

A Manifestation of Modernity: The Split Gaze and the Oedipalised Space of *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* by Mishima Yukio

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This paper explores the ways in which the modernist paradigm is at work in The Temple of the Golden Pavilion by focusing on its spatial demarcation—a map of the Self against the Other. The boundaries of gender in this text are firmly fixed; the Mother represents corporeality, ignorance, and profanation, while the Father represents spirituality, knowledge, and sacredness. Striving to embody the Father, the narrator is forced into the position of the brooding Son. He is unable to become a speaking subject proper, nor to slip back into the comfortable pre-symbolic domain. The paper also focuses on the narrator's gaze, which constantly splits and vacillates on different levels, being unable to obtain the unified singular perspective necessary for the constitution of the subject.

Introduction

The Temple of the Golden Pavilion (*Kinkakuji*, 1956) by Mishima Yukio (1925–1970) demonstrates high modernist characteristics including the theme of alienation, the use of symbolism and metaphor, and detailed description of the human interior, all of which serve to narrativise a ‘brooder’, a unique human subject, a master of self-searching. Furthermore, the text is foregrounded by the mode of confession: the first-person narrative of a confessant who aims to regain his lost power by telling his story to his reader/confessor. In this sense, the novel is an extension of the project that Mishima undertook in his earlier novel, *Confessions of a Mask* (*Kamen no kokuhaku*, 1949), in which he created an emblematic Foucauldian modern subject through a meticulously structured confessional narrative.

The purported modernity of *Kinkakuji* was the key element in its instant canonisation by departments of Japanese Literature in the 1960s. Throughout the 1970s and beyond, scholars of modern Japanese literature continued to embrace *Kinkakuji* as Mishima's best work, even as Mishima himself departed from his earlier faith in the modernist project. Mishima wrote in 1970, the year he completed his last novel and staged his own ritual suicide:

I have all along had in mind a wish to destroy from the root the modernist misconception of literature, by equalising body and spirit, and by embodying that equality. ... [W]hen it [my wish] is fulfilled, a unison of the creator and his work—the executioner and the condemned’ as Baudelaire would put it—will become possible. I wonder if the era of modernity begins when an artist and his work are separated, and he found his perverse pride in that solitude. What I mean here by ‘modernity’ is also applicable to the ancient

times: Otomo no Yakamochi in *Manyōshū* and Euripides in Greek tragedy, for example, represent ‘modernity’ of this sort.¹

By ‘the modernist misconception of literature’ Mishima is referring to a philosophical issue, not a style of writing. This is an indication of a paradigmatic shift in his stance. In the paradigm of modernity, as Mishima points out, the self-conscious breaks away from the body, looks at it from outside and enables a narcissistic subject to judge itself ‘objectively’ before others judge it for them. As such, the modern narrative is self-reflective, always returning happily to the safe and familiar space of the Self without touching the body of the absolute—irreconcilable and dangerous—Other. Mishima calls ‘this sort’ of ‘modernity’ a ‘spiritual narcissism’:

The myth of Narcissus symbolises the pure model of self-consciousness by celebrating in a naïve manner the purity and sublimity of man’s physicality. When Socratic modernity stealthily creeps in, however, the *intellectual and spiritual narcissism* begins to rule even in Ancient Greece. ... this narcissism relates to something invisible ... and is superior in its universality and applicability ... people can accept it with ease. It is open to everyone, and can be achieved through effort. Because it is invisible, it can secretly satisfy the narcissistic impulse of men in general.²

