, in fact, his "conversion" to ultranationalist politics in his later years seems but a "natural progression". This is a point which seems to have escaped Mishima's best English-language biographer, John Nathan. Like some Japanese critics also, Nathan perceives an antithetical relationship between Mishima's "nihilism" on the one side and his "ultranationalist faith" on the other. Needless to say, such a view betrays an ignorance not only of nihilism but of modern European history. Nathan notes that, in 1960, Mishima, in speculating on the reason why the crowds which besieged the Japanese Prime Minister's residence hated him so, concluded that: "They hate him because he is a little, little nihilist. ... He believes in nothing, and though he may think he has convictions, the mob knows intuitively that he is unable to believe in his political principles." And, at the same time, Mishima had confessed: "I am also a nihilist."
concludes:

These are not the words of a man with political convictions. Yet by 1968 Mishima was promising his friends that he would "die with sword in hand" in the battle with the Left at the next renewal of the security treaty in 1970. By 1968, that is, he had become (or at least was sounding very much like) an ultranationalist. What enabled (or drove) the confessed nihilist in this short space of years to acquire faith? 55

As Nathan sees it, then, during the last decade of his life Mishima suddenly underwent some sort of miraculous "conversion", or, for some mysterious reason, took a political "leap of faith" --and this freed him forever from his erstwhile nihilism. In other words, his extreme-right politics were not a "natural outgrowth" of his nihilism but a reaction against nihilism in the direction of "faith".

One might object to the psychological improbability of this view: is it likely that a man whose psyche had been so deeply permeated with nihilism since his childhood--as his writings show--would suddenly "acquire faith" and free himself of that nihilism in the last few years of his life--indeed, just before he committed suicide? But, actually, one need not pursue the issue even that far. Nathan's "interpretation" is based not only on a misunderstanding of Mishima's nihilism but on a misreading of what Mishima himself said. What Mishima said was that Prime Minister Kishi was a "little, little nihilist"--in other words, a passive nihilist, a nihilist who cowered in his official residence, afraid to take action against the crowds who were protesting against the 1960 security treaty with the United States. If Kishi had taken strong action--if, for instance, he had called on the Self Defense Force to attack
the leftist protesters--then events might have turned out more
to Mishima's liking: perhaps a full-scale revolution which
would have left the military in charge. But Kishi was a petty,
passive nihilist, and so incapable of such ruthlessness. Mishima,
in fact, drives this point home by comparing him to a more
"active" nihilist--Hitler--in a continuation of the above re-
marks which Nathan neglects to quote: "While one hates a tiny
nihilist, one may accept a nihilist on the grand scale such as
Hitler." Similarly, in the essays he wrote later in the de-
cade, as we have seen, Mishima depicted such of his "heroes"
as the samurai moralist, Yamamoto Jōchō, and the Yang-ming
activist, Ōshio Heihachirō, as thoroughly admirable "active
nihilists". In espousing right-wing activism during the last
few years of his life, then, Mishima was not taking a "leap of
faith" beyond his nihilism; he was simply "graduating" from
one form of nihilism to another. In doing so, he was following
in the footsteps of many Western nihilists before him--as he
himself was well aware.

In his essay, "A New Theory of Fascism" (Shin fashizumu-
ron, 1959), Mishima claims that "it was easier for fascism to
make use of the followers of Nietzsche than of drug addicts",57
and that: "One trend of the so-called active nihilism [nōdō-
teki nihirizumu] was towards fascism." And he explains the
nihilist's attraction towards fascism in psychological and
even moral terms. As in the Yang-ming philosophy, in fascism
"thought and action are always inseparable; fascism does not
respect thought which is not transferred into action".59
thus sanctioning action as the highest value, fascism promised "salvation" to the nihilists, who felt the normal human need for action but who had lost faith in the traditional moral grounds for action:

If "they do not respect thoughts that are not turned into actions", human beings, who cannot stop thinking, must always act—any kind of action will suffice. In this sense, fascism brought relief [sukui] to the nihilists, just like the cure for a kind of psychic disease. 60

Though the parallels between the European "active nihilist's" embrace of fascism and Mishima's own embrace of Japanese ultranationalism seem obvious—in both cases out of a desperate need for an "action philosophy"—in the same essay he wittily makes light of those leftist critics who call him a "fascist":

I developed an interest in fascism because certain leftist magazines called me a fascist. Generally, leftists think that "fascist" is the worst thing they can call anyone, so, if we translate this word into everyday language, it means something like "idiot" or "nincompoop". Even so, this was the first time I'd been called any kind of "...ist", so it tickled my vanity a little. A friend of mine who is even more bad-mouthed than the Communists said to me: "Up to now you were no more than a pederast so, in being called a fascist, you've graduated to being an ist for the first time—and that's something." 61

I would by no means argue that Mishima must necessarily be labelled a "fascist"—or even a "Nazi-sympathizer". Though undoubtedly he sympathized with the general world-view of the European fascists and Nazis—and with their military-machismo style—just as surely his sensibilities were offended by their "excesses". Despite all his nihilist bluster, his "tough-guy" pose, and what we might call his cultivation of the "machismo of evil", Mishima was, after all, a man of some intellectual
and aesthetic refinement, and thus could never be a total nihilist in his moral judgements. There were limits to the level of violence even he would tolerate; he did recognize certain minimum standards of civilized behavior. Perhaps most significantly, he felt that terrorists should be carefully selective in their choice of victims. Thus, for instance, he condemned the young rightist who had attacked the wife and maid of the Chūō Kōron president in 1960, because the latter had published a story considered insulting to the Imperial Family. Speaking to a student audience in 1968, Mishima remarked:

"Komori [the young rightist] of the Chūō Kōron Incident was bad business. The worst thing is attacking women and children. One of the splendid things about the young officers in the February 26 [1936] Rebellion was that they didn't harm any women or children." 62

We should note, though, that the unspoken implication here, the "other side" to what Mishima is saying, is that, though indiscriminate killing is wrong, selective killing is quite permissible. While "one of the splendid things" about the young rebel officers of the 1930's was that they refrained from killing women and children, another of the "splendid things", presumably, was that they did kill certain "corrupt" members of the Establishment—just as Mishima's hero, Isao, does in Runaway Horses.

While I would not argue, then, that Mishima should be placed on the same moral level as the European fascists and Nazis, what I would argue is that, as much as in their case, his politics were an expression of his nihilism. This is true,
first and foremost, because of the centrality of violence in his politics. What distinguishes him in this regard from those hard-core "active nihilists", the fascists and Nazis, is something more like an aesthetic than a moral scrupulosity: he does not condemn political murder \textit{per se}, but his traditional sense of chivalry would exempt women and children from being "legitimate" targets—since, in a traditional society, they have no power anyway, and therefore no place in the murderous political power-struggle. But there is no doubt that Mishima still believes, along with the fascists and Nazis, in the all-importance of "direct action"; in other words, he believes, to quote Hermann Rauschning's summary of Nazi doctrine again, that "the use of violence in a supreme effort liberates creative moral forces in human society which lead to social and national renewal".\textsuperscript{63} And he also shares the anti-intellectualism of the Nazis, what Rauschning calls their "anti-intellectual attitude of 'dynamism'", which he attributes to their nihilist conception of man:

Man...is not a logical being, not a creature guided by reason or intelligence, but a creature following his instincts and impulses, like any other animal. Consequently, reason cannot provide a basis for a social order or a political system. The barbaric element of violence...is the one element that can change a social order.... 64

The theme of "man as puppet" is central also to Mishima's nihilism. And, as with the Nazis, what would replace reason as the guiding force of his political system would be a "mysticism" of race, a national mythology centred, in his case, not on a \textit{Führer} or a \textit{Duce} but on the \textit{Tennō}, the Japanese Emperor. To put it bluntly: all violence would be sanctioned in the name
of the Emperor. Since there would be no need to resort to "reason" to justify action, men would no longer be trapped by passive nihilism—as always happened when they began to reason. One may see this illustrated clearly in the tetralogy, in which violence is definitely glorified at the expense of reason. A man of reason such as Honda—a lawyer of all things—uses his reason only for self-justification; like every other "intellectual" who appears in Mishima's novels, he is a passive nihilist: his intellectual prowess makes him a cynic and a coward. Only a "pure" young man such as Isao, an intellectual innocent, is capable of the "heroic" acts of murder and suicide.

Indeed, it would be difficult to say what Mishima really hoped to accomplish by his political activism beyond a general increase in the level of violence. Certainly his "emperor-worship" was no more than a private fantasy, which had nothing to do, for instance, with the real Japanese Emperor, Hirohito—who, as a matter of fact, had no desire to be worshipped. Indeed, Mishima had once got into trouble with the more realistic "emperor-worshippers" for criticizing Hirohito on the grounds that he had betrayed the heroic war-dead by renouncing his divine status. Though he denounced the 'thirties' rightist Kita Ikki for trying to make use of the Emperor for his own social-reformist ends, one might charge Mishima with much the same thing—albeit to serve the ends not of social reform but of active nihilism.

And what were those ends? Certainly not social improvement, not the betterment of the lives of the "masses", for whom
Mishima cared nothing. As Noguchi Takehiko has pointed out, in this respect Mishima differed fundamentally from the young rebel officers of the 'thirties whom he idolized: most of them came from impoverished farming villages and had ample reasons for their grudge against the Establishment. But Mishima chose to downplay these social motives; they seemed to vulgarize what were otherwise the young officer's "pure" acts of violence. To the "haughty" Mishima, writes Noguchi, "such facts seemed to have been somewhat suspect, vulgarly seditious, and more suited to an agitprop novel" and thus he almost entirely excluded them from *Runaway Horses*. The novel's narrator tells us that Isao explained nothing to his recruits: there need be no social/reformist justifications; their only "general plan" would be to "resolve on action, no matter what kind of action", since "everything that was evil" in the world "approved of one's impotence [muryoku] and inactivity [mui]". Isao's "moral code", then, is based on the simple nihilist dialectic: action is good, passivity is evil. And, of course, hidden behind this is another nihilist code: death is preferable to life.

The Marxist critics, of course, have had a "field day" with Mishima; for them he has been almost a "dream come true", the most convenient of whipping boys, the very epitome of all the "bourgeois decadence" they had always been talking about. If they had invented him themselves, they could not have designed a more archetypal—or caricature—opponent: scion of a privileged, upper-bourgeois family, completely lacking a "social conscience", but "playing" at revolution merely to gratify
his nihilist/narcissist impulses—or, more sinisterly, resorting to fascism to shore up the declining privileges of his class. Admittedly, Mishima provided the Marxists with so much ammunition against himself that it would be difficult to defend him except in the usual rather lame way one defends "disreputable" writers: he is an artist and should be valued as such; his politics need not be taken seriously as politics, but only for the "aesthetic" use he makes of them in his works. Of course, the writer himself might object to such a "defense", since its unspoken implication is that he is a kind of idiot-savant who should not be expected to function responsibly in the "real world". And in Mishima's case there is an added complication: he did finally trespass into the "real world", and not with pen but with sword in hand.

At any rate, if Mishima can be said to have hoped for any concrete, positive result from his rightist activism—beyond the realization of a private fantasy—it was to "enhance the spiritual strength" of Japanese men—to use the phrase in which Nietzsche defined the primary aim of active nihilism by making their lives more "manly", more dangerous—and more violent. When he argues that the Emperor is the indispensible cornerstone of Japanese culture—"the Emperor as cultural concept" [bunka-gainen toshite no tennō], as he says in his late essay, "On the Defense of Culture" (Bunka bōei ron, 1969)—what he means by "Japanese culture" is not just such things as the tea ceremony and flower arrangement; what he means above all is the samurai warrior code of Bushido, the code according to which
one resolves all moral conflicts "by choosing immediate death". It is the divine Emperor who sanctifies this code—and, indeed, who enables the warrior to die happily. During the Pacific War, after all, all good Japanese soldiers were expected to die shouting: "Tennô Heika banzai!" ("Long live His Majesty the Emperor!") Without the divine Emperor, the Japanese warrior would have nothing to die for.

Mishima wholeheartedly accepted Ruth Benedict's characterization of Japanese culture as having "two sides", one peaceful and the other warlike, symbolized by the "chrysanthemum" and the "sword". And he felt that the "sword" side had been increasingly neglected in modern times—and even in the peaceful Tokugawa period which preceded modern times, when, he believed, the "feminization" of the Japanese male had begun. As he says in his Introduction to the Hagakure:

...we are constantly being told of the feminization of Japanese males today—it is inevitably seen as the result of the influence of American democracy, "ladies first", and so forth—but this phenomenon too is not unknown in our past. When, breaking away from the rough-and-tumble masculinity of a nation at war, the Tokugawa bakufu had securely established its hegemony as a peaceful regime, the feminization of Japanese males immediately began. 73

It follows from this, of course, that in order to reverse the process, in order to "remasculinize" the Japanese male, the nation will have to become more warlike. Over the past century the process of "feminization" has only worsened. In Runaway Horses the narrator speaks of the "spiritual massacre" (seishin-teki gyakusatsu) that had been committed by the Meiji government in 1876 when it banned the wearing of swords. This symbolic
"castration" of the most manly of Japanese men—the samurai—was repeated on an even larger scale by the "emasculcation" of the Imperial Army after its humiliating defeat in the Pacific War: its reduction to the farcical status of a "self-defense force"—as Mishima lamented in his "final statement" to members of this force on the day of his death. Being "condemned" forever to play the contradictory role of a "pacifist army", the flower of Japanese manhood (as Mishima conceived the military to be) were no longer allowed to be "real men"—aggressive, dangerous, quick to defend their honor with their lives—they were like tigers with their fangs and claws removed.

One may see from all this that Mishima's "politics" are obviously an expression on a wider, social level of the same kind of "masculine protest" we already saw functioning on the narrower, personal level of his psychology—and the psychology of his fictional alter egos. And the "masculine protest" itself, as we have also seen, is the psychological expression par excellence of what is known in Nietzsche's philosophy as "active nihilism". In Mishima's view, Japan as a whole had suffered the same kind of "feminization" or "emasculcation" in its modern history as he himself had suffered in his childhood; thus the "socio/political" cure he recommended for the "spiritual malaise" of the entire country was essentially the same as the "cure" he had applied to himself: in a word, study kendo; acquire the old "kendo-team spirit". With Japan once again a nation of swordsmen instead of Toyota salesmen, the Emperor and the Imperial Army would naturally be restored to their rightful position.
Insofar, then, as Mishima's ultranationalism was not of the "conventional" sort but an expression of his nihilism; insofar as he espoused it not out of any newly acquired "faith" but as a ready-made "justification" of his "blood-lust", then certainly it falls within the mainstream of twentieth-century nihilist politics, which includes Naziism and fascism. In his "New Theory of Fascism", Mishima tries to dissociate himself—and the wartime Japanese nationalists—from the European fascists by pointing to what he sees as some crucial differences: Japanese nationalism was not based on a systematic, man-made philosophy such as that of fascism but on emperor-worship; it did not appeal to the intelligentsia as fascism appealed to many European nihilists, and, finally:

The genesis of fascism is inseparably linked to the spiritual conditions of Europe from the latter part of the nineteenth century to the beginning of this century. And the fascist leaders themselves were definite nihilists. Nothing could be further than fascism from the optimism of the Japanese right-wing.

Though he grants that the Japanese ultranationalists were as racist as the fascists, he contends that racism is only a "secondary phenomenon" of fascism: "What the Japanese right wing had in common with fascism was mainly this secondary aspect", and this is simply because "racism is the easiest weapon to use"—presumably, to arouse the masses.