Mishima’s understanding of the modern has an uncanny resemblance to that of Michel Foucault.³ ‘Socratic modernity’ or ‘intellectual and spiritual narcissism’ is, in Foucauldian terms, ‘the care of the self’ or ‘the governmentality of the self’. The emergence of the Self, according to Foucault, harks back to the Socratic precept: ‘to concern yourself with yourself with wisdom, truth and the perfection of the soul’.⁴ Christian spirituality and monastic principles were developed in the fourth and fifth centuries of the late Roman Empire with the same precept: the ‘care of the self’. The practice of confession was institutionalised through the conviction that ‘man must take care of himself and search every corner of his soul’.⁵ The mode of confession has since disseminated into various aspects of modern living such as the police interrogation, Freudian psychoanalysis, and most notably the modern novel.⁶ As Mishima noted in the above passage, ‘intellectual and spiritual narcissism’ is equally available to everyone; one can achieve it by making an effort to take care of oneself, searching for one’s inner truth, and ‘governing’ oneself with the ‘technique of living’. The modern novel demonstrates this, and the reader of the novel, by taking the position of voyeur, experiences the same process of ‘intellectual and spiritual narcissism’.

Through *Kinkakuji*, Mishima took up the high modernist project of post-war Japan: a literary construction of the modern Japanese subject that was as deep and complex as those found in modern Western literature. He achieved it by recording the narrator’s

¹ Katō, *Shōwa II*, 122. My translation; emphasis in original.

² Mishima, *Mishima Yukio hyōron zenshū*, Vol. 4, 774. The article is entitled ‘Narushizumu ni tsuite’ (‘On narcissism’), and first appeared in *Fujin kōron*, July 1966. Translation and italics are mine.

³ A thesis written in 1942 by the young Mishima entitled, *Ōchō shinri bungakushi* (*A History of Psychological Court Literature*), demonstrates his understanding of the mechanism of modern narratives and the meaning of modernity even before he embarked on his writing career. He locates the rise of modernity in twelfth-century Japanese court literature. See Mishima, *Mishima Yukio hyōron zenshū*, Vol. 1, 834–860.

⁴ Foucault, *Ethics*, 226–227.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 227.

⁶ For the mechanism of confessions, see Tambling, *Confessions*.

failure to establish the boundaries between the 'clean and proper' Self and the 'abject' Other.⁷ Firstly, I attempt to read the Oedipalised space of the text that dictates the Son's destiny. The space occupied by the dead father, the Superior of the temple, and the images of *Kinkakuji* represent the symbolic authority that dominates the narrator Mizoguchi's psyche. His mother, along with other women in the text, occupies the position of the archaic authority that threatens (instead of mediating) his entry into the symbolic. I then relate my argument to the Nietzschean notion of the 'priestly' to clarify the complex nature of Mizoguchi's position, which is shared by numerous other brooding sons 'at large' in modern novels.

Secondly, I return to the notion of gaze—or 'looking' as it is simply put in the text—which seems to function as the key agent in Mizoguchi's storytelling. The gaze that operates throughout the text constantly splits into two: one that sees the abject reality from a spiritual height and another that is located within that body of reality. Mizoguchi's self-identification with an abject existence such as that of a fly or a black dog enhances the dynamics of his narcissistic gaze. Lastly, I discuss another character in the text, Kashiwagi, who is a highly manipulative operator of gaze. Although Kashiwagi offers a significant alternative solution, it is destined to fail Mizoguchi who is not endowed with the basic skills of self-fashioning—the ability to narrativise a coherent self—necessary for the modern subject.

Father's Hands that Cover my Eyes

All of a sudden my open eyes were covered by something large and warm, and I could see nothing. I understood at once. Father had stretched his hands out from behind to cut off my vision. ... Incomparably large hands ... blotting out in one second the sight of that hell which I had seen. ... I nodded slightly within those hands. From that nodding of my small head, Father could instantly tell that I had understood and that I was ready to acquiesce; he removed his hands.⁸

The primal scene in *Kinkakuji* is all the more disturbing in the sense that the narrator shares the *gaze* with his father. As a 13-year-old boy, the narrator witnesses his mother's adultery, in response to which his father takes no action but maintains his silence. Mizoguchi's father is a Zen priest and he is expected to become one, too. While Shinto priests preside at marriage, birth, growth and harvest ceremonies, Buddhist priests in modern Japan are assigned primarily to the world of the dead. The young Mizoguchi is fully aware of his own predestined position as a mediator between the dead and the living.

His father, who officiates at a small temple on a desolate cape off the Sea of Japan, seems to live only in a spiritual world; his spirituality is emphasised by his emaciated body ridden with tuberculosis. His body literally disappears as early as the second chapter where its cremation takes place in the rain. Mizoguchi feels as if he has managed to free himself from his father's spirit by 'looking' at the 'spirit ... transformed

⁷ My analysis draws on French psychoanalysis. Phrases such as the 'clean and proper' and the 'abject' are well-established concepts in Julia Kristeva's work in *Powers of Horror*.

⁸ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 46. The page numbers are taken from the 1987 Penguin edition.

by death into mere physical substance⁹ which no longer returns its gaze. The death of the father, however, does not liberate the son. It instead binds him more tightly to his father's will, throwing him into an ambivalent space which is a threshold between two polemical worlds: those of the dead and the living; of spirituality and corporeality; of the sacred and the profane; and of good and evil. Mizoguchi's own body then becomes an uncanny space in which two forces coexist without the possibility of negotiation or reconciliation. Freud argues in 'Totem and taboo'¹⁰ that the 'dead father', through his absence, lays down the Law of inhibition on his son who is unable to position himself to be the legitimate heir to the symbolic Father. The son is prohibited from remaining in the semiotic (the sphere of maternal authority), and yet his access to the symbolic order—the acquisition of language—is rendered equally impossible.¹¹ After the father's death, the beauty of *Kinkakuji*, which Mizoguchi has cherished in his imaginary vision, has become a monument to his 'dead father'. *Kinkakuji*, a fetishised object of the father's, is now that of the son. It fills in the lack of the subject, the void created by his father's absence.¹²

The father's 'merciful' hands—hands from another world—'protected' Mizoguchi's gaze from the 'terrifying' corporeality in which his mother resides. By covering his eyes, what those hands had unintentionally done was force him to identify with his father and to take the father's position, which was already deprived of phallic power. It was a feminised position, intensified by poverty, illness, his wife's adultery and his unsuccessful career as a priest. When Mizoguchi compares his father to Father Dōsen, the Superior of *Kinkakuji*, his father's castrated position becomes even clearer to the reader. Fellow acolytes in their youth, the two men found themselves far apart in the Buddhist hierarchy. While the Superior occupied a central position, Mizoguchi's father remained anonymous and on the periphery. Like Hamlet who was predestined to act on behalf of his dead father, the fate of the narrator in *Kinkakuji* is predetermined by the father whose ghost haunts his psyche and troubles his mind through the images of *Kinkakuji*. As in the Shakespearean narrative, the course of events bequeathed by the 'dead father' is unavoidable, and therefore, it dictates tragedy.

Blaming the Mother

In this text, the narrative consistently blames the mother. Whether beautiful or ugly, young or old, all women in the text are equally assigned a mission of betrayal. Mizoguchi's mother, who betrays his father (and hence betrays her son) has 'animalian' qualities. She is deprived of knowledge; she does not know that her son knows of her adultery and that her husband and son share that knowledge of her 'profane' body. Most importantly, she is ignorant of the sacredness of *Kinkakuji*. Mishima locates her position outside the conceptual domain, where it is impossible for her to become the owner of gaze. Her access to knowledge has already been denied. The more she is

⁹ Ibid., 26.

¹⁰ Freud, 'Totem and taboo', 1–162.

¹¹ Here, I move to post-Freudian psychoanalysis where the relationship between language and the subject's construction of the self becomes central to the discussion. See in particular the works of Lacan (*Écrits: A Selection and The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*) and Kristeva ('The system and the speaking subject' and *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*).