But Mishima's attempts here to befuddle those leftist critics who would associate him with the fascists are somewhat disingenuous. While there may be a cultural or stylistic difference between pledging blind obedience to a tennô on the one hand and a führer or a duce on the other, for the nihilist
both these "acts of submission" may be made to serve the same purpose: forging a whole populace into one mass expression of the national will-to-power. As Albert Camus once said of the hero of his own novel, The Fall (La Chute, 1956): "as a good modern nihilist, he exalts servitude". Mishima's own exaltation of blind servitude to the Emperor as deity certainly fits this nihilist pattern; and, on the other hand, the European nihilist's exaltation of blind submission to a Hitler or a Mussolini as personifications of the national will-to-power was every bit as "suprarational" or "mystical" as emperor-worship. It may seem paradoxical that a nihilist should "exalt servitude": one usually imagines a nihilist as an egotist bent only on the satisfaction of his personal will-to-power—or, in Mishima's case, as a narcissist concerned only with his own self-glorification. But, of course, the real nihilists "exalt servitude" only for others, not for themselves; all of their pseudo-mystical nationalism is merely a device for manipulating other people, especially the despised "masses". As Helmut Thielicke points out in the passage quoted earlier:

...the really dedicated National Socialists knew very well that "people and race" are not the ultimate forces of reality. Nor did they really believe in the idea of personality which is connected with and emphasized in the Führer principle. For all mass leaders are very definitely cynics and despisers of humanity....

Thielicke refers to the nihilism of such people as "camouflaged" or "ciphered"; in other words, their nihilism is "masked" by their ultranationalism and Führer-worship. As for Mishima, there can be no doubt that he was also a "cynic and despiser of humanity"--his novels are rife with misanthropy. And we also
know that, since early childhood, he was extremely adept at hiding his "true self" behind a variety of masks. Could it be that his ultranationalism and emperor-worship were only the last of these masks—a "heroic" mask now rather than the "mask of conventionality" he had felt obliged to wear in his youth, a mask more pleasing to his ego and more consonant with his "aesthetics of blood and metaphysics of death", but a mask nonetheless, because fashioned out of a "faith" he did not possess? Certainly, for instance, there were limits to his "submission" to the Emperor. When it came to an actual clash between the Emperor's will and his own—as in the question of imperial divinity—there can be no doubt as to whose will took precedence: Mishima did not hesitate to try to "correct" the imperial will. While he may have been accurate in his portrait of the typical Japanese ultranationalist as a non-intellectual "optimist" with a simple faith in the Emperor rather than a sophisticated, systematic world-view, he himself was about as diametrically opposite to such a "simple, non-intellectual optimist" as one could imagine. Furthermore, he definitely did possess a world-view every bit as "sophisticated" and "systematic" as that of the European fascists—and, indeed, it was essentially the same world-view: that of nihilism. As for his "faith" in the Emperor, and its relation to that nihilist world-view, this is a more complex and ambiguous question—the "sincerity" of a professed faith is never easy to measure. But it seems to me that Mishima provides a clear answer to that question in his final tetralogy.
III. Moral/Political Nihilism in Mishima's Novels

Though the first two of the three major Mishima works I have dealt with are largely "apolitical", nonetheless they are centrally concerned with the moral problems of will and action, and thus prepare the way for Mishima's later "resolution" of these problems in political terms.

Confessions of a Mask makes a moral problem, most obviously, out of the narrator's homosexuality, and the sado-masochism which accompanies it. When the novel was first published, in 1949, it was praised by the critics as a "daring confession" in the "naturalist" tradition of Tayama Katai: a frank expose of the author's sex-life. A number of Japanese critics have regarded the novel's unusual "frankness" as made possible by--and symptomatic of--the general "relaxation" of moral standards in the immediate postwar period--or what Tasaka Kô refers to as a "momentary lapse in sexual taboos". More generally, the "alienation" of the homosexual hero has been thought to reflect the alienation of postwar Japanese youth as a whole, their "nihilist mood" after the apparent vitiation of all traditional values with their country's defeat. In this sense, the young Mishima may even be said to have occupied the position of "moral spokesman" of the new postwar generation, in much the same way as, say, Sartre and Camus did at about the same time in France. Mishima's contemporary, Miyoshi Yukio, for instance, reminisced as follows in 1981 about the impact the Confessions had on his generation when it was first published:

Reading it at that time, our generation understood very well that the homosexuality had a symbolic meaning.
In short, during the war we had been taught about the Emperor as a personal god and we believed it, but after the defeat all values were reversed and a new reality began. In this sense we all felt like demobilized soldiers. But demobilized soldiers return to their homes and we had none to return to. We were in suddenly new conditions, and we continually felt alienated from those conditions.... Mishima and I are about the same generation; the Pacific War started when we were in Middle School. For our kind of generation, the relation between reality and normalcy cannot be maintained, so we can understand homosexuality as a metaphor of the effort to form a relation with reality, of a kind of connected/non-connected relation with reality.

It is entirely appropriate, then, that Umehara Takeshi, editor of *Nihilism* (*Nihirizumu*, 1968), a volume of stories and essays by such postwar "nihilists" as Dazai Osamu, Ishikawa Jun, Takeda Taijun and Sakaguchi Ango, credits Mishima with being the first one to recognize the nihilist philosophical and moral implications of the postwar Japanese version of the "death of God"—the Emperor's renunciation of his divinity:

This collapse of the godhead of the Emperor was really a metaphysical kind of event [*keiji jōgaku-tekijiken*] in Japan. Mishima Yukio was the one who noticed this—though rather a long time after the event itself. Unlike Sakaguchi [Ango] or the scholars demobilized after the war, he had not staked his life on the Emperor and then experienced nihilism when the imperial system collapsed. Rather he was a thinker about the reality of the confusion of values after the defeat. Something was missing in peace and democracy. Intense enthusiasm was lacking, and thus Mishima longed for his past in which this enthusiasm and faith existed. Did not faith in the Emperor exist exactly as this kind of enthusiasm and faith some twenty years before? He depended on the reality of the existence of this kind of god, and criticized the corruption of those people who had lost this god. And Mishima criticized the human emperor, asking whether it was not a breach of faith for a god to confess that he was not a god. 85

The Mishima of whom Umehara is speaking here is, of course, the Mishima of the 1960's, two decades after the publication of
the Confessions. It was not until the 'sixties that he began to explicitly discuss the "metaphysical" or "nihilist" import of the Emperor's renunciation of his godhead. Nevertheless, as Miyoshi testifies, already in the Confessions Mishima had captured the general nihilist mood produced by the sudden post-war collapse of the traditional system of values—the "corner-stone" of which was the Emperor.

At the same time that the Confessions is redolent of "post-war nihilism", though, there is also a strange conventionality—and even harshness—about some of the narrator's moral judgments, especially in regard to his own homosexuality. There is a great contrast in this respect between this early work and the two later works I have discussed, which are morally unconventional to say the least. The contrast seems all the greater when we realize that the "sins" of the Confessions' narrator are more "in thought than in deed", whereas Mizoguchi and Isao commit actual acts of violence and destruction which, nonetheless, the author seems to exonerate. But, of course, there are legitimate aesthetic reasons for these moral incongruities. The young confessor, for instance, has a point to drive home by his apparent self-castigations. A critic such as Moriyasu Ribun, in fact, suspects that these judgments are purposely exaggerated: for example, the narrator's description of his homosexual urges as an "evil decadence" (jaaku na daraku) and the "most malignant form of degeneration" (ichiban akushitsu no taihai). Moriyasu argues that, given Mishima's experience of the aristocratic boarding school, the Gakushûin, he could
not really have believed in these exaggerated epithets:

In the dormitory of the Gakushūin in the prewar period, where boys of the privileged classes lived, homosexual incidents were commonplace, so even if the "I" [of the Confessions] is not Mishima himself, there were probably many such boys around him. So I do not think Mishima really felt, as is emphasized so repeatedly in the novel, that homosexuality was such an extraordinarily shameful thing as to be a "cursed...special circumstance" or an "unusual...sexual perversion". 87

Moriyasu suspects that these "exaggerations" enable Mishima to dramatize himself by donning the "mask" of a "'chronic case' of the age".88 Noguchi Takehiko similarly argues that Mishima's donning of the "mask of a sexual deviant" was an example of his "aggressive opportunism"—in other words, a case of "painting himself black" so as to blend in with a dark age:

...this postwar "age" of disorder and confusion, of the collapse of social taboos, of an unprecedented reversal of values, was what made these "confessions" possible. I am not saying that Mishima, by choosing this form of scandalous confessions, and leaving his "nihilistic aesthetics" in the background, was ingratiating himself with the postwar literary world. But it cannot be doubted that, in this age when wild, amoral, anarchistic energies were let loose—an age of burnt ruins, tramps, wholesale selling, women of the night, the black market, burglars etc.—this novel in which appear, shaded, shocking subject matter and explicit language of self-analysis, conforms to the kind of language and subject matter favored by the so-called taste of the age, and has the intention of trying to adjust itself to the age. In Mishima's own words: "Truly I slept together with that age. No matter what pose I assumed of being against the age, still I slept with it." So Mishima's opportunism was skillfully aggressive. Putting on the "mask" of a sexual deviant, which seems like his unmasked face, he went out into the world "confessing" honestly that he could not adjust to the postwar "everyday life". While people were looking at this monstrous apparition, trying to decide whether to believe in it or not, Mishima gained his rightful position in the postwar literary world. 89

While there is no doubt that Mishima was a skillful and persistent self-publicist—and two decades later he would
"paint himself black" in another way, politically rather than morally, just at a time, as in the late 'forties, when he was beginning to suffer from "public neglect"—nonetheless it seems to me that there is also a more important reason—and one more integral to the novel—for his unaccustomed "moralism" and "negative self-definition". As I pointed out earlier, his central nihilist argument is served by this, his view of himself as "victim" of a terrible and inescapable fate. And this is also why he does not try to "base a new morality" on his homosexuality, as Noguchi points out:

The Mishima who wrote the Confessions is definitely not the André Gide who wrote Corydon. To use Sartre's argument in denouncing Baudelaire, the hero, "I", does not aim to base a new morality and logic on the reality of his homosexuality, but always assigns a minus sign to his own "character" as it is. "I" is the kind of person who says: "It didn't matter to me whether the war was lost or won. I wanted only to be reborn as something else." He is the type of person who regards himself as an unusual person or a heretic; to put it in Sartre's terms, he tries to adapt himself negatively to a society governed by the morality of others, he entrusts the establishment of his coordinating axis to others, he asserts the power of his own existence by that minus image of himself. I'm not trying to censure Mr. Mishima by saying this, and I'm not looking down on the Confessions. I'm only trying to explain that Mishima does not call in this novel for the social rehabilitation of sexual deviants. 90

The fact that Mishima could not simply "live with" his homosexuality, his "feminization" and his "passivity", the fact that he could not simply adopt a Gide-like attitude of tolerant acceptance and even vindication, was, of course, the source of all that was to follow: a lifetime of overcompensation and "masculine protest". As Moriyasu points out, most men write their autobiography at a mature age, out of a nostalgic "looking back", but the Confessions, being written by a
twenty-four-year-old, naturally also has a strong element of "looking forward".\textsuperscript{91} Already in the \textit{Confessions} we discover the roots of his desire to be "reborn as something else". But, as yet, he does not seem to have developed any effective "plan of action" to realize this ambition. The only "action" he seems able to take to engage with the "outer" or "real" world is to don a mask. And this leads to what we might regard as the second major moral problem of the novel: the narrator's mask-wearing.

The narrator's first consciousness of "mask-wearing" occurs early in the novel when the expectations of his girl cousins compel him to play the role of a "normal" boy who enjoys such things as war-games.\textsuperscript{92} This, we might say, is still an "innocent" kind of mask-wearing, in that it is done simply out of a desire to please others and the "deception" involved causes no harm. "Innocent" as it is, though, it still habituates the narrator to the act of mask-wearing itself, as the only satisfactory way he can relate with others and win their acceptance. Thus it prepares the way for his later, more sinister and harmful mask-wearing as a "normal male" in his relations with women. As Moriyasu notes, he seems to feel "a triumphant joy in deceiving women".\textsuperscript{93} Indeed, he even imagines himself as a kind of "Don Juan" who entices women to fall in love with him, only to abandon them later--though even he realizes the sad irony of this "illusion", considering his sexual impotence with women.\textsuperscript{94} As Moriyasu points out, though, there is a marked incongruity between his supposed extreme moral sensitivity in
regard to his homosexuality on the one hand, and his noticeable lack of such sensitivity in his treatment of women on the other. And, of course, this reinforces the impression that the former is an "exaggeration" for the sake of the novel's central argument.

But, as a number of critics have pointed out, there is a far larger significance to the narrator's mask-wearing than merely his moral insensitivity, or the delight he takes in deceiving women. And this has obvious relevance to the whole of Mishima's life and work. Tsuge Teruhiko has made the interesting suggestion that Mishima's compulsive "mask-wearing" is somehow related to his social background:

The "mask" of "Confessions of a Mask" is a word with very deep levels of meaning; if so, is it not true that Mishima was a writer who concealed his true intentions (honne) throughout his life? Because of his upbringing, belonging to the wartime literary school, and his education at Gakushuin, where surface appearance (tatemae) was so important—anyway, he hid his true intentions.

It was for this reason, concludes Tsuge, that Mishima wrote the Confessions from such an "objective" point of view: since he felt compelled to "hide his true intentions", he could not bear to write of himself in the usual, all-revealing, "intimate" manner of the traditional Japanese "I-novelist" (shishōsetsuka).

While Tsuge is no doubt correct in asserting that the Japanese upper classes are extremely sensitive to tatemae or surface appearances, this is, in fact, a concern which pervades all levels of Japanese society—to a degree perhaps unique among world cultures. To fully understand Mishima's life and
work, both of which so often involve the kind of role-playing and mask-wearing which seem, to Western readers especially, superficial and even narcissistic, certainly one must take into account this all-importance of "face" and surface appearance—and thus of "mask"—in Japanese culture as a whole.

But, important as this cultural factor undoubtedly is, there is another factor which, it seems to me, is of even deeper significance: namely, Mishima's own nihilism. Japanese society may encourage mask-wearing, but Mishima's mask-wearing is obviously necessitated by something deeper than social convention. Since childhood he seems to have developed a "desperate dependency" on the mask, as if he felt that, without it, he would be nothing. Since "the mask is all", he clings to it as desperately as a drowning man might cling to a piece of wood—for, indeed, he feels that, without this single token of his identity, he might well drown in the underlying chaos of his psyche.

Thus, as Tasaka Kō asserts, in the Confessions we must regard the narrator's mask as "itself his true face" (sugao), since, if we try to look for his true face behind the mask, we will find, not a clear, fully-formed face but a "sea of confusion, formless inner desires and abstract passions...." But, as Noguchi Takehiko points out, the reader is easily deceived by Mishima's "game of masks":

The reader thinks he can see, in this novel, the unpainted face of Mishima Yukio confessing the "naked truth" with his mask removed.... But what the reader sees as Mishima's unpainted face is really another mask made exactly to resemble him. Behind this mask which exactly resembles the real thing, which is lonely
but sensuous, and which is stamped with the seal of a sexual deviant, probably—though no-one can perceive this—there lies hidden a Medusa-like face full of anathema and hostility towards postwar society. Or, rather, perhaps there is not even any face at all.

First of all, a face is unnecessary for that "abstract passion" which forms the essence of Mishima; we might say that all that is needed is an expression full of rapture floating in mid-air. Thus Mishima's confessions are impossible without a mask. Earlier I described Mishima's literary portrait as a two-sided face, one side turned towards life and the other towards death. But what we see as his "unpainted face" is probably none other than the god of death. Because the face turned towards life is always covered with some kind of mask. 100 [emphasis in original]

In Nietzsche's terms, Mishima's mask is thus an Apollonian "ordering principle" which protects him against both the inner chaos of his own psyche and the outer chaos of the world around him—or of "life" in general. This is why, in the Confessions, the narrator dons his "mask of normalcy" not only to establish a deceptive relationship with Sonoko—who, as Tasaka Kô says, represents woman and therefore life itself—but also to establish a deceptive relationship with himself, to deceive, so to speak, his own inner demons.