¹² The term 'golden' has a phallic connotation in Japanese. It is a suitable fetish in the Lacanian sense. For further definition of fetishism, see Grosz's article 'Sexual relations'.

ignorant and excluded, the more monstrous she becomes. She is the source of evil and the cause of tragedy. At the same time, however, she governs the reality that brooding Mizoguchi struggles to get in touch with. She represents the outside world that is the object of his repressed desire. In the following passage, the mother uses her 'snake-like' voice¹³ to plant the idea of Mizoguchi taking over the Superior's position. It is metaphorical parricide that she suggests to her son.

[S]he bent close to me and said: 'You see, dear, you don't have a temple of your own any longer. The only thing for you now is to become the superior of *Kinkakuji* here. You must see that the Father [Superior] really gets to like you, so that you can take his place when the time comes for him to leave. You understand, dear? That's all your mother will be living for now.'¹⁴

Julia Kristeva points out that 'maternal authority', although archaic and therefore pre-symbolic, it is nevertheless dependent on 'meanings' that Kristeva calls the 'semi-otic':

Maternal authority is the trustee of that mapping of the self's clean proper body; it is distinguished from paternal laws within which, with the phallic phase and acquisition of language, the destiny of man will take shape.¹⁵

This 'archaic authority' of the mother is felt so intensely by Mizoguchi that the mother's ambition to turn him into the Superior's successor materialises into a 'red swelling' on his neck, which subsequently requires surgical removal. This swelling is a metaphor for the evil of the mother, and its surgical removal symbolises Mizoguchi's choice of action, which is to reject her will and find his own way of breaking away from the 'archaic authority'. Kristeva's account of abjection—the horror within the maternal body—is effectively inscribed by Mishima in this novel as part of the (de)formation of the modern subject. Fearing the collapse of the boundaries of one's 'clean and proper' self, one turns 'what flows from within' into an object of desire:

[D]evotees of the *abject*, she as well as he, *do not cease looking*, within what flows from the other's 'innermost being', for the desirable and terrifying, nourishing and murderous, fascinating and abject inside of the maternal body. For in the *misfire of identification* with the mother as well as with the father, how else are they to be maintained in the Other? How, if not by incorporating a devouring mother, ... for want of being able to signify her: urine, blood, sperm, excrement.¹⁶

The abject space of the mother is eroticised and covertly desired by the narrative of *Kinkakuji*. The following paragraph is abruptly inserted into the chapter where Mizoguchi introduces his mother to the reader for the first time:

What is so ghastly about exposed intestines? Why ... do we have to cover our eyes in terror? ... at the sight of blood pouring out? Why are a man's intestines ugly? Is it not exactly the same in quality as the beauty of youthful, glossy skin? ... Why does there seem to be something inhuman about ... refusing to make any distinction between the inside of their bodies and the outside? If

¹³ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 49.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 72.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 54. Emphasis added.

only human beings could ... gracefully turn them inside out like rose petals and expose them to the spring breeze and to the sun ...¹⁷

This echoes a passage from Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* that Mishima quotes in the preface to *Confessions of a Mask*, a passage in which transgression is justified and the modern concept of a 'clean and proper' self is problematised.¹⁸ It is not surprising, therefore, to see the above paragraph immediately followed by a passage that begins 'Mother had already arrived ...' in which Mizoguchi starts to tell the story of his mother: her adultery, physical ugliness, and spiritual lowliness.

The mother (the site of abjection) in *Kinkakuji*, despite the implication of 'beauty within' in the passage above, remains a hindrance to subject formation. The figure of the mother is utilised to embody the abject and threatens the integrity of the son who wishes to imagine himself as a *clean-and-proper* unified subject:

[T]he smell of her perspiration hovered before my nostrils ... distant memories of being nursed, memories of a *swarthy breast* ... there existed some sort of physical force and it was this that seemed to frighten me ... Mother might cross the threshold and penetrate my mind.¹⁹

The demonisation of the mother does not end there. She is also one who represents the class beneath:

[I] wondered what it was that made Mother so particularly ugly. Then I understood. What made her ugly was—*hope*. Incurable hope, like an obstinate case of scabies, which lodges, damp and reddish, in the infected skin, producing a constant