In this respect, the moral problem of the narrator's mask-wearing relates directly to the third and most important moral problem of the novel, which is presented by his determinism. If, after all, the narrator were convinced that he could effect some real, substantial change in his "nature" as a homosexual, then he would not feel the need always to hide behind masks. But he is convinced that his homosexuality is "fated" and therefore inescapable—and, as we have seen, this seems confirmed by the novel's ending. Since he is unwilling simply to accept his homosexuality, what choice has he but to resort to masks to
"hide it" both from himself and from others? The later Mishima, of course, would find more "active" ways to try to resist his "destiny"—though we may suspect that even his later "activities" were but another variety of mask-wearing. Nevertheless, the determinism of the Confessions, its denial of the possibility of effective moral action, makes this work seem, especially in contrast to Mishima's later works, an expression of "pure", unadulterated passive nihilism. Thus a critic such as Matsumoto Tôru criticizes the novel for its lack of "tension" because of the "passive attitude" the narrator adopts towards the problem of his homosexuality. And he attributes this passivity to the "self-indulgence (amasa) of the young Mishima's thinking". Indeed, Mishima himself, as Tsuge Teruhiko points out, later came to view the introspective, self-dissecting kind of writing of the Confessions as the "woman's way"

In other words, to judge from this early novel it seems that Mishima had not yet discovered, at the time of its writing, the "escape route" of active nihilism; he had not yet embarked upon a full-fledged "masculine protest". His total "passivity" is most conspicuous in his attitude towards the war: he is content to remain a passive spectator, protected from real danger by his upper-class status. As Noguchi Takehiko remarks, there is an "odd, uneven match" between this Mishima, who seems concerned only with his own survival and who is definitely the opposite of an "aggressive war-lover", and the Mishima of the 'sixties, who, in The Voices of the Heroic Spirits (Eirei no koe, 1966), "makes the kami-kaze fighters sing an anthem of
death". Or, to add an even more striking contrast, there is quite a difference between the *Confessions*’ narrator’s "passive resistance" towards his fate as homosexual and Lt. Takeyama's "active acceptance" of his fate as suicide in another Mishima work of the 'sixties, "Patriotism" (*Yūkoku*, 1960). As Sadoya Shigenobu points out, by this time he was trying to "link what Nietzsche spoke of as 'love of fate' [amor fati] with the pure love of Lt. Takeyama and his wife", the highest expression of which is their mutual suicide. In other words, by the 'sixties Mishima had discovered active nihilism.

The first significant expression of his active nihilism, though, came several years before his final "ultranationalist" decade, in the unconventional form of his 1956 novel, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*. The principal moral/aesthetic problem Mishima faced in writing this novel was, of course, the problem of how to "justify" Mizoguchi's act of arson, and, in the process, to make of this "mad monk" a sympathetic character. A number of leading critics seem to have felt that Mishima failed to solve this problem. After all, as Noguchi Takehiko points out, to burn down the famous golden pavilion was "quite a crime against public morals". Nakamura Mitsuo accused Mishima of a lack of moral seriousness in turning "an outrageous criminal act" into a "young aristocrat's intellectual prank". Kobayashi Hideo opined that Mishima should have "killed off" Mizoguchi at the end--no doubt viewing the death penalty as the only fitting punishment for such a heinous offense against Japanese culture. Kobayashi also compared
the novel unfavorably with Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. and certainly it is true that there is an important moral
difference between the two novels: whereas Dostoevsky clearly
condemns Raskolnikov's nihilist justifications for his act of
murder, Mishima seems to condone Mizoguchi's nihilist justifi-
cations for his act of cultural sabotage. Given the author's
nose-thumbing attitude, then, and the cultural significance of
the crime itself, it is easy to understand why some of Japan's
leading "men of culture" found the novel offensive. Needless
to say, Mishima took great pleasure in offending the literary
establishment--while simultaneously, of course, benefitting
from its recognition. And, as the following passage from his
essay, "What Is a Novel?" (*Shōsetsu to wa nani ka*, 1970), shows,
he also enjoyed playing the role of a "dangerous thinker" in
morality as in politics, a Nietzsche-style prophet of "new
values", values which, no doubt, would be "beyond good and
evil":

Nothing stimulates the novelist's imagination more, challenges his ability more, and inspires his creative urge more, than a crime that seems indefensible in the light of ordinary morality. In such a case, the novelist takes pride in his courage to render a different verdict, though the rest of the world may condemn him. Perhaps the criminal, in his unrepentant pride, is the harbinger of hitherto unknown values. In any case, a novel reveals its uniquely ethical nature at a crisis like this one. 111

In the case of *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, the
"ethics" are unique indeed. They can be understood fully, in
fact, only within the context of Mishima's active/passive ni-
hilist dialectic. Mizoguchi's act of arson is "justified"
most obviously as an act of self-liberation, but this does
not mean, as one might be tempted to conclude, that it is an entirely solipsistic action, without any kind of redeeming "social significance", such as pertains to the politically-motivated acts of violence committed by Mishima's later heroes, the 'thirties' terrorists. Despite Kobayashi Hideo's criticism that the work was not a "real novel" because it lacked meaningful interpersonal relationships and relationships between the hero and society, such relationships do, in fact, exist, and, within the context of the novel itself, are "meaningful" enough to function as more subtle justifications of the hero's action. If the whole novel were analysed as a series of such "justifications", certainly one would have to take into account not only Mizoguchi's own "liberation" but also the repercussions of his action on people around him and on society at large.

From a strictly nihilist point of view, of course, no act of violence or destruction need be justified. To quote Hermann Rauschning again, the nihilist view is that "the use of violence in a supreme effort liberates creative moral forces in human society which lead to social and national renewal". Nevertheless, even if a nihilist novelist subscribes to this "doctrine of violence" himself—as Mishima undoubtedly did—he must expect strenuous resistance to it from most of his readers. Thus he is confronted by a difficult, perhaps impossible, task in "reader persuasion". And what makes it even more difficult is that, whatever "arguments" he uses, they all circle back in the end to the original nihilist argument: that violence is its own justification. In The Temple of the Golden Pavilion
too, Mishima's "justifications" of Mizoguchi's act of arson are all variations of this central theme.

The way the reader finally judges Mizoguchi's act of arson also determines, of course, the way he finally judges Mizoguchi himself. Trying to make Mizoguchi a "sympathetic character" was perhaps the most difficult of Mishima's problems. Indeed, it may have been an insurmountable one. If the novel fails conspicuously in any area, it is probably here. The only readers one can imagine "identifying" with Mizoguchi are those with similar destructive or pyromaniac urges. He is not only "evil" but takes pride in being evil—as, for instance, in the sense of power he feels in deceiving his Superior or in trampling on the prostitute's stomach. True enough, as Noguchi Takehiko points out, Mizoguchi possesses his own peculiar kind of moral fastidiousness: he will trample on a pregnant prostitute but will not flatter the Superior to gain advancement, to inherit the temple for himself.114 In other words, he possesses his own kind of stubborn, fanatic pride, the pride of a frustrated idealist who feels himself "too good for the world", but this is hardly enough to endear him with the reader. Perhaps the best that can be said of Mizoguchi has been said by Miyoshi Masao: he is a "philosopher of beauty with brilliant insights, though admittedly nihilistic and perverse".115 Which is to say: his appeal is all intellectual. One might argue that this is enough, that reader/hero identification is unnecessary in a "philosophic novel". But, quite apart from any consideration of the resultant loss in the novel's emotional
power, the point is that, if readers do not identify—or, at least, "sympathize"—with the hero, they are less likely to accept the author's justifications—however intellectually impressive—for the hero's "unconventional" behavior. To refer again to Crime and Punishment, for instance, by the end of the novel we are prepared to forgive Raskolnikov everything only because Dostoevsky has succeeded in making us identify with him in such an intimate and moving way. The crucial difference probably lies in Raskolnikov's essential humility—once free of the madness of his "Napoleon complex". Perhaps it is only natural that we are able to forgive evil followed by remorse, but not evil followed by a smug self-complacency. Thus it is unlikely that many readers will find themselves moved by Mizoguchi's final resolution "to live".

Mishima is somewhat more successful, it seems to me, in the "justifications" he adduces from Mizoguchi's relations with the other main characters. Basically, the technique is to show the hero surrounded by such a quagmire of passive nihilism that any form of action—even an act of destruction—is welcomed as a refreshing change, and seems even to promise some "purification" of the moral atmosphere. Indeed, the "terrible beauty" of the final conflagration may be seen to take on a symbolic tenor in this respect: in a world of unremitting darkness, it at least provides some momentary light. More specifically, the act of arson may be seen as Mizoguchi's "moral protest" against the evils of passivity as he has experienced them since childhood: not only his own passivity, but the passivity
of his father who did nothing about his wife's infidelity, the passivity of Uiko, who betrayed her lover to the police, the passivity of his friend, Tsurukawa, who committed suicide because of a disappointment in love, and, above all, the passive nihilism of Kashiwagi and of the Zen Superior.

The precise nature of Mizoguchi's relation with Kashiwagi—and of Kashiwagi's role in the novel as a whole—has been the subject of much debate. Is he merely a "double" or is he in some ways Mizoguchi's opposite? To what extent is he Mishima's own "mouthpiece"? Noguchi Takehiko, for instance, takes the extreme view that both characters are "parts of the same person", who is none other than Mishima himself.\(^{116}\) Tsuge Teruhiko, on the other hand, sees Kashiwagi as a more extreme nihilist than Mizoguchi, and thus as a necessary catalyst of the action, a Mephistopheles who eggs Mizoguchi on to commit his act of arson.

What Tsuge forgets, though, is that Mizoguchi is almost prevented from taking action by Kashiwagi's passive nihilist doctrine that knowledge, not action, is the only thing that counts in the world.\(^{117}\) While the two characters do share the same nihilist world-view, they differ significantly in the way they react to this world-view. The important point is that Mizoguchi grows beyond Kashiwagi: he reverses the latter's scheme of values, restoring action to its "rightful" place, above knowledge. If Kashiwagi is a Mephistophelean tempter, what he tempts Mizoguchi towards is not destructive action but inaction, passive nihilism. In other words, he represents
"evil" from the perspective not of conventional morality but of active nihilism. As Noguchi points out, Kashiwagi belongs to the same "line" of Mishima characters as Seiichirô in Kyôko's House and Tôru in The Decay of the Angel, an "ironist, a man who reflects on everything ironically". In all of Mishima's novels, the sense of irony possessed by sophisticated intellects functions as a primary force of passive nihilism: like an intellectual acid, it corrodes the will to act. How can a man who views everything ironically, after all, be made to follow Jô-chô's advise to "die a fanatic's death"? Certainly not Kashiwagi. Mizoguchi, though, still has enough of the "fanatic" in him to stake his life on the destruction of the golden pavilion.

The Zen Superior, too, belongs in the same camp as Kashiwagi. He represents all the "evils" of "Buddhist passive nihilism" as diagnosed by both Nietzsche and Mishima. One may see this clearly in the attitude of "passive non-resistance" he takes towards Mizoguchi's own "evil"; much to the latter's chagrin, he makes no attempt to punish or even to rebuke his wayward charge. Similarly, when Mizoguchi confronts him with the fact of his affairs with geisha, the Superior "shows his true colors" by responding that it all "amounts to nothing" and is "meaningless". The effects of such passive nihilism are evident in his body, mind and spirit: he has a feminine body, soft and fleshly; he is compared by Mizoguchi to a "living corpse", still glowing with health but void of all spirit; and his "powerlessness" or lack of will power is
repeatedly emphasized. His absolute passivity, and the aura of profound "evil" which this produces, is well expressed by his posture during his last appearance in the novel: a posture of animal-like crouching, signifying his abject submission to all the "evil" in the world.

A great contrast to the Superior is formed by another Zen priest, Zenkai, who appears in the final chapter of the novel. He is as masculine, strong-willed and powerful a figure as the Superior is feminine, weak-willed and impotent. He seems to represent the "real" tradition of Rinzai Zen, the active, vigorous and, apparently, sometimes even violent tradition expressed by the various kōan used throughout the novel. Along with these kōan, in fact, he provides the primary impetus which spurs Mizoguchi on to action. It is easy to understand why Mishima felt attracted to the "masculine" form of Zen which Zenkai represents: from a nihilist point of view, Rinzai Zen could be regarded as an active nihilist "masculine protest" against the traditional passivity of most other forms of Buddhism. Whereas Sōtō Zen, for instance, practised only "quiet sitting", Rinzai Zen encouraged active contests of wit among monks and masters over mystical conundrums or kōan, and these were often accompanied by screams, shouts, beatings and other forms of "violent" behavior. The kōan which figure prominently in Mishima's novel—"When you meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha", and "Nansen kills the cat"—seem to exemplify this "violent" side of Rinzai Zen and, at least to the nihilist mind, might seem to offer some justification for violence. As Donald Keene
points out, Mizoguchi identifies himself with Nansen, the "destroyer and liberator". And, indeed, his action does seem to have something in common with the great iconoclastic tradition of Zen: for instance, the burning of sutras to show one's "non-dependency on words". Since the above "violent" koan are usually interpreted as purely symbolic—i.e., not as actually condoning violence but as enjoining spiritual freedom—it could be argued that Mizoguchi's action likewise should be interpreted in a similarly symbolic way: as an "object lesson" in nothingness, a rebuke to all those "decadent" modern-day monks who are much too attached to the beauty of that mere material object, the golden pavilion. Viewed from this "higher" perspective, so to speak, Mizoguchi's act of arson might be seen as an eminently "moral" action. But what prevents most readers from accepting his action in this purely symbolic way, of course, is the brute historic fact that the destruction of the pavilion actually happened. This, perhaps, is the inevitable disadvantage Mishima must suffer for "grounding" his novel in an actual historic event.

Since, in The Sea of Fertility tetralogy, Mishima aimed to create a vast and diverse panorama of over sixty years of Japanese history, it is hardly surprising that the work does not centre on a single moral problem such as the Confessions' narrator's homosexuality or Mizoguchi's act of arson. Nevertheless, the work does centre on the same general moral issues of free will and the need for action, and, as in The Temple of the Golden Pavilion, there is a disposition of "passive" and
"active" natures among the work's various characters: the goodness of an active nature being exemplified primarily by Isao, and the evil of a passive nature by Honda and Tôru. One might think that, with the second volume of the tetralogy, Runaway Horses, Mishima had finally solved his problem of "reader persuasion". It was hardly possible to argue, after all, that Mizoguchi was acting "in defense of Japanese culture" in burning down the golden pavilion; his action could only be "justified", if at all, on a symbolic level. But what of the actions of a 'thirties' terrorists such as Isao? His actions supposedly are taken "in defense of the Emperor", and the Emperor, according to Mishima, was the very "source and guarantor of Japanese culture". But is this enough to convince a modern Japanese reader—not to mention a Western reader—of the "justice" of Isao's murder of the "un-Japanese" capitalist, Kurahara, ostensibly for his "profanation" of the major imperial shrine at Ise? At least one perceptive Japanese critic, Noguchi Takehiko, thinks not.

To the question as to what "conditions" are necessary to "legitimate acts of terrorism in a novel", Noguchi answers that there are two: first, "the author must convince the reader of the emotional purity sustaining the beliefs of the protagonist"; second, he must persuade the reader to see "a certain poetic justice in the death of the terrorist's victim". Noguchi feels that Mishima succeeds in fulfilling the first condition, but fails in the second.

The reason he fails, concludes Noguchi, is that he neglects
to provide Isao with sufficient motivation. Unlike many of the real 'thirties' terrorists, Isao is not the offspring of an impoverished rural family such as were often forced to sell their daughters into prostitution. And yet, says Noguchi, "this poverty not only was the immediate cause of the terrorist acts of the early Shōwa years, it also should have provided the perfect legitimization for the terrorist aspirations of his young hero". Why, then, did Mishima consciously reject for his novel this "ready-made" justification? To have done so, it seems, would have been to detract from the "purity" of Isao's motives in Mishima's eyes, and to turn his own work into some kind of vulgar "agitprop novel". As Noguchi says, Isao's "motives for turning to terrorism do not spring from any simple sense of social justice but are, perforce, conceptual. Or rather, for him it is first and foremost a matter of loyalty and patriotism." But it is an odd form of "loyalty and patriotism". As Noguchi himself points out, Isao and his followers care nothing for what will become of their country after their acts of violence. The only thing they seem to really care about is their own "spiritual salvation" in an age of decadence, and this is to be achieved by "pure actions". The "purity" of an action, it seems, is determined by the degree to which it is unmotivated by considerations of personal or social betterment: thus Isao does not bother to explain to his followers why they must act; in an age of decadent passivity, action is its own justification. Isao's act of murder is, in fact, essentially unmotivated. Kurahara's absurd "crime" of sitting on
a sacred sakaki sprig is offered as only the flimsiest justification—an obvious matter of tatemae only. There is a strange air of unreality about the murder scene itself, in fact: the victim does not cry out or make any protest; he accepts Isao's knife uncomplainingly, with a "relaxed" face, as if feeling no pain. What really interests Mishima is the subsequent scene of Isao's seppuku. He lingers over this in loving detail, and the final "explosion" which occurs after Isao plunges the knife into his abdomen resembles nothing so much as a sexual orgasm—albeit one with the "sun-god emperor" as his partner.

Isao's "pure actions" are performed, of course, "in the name of the Emperor", but it is difficult to see his emperor-worship as anything more than, at best, a private fantasy without any relation to the real Emperor, or, at worst, a thin veneer of "nobility" applied to his violent urges. And one's scepticism on this score seems justified by what occurs throughout the remainder of the tetralogy. It begins to seem, then, that Isao is not so remote from the "active nihilist", Mizoguchi, as he first appeared to be.

For the duration of Runaway Horses, of course, Mishima maintains the mystical "fiction" of Isao's "union" with the divine Emperor, as symbolized throughout by the sun. During his trial Isao delivers a paean to the sun as the "true image of His Sacred Majesty" and, as he commits seppuku in the novel's final scene, he seems to achieve, at last, the long-desired mystical union with this fantasy "sun/emperor". But it is interesting—and perhaps significant—to note that when
the sun again appears in the very last scene of the tetralogy, to "punctuate" Honda's experience of nothingness, it is no longer the "divinized" or anthropomorphized imperial sun but merely the ordinary, impersonal sun of a hot summer's day—which, with its ruthless and unrelenting heat, seems only to reinforce the temple garden's "message" of the indifference if not hostility to man of the whole universe. The all-powerful, benevolent Emperor, fountainhead of the national culture and of amae, seems to have vanished into thin air along with all the other "illusory" identities of the tetralogy. He is as conspicuously absent from this final scene as is Nietzsche's famous "dead God" from the novels of modern Western nihilists. And, indeed, the whole atmosphere of the final scene is one of such uncompromising nihilism that any expression therein of a simple "faith in the Emperor" would seem an absurd incongruity. If this is Mishima's "final statement", it is a nihilist statement pure and simple.

Judging by the tetralogy's conclusion, then, all of the ultranationalist "justifications" for violent action turn out to have been as illusory as Honda's belief in personal reincarnation. Indeed, when one surveys the tetralogy as a whole, one is surprised to discover to what extent its "passive" elements outweigh and overwhelm its "active" ones. If Mishima's new-found "masculinity" and "active nihilism" had become an authentic part of his being—rather than simply another of his "masks"—why was he not able to express it more successfully in his last major work, a work obviously meant to be his
crowning achievement and "last testament" to the world? His original scheme seems to have been to balance the four active "protagonists" against the one passive "deuteragonist", Honda, who appears in all four novels. But, of the four protagonists, only Isao is a pure "man of action". Kiyoaki, the sensitive romantic who dies for his love, though "pure" in his idealism, is hardly very "active"; and Ying Chan and Tôru are every bit as "passive nihilist" as Honda.

It begins to seem, then, that Mishima's "natural" and fundamental world-view remained, until the end, that of a passive nihilist. Despite all the studied machismo of his later years—and his supposed emperor-worship—he was never really able to escape from the passive nihilism and determinism of the young narrator of *Confessions of a Mask*. All the rest was mere mask-wearing, and required a great effort of the will. The final scene of *The Sea of Fertility* is his last "hammer-blow" as a nihilist, and it shatters all of his masks, including even his most cherished one: that of Mishima the ultranationalist and emperor-worshiper. Thus one feels compelled to agree with Umehara Takeshi, who accused Mishima of "fabricating" his own death-of-god crisis in order to "validate" his nihilism:

Things Mishima has written recently express the nihilism of a human being who has lost his god. But did that god ever really exist as Mishima said he did? I do not think that Mishima himself formerly believed in that kind of god. In the writer's plan to try to fabricate, in an age of no gods, a god which is the most difficult to believe in, I think one sees too much falsity. That is rather no more than a fabricated god of a not very deep theory of values and logic. 136

Indeed, one need only read an early Mishima story such as
"Sorrel" (Sukampo, 1938) to discover that his nihilism long predated the Emperor's "fall from divinity", and that this early nihilism, already of the "death and blood and night" variety, had far deeper roots in his psyche than could be planted—or uprooted—by any mere political ideology. The truth is that, from a Nietzschean point of view, Mishima's "active nihilism" was always a sham. What it lacked so conspicuously was Nietzsche's ecstatic, half-crazy joie de vivre, his "Dionysian" frenzy, his desperate need to "justify" life at all costs—even at the cost of accepting violence as a necessary part of life. What Mishima wanted to "justify" was not life but death. He was as essentially negative in spirit as Nietzsche was essentially positive. His real motive in exalting violence and active nihilism was not because these were "life-enhancing", as Nietzsche thought, but because they led to death. In his glorification of the Liebestod, in fact—as in the "erotic suicides" of Isao and of Lt. Takeyama and his wife in the story, "Patriotism"—Mishima was much closer to Nietzsche's arch-enemy Wagner, whom Nietzsche considered a "decadent" romantic and passive nihilist nonpareil. Thus Sadoya Shigenobu is quite mistaken when he says of Mishima's own suicide that it was "exactly a ceremony of the extreme form of Nietzschean nihilism by means of kappuku (disembowelment) and kaishaku (decapitation)". Nietzsche would have wanted nothing to do with such a "ceremony". Nor was it a "ceremony" in the true samurai spirit of seppuku. It was, in fact, a ritual distinctly Mishima's own: the ritual of a passive nihilist disguised by the mask of an active nihilist as he embraced death.
Chapter Three

Notes

2. Quoted in Goudsblom, p.33.
5. ibid.
7. op.cit., p.22.
13. Hingley, p.58.
14. op.cit., p.57.
15. op.cit., p.58.
16. op.cit., pp.80-89.
17. op.cit., p.13.
23. op.cit., p.290, f.2.
29. Mishima Yukio *Zenshū* [hereafter *M.Y.Z.*], (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1973-76), vol.18, p.685. All translations from Japanese my own unless otherwise specified, but, for readers who would like to refer to the published English translations of Mishima's novels, I also give page references to the paperback editions of these, in brackets, as follows: (*Runaway Horses*, tr. Michael Gallagher, New York: Pocket Books, 1975, pp.291-2)
31. op. cit., p.82.
32. op. cit., p.78.
33. *New Fascists*, p.90.
37. *ibid.*
38. op.cit., p.85.
39. op.cit., p.86.
40. op.cit., p.81.
42. *ibid.*
43. op.cit., p.52.
44. See, for instance, his essay on Genêt in *Shôsetsuka no*
kyûka (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1982) and his essay on Oscar Wilde in Aporo no sakazuki (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1982).

45. M.Y.Z. 19, p.29. (Temple of Dawn, p.18)


49. op.cit., p.37.

50. op.cit., p.253.

51. op.cit., p.252.

52. ibid.


55. op.cit., p.175.

56. Quoted in Scott Stokes, p.206. Also, partly, in Agata pp.64-5.


58. ibid.

59. ibid.

60. op.cit., p.174.

61. op.cit., p.168.

62. Quoted in Nathan, p.185.

63. Rauschning, pp.27-8.

64. op.cit., p.28.

65. See Nathan, p.211.


67. op.cit., p.439.

68. M.Y.Z. 18, p.589. (Runaway Horses, pp.197-8.)

69. Will to Power, p.21.

70. M.Y.Z. 33, p.397.
73. Hagakure, p.18.
74. M.Y.Z. 18, p.589. (Runaway Horses, p.197.)
75. Japan Interpreter, p.74.
77. op.cit., p.174.
78. op.cit., p.175.
79. op.cit., p.174.
81. Thielicke, pp.32-3.
86. Moriyasu, p.241.
87. op.cit., p.244.
88. ibid.
90. op.cit., pp.103-4.
91. Moriyasu, p.238.
92. M.Y.Z. 3, p.182. (Confessions, p.27)
93. Moriyasu, p.245.
94. M.Y.Z. 3, p.318. (Confessions, pp.212-3.)
95. Moriyasu, p.245.
96. Tsuge Teruhiko, in above zadankai, p.7.
97. ibid.
99. op.cit., p.27.
100. Noguchi, Sekai, pp.110-1.
103. op.cit., p.15.
104. Tsuge, in above *zadankai*, p.9.
109. Quoted in above *zadankai*, p.22.
119. Hagakure, p.69.
127. op.cit., p.438.
128. op.cit., p.439.
129. ibid.
130. op.cit., p.440.
131. ibid.
133. M.Y.Z. 18, p.589. (Runaway Horses, pp.197-8).
136. Umehara, Nihirizumu, p.25.
137. Sadoya, Mishima Yukio ni okeru seiyō, p.66.
Conclusion

As a nihilist writer Mishima may be placed within an international intellectual tradition whose origins lie in mid-nineteenth-century Europe. Of the two kinds of novelists concerned with nihilism—those who write about nihilism, such as Dostoevsky, and those who write out of nihilism, such as Samuel Beckett, Mishima belongs to the latter kind. Unlike Beckett and other European nihilist novelists of the twentieth century, though, Mishima did not experiment with "anti-novel" forms to express his nihilism. He was as aesthetically conservative as he was intellectually radical. Judged by the standards of Robbe-Grillet and other French "new novelists", his aesthetic practice is inconsistent with his world-view. Though completely without faith in the traditional "bourgeois humanist" model of an orderly, meaningful universe in which human beings exist as distinct individuals making rational moral choices through the exercise of free will, nonetheless he continues to employ an aesthetic form based on that very world-view: the well-made novel of chronologically ordered, syllogistic plots, distinct, recognizable characters and settings (which never "disorient" the reader), and articulate, rational arguments.

It may be urged in Mishima's favor that, though his novels are "oases of order", he is well aware of the desert which lies just beyond, the chaos and nothingness which continually encroach upon the borders, and sometimes he "lets it in". He
creates the illusion of character only to "unmask" it; he creates the illusion of faith only to undermine it; he is still the small boy of whom it was observed that he enjoyed building huge towers of blocks only to knock them down again. In this sense Mishima does resemble the Western novelist he most admired, Thomas Mann, who once confessed that, since he lacked the experimental talents of a Joyce or a Kafka, he could be "original" only by infusing the traditional forms he used with his "modern" sense of irony. Mishima's "irony" is of a more extreme and violent variety than Mann's—the irony of a nihilist. A good example of Mishima's brand of irony is what happens to Honda at the end of the tetralogy: visiting a Buddhist temple in the hope of receiving some psychological reassurance or even spiritual purification before his death, he receives instead a nihilist "hammer blow" which destroys his belief in everything that has made his life meaningful. From an aesthetic point of view, it is important to note that this "hammer blow" destroys not only Honda's belief in reincarnation, but also the whole elaborate structure of the tetralogy itself, which is based on reincarnation. Some readers may feel irritated by Mishima's "Indian giver" strategy here—first giving us the idea, then taking it away—but certainly this is one legitimate mode of nihilist writing: because, as much as, say, Beckett's bleak landscapes populated by anonymous characters, it effectively communicates a powerful sense of nothingness. While Beckett's is completely an "art of emptiness", so to speak, Mishima's is an art of "form and emptiness", or an art
which demonstrates the "emptiness of form". Actually there is a long tradition of such art in literature, though perhaps more in theatre than in the novel. The "gesture" with which Mishima makes everyone and everything vanish at the end of the tetralogy is a theatrical gesture, similar in kind to Prospero's "gesture" towards the end of The Tempest:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits and Are melted into air, into thin air: And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep. (Act IV Scene I)

Such "vanishing acts", though, are probably easier to carry off in the theatre than in the novel. The theatre is more obviously an "art of masks", and theatre-goers do not seem to mind being reminded of this fact—perhaps because the actors stand before them "in the flesh", and so at least are "substantial" in a physical sense. The characters of a novel, though, possess no such actual physical presence, and thus the novelist has a more difficult task from the beginning in convincing his readers of their "substantiality". Once he succeeds in doing so, he risks alienating his readers if he then proceeds to demonstrate that "all is illusion". His readers are apt to feel that their imaginations have been "violated", that they have been "taken for a ride". One might be tempted to conclude, then, that, because of his penchant or need to play "games of masks" with his characters, Mishima's genius
was more suited to the theatre, as some critics have suggested. But this fails to take into account one all-important factor: what might be called Mishima's "autobiographical impetus" as a writer. Theatre is too "public" an art to support the kind of intimate self-revelations which were as necessary a part of Mishima's writing as of the writing of the traditional Japanese "I-novelists" (ši-shôsetsuka).

For Mishima's nihilism was not merely a "philosophical system", an intellectual construct which could be conveniently transposed onto his novels as a structural framework; his nihilism was rooted in the depths of his psyche, so that his need to give vent to it was a deep psychic need. This is most evident in his early work, Confessions of a Mask, which clearly reveals the origins of his nihilism in his homosexuality, sadomasochism, the psychic resistance or "masculine protest" which his homosexuality arouses in him, and, finally, the deterministic view he takes when his "protest" fails. That Mishima's "primary inspiration" as a writer was his need to give expression to these personal psychic conflicts is revealed by the fact that he was never again able to write with such power as he did in the Confessions, his most closely autobiographical work. But even such later works as The Temple of the Golden Pavilion and The Sea of Fertility may also be seen as an expression, albeit more "objectified", of the same psychic tensions, which, in nihilist terms, take the form of an active/passive dialectic. This basic active/passive dialectic is also "translated" into some of the many other "dichotomies" which
obsess Mishima throughout his novels: male/female, young/old, physical/intellectual, beautiful/ugly, idealistic/cynical, innocent/decadent.

Thus, paradoxically, at the same time that Mishima's nihilism militates against his formal structures, it also serves as the underlying formal principle of those structures. In *Confessions of a Mask*, it is the narrator's nihilist determinism which impels him to wear his "mask of normalcy", and it is also his nihilist determinism which finally strips away that mask. In *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, we see this process "objectified" by the symbolic artist-figure, Mizoguchi: his "aesthetics of nothingness" are what attract and bind him to the "illusory structure" of the pavilion, and also what impel him to destroy the pavilion. In *The Sea of Fertility* Honda's "Buddhistic" passive nihilism attracts him to another kind of "illusory structure", that of reincarnation, viewed explicitly as the Asian parallel to Nietzsche's "eternal recurrence". But it is also his nihilism, of course, which finally undermines this structure. On the other hand, Isao's active nihilism motivates him to embrace a mystical ultranationalist ideology, but this also is proven illusory by the tetralogy's final passive nihilist "epiphany".

As one ponders on the problem of Mishima's nihilism, and the nihilism of other writers, there are moments when nihilism seems inimical to everything literature stands for: the celebration of life and of humanity, a *joie de vivre* which, despite many sorrows, never succumbs to despair. At other times, it
seems that nihilism is the natural condition—or, at least, a natural temptation—of the literary mind. A writer, after all, creates people and places ex nihilo and thus may be tempted to see nothingness as the "reverse side" of all creation. A puppet-master, he may be tempted to see even "real" human beings as puppets. A dreamer, he may be tempted to see all life as a dream. This temptation of what might be called "the writer as demigod or enchanter" is perhaps best expressed by Shakespeare in the above-quoted passage. Here the "sense of unreality" takes on a gentle, poetic, dream-like quality, but there are also passages in Shakespeare which give it a harsher, more "nihilistic" expression. As, for instance:

As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport. (King Lear, IV, i, 36)

Or:

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (Macbeth, V, v, 17)

But obviously any writer who yields entirely to the "nihilist temptation" will cease to write. Mishima, in fact, seemed to come close to this in his later years, and his last works perhaps suffer from the fact that he now had more "faith" in the importance of body-building and sword-play than in the importance of writing. Nihilism in its extreme form is anti-creative; one might say that it becomes "all hammer and no mask". Many writers in our century have played a dangerous game of flirtation with the void, and some of these have, in
fact, lost their will to create. Throughout the three decades of his writing career, Mishima performed a delicate balancing act between his "hammer" and his "mask". But his urge to use the hammer, it seems, grew stronger and stronger, until finally he used it on himself.
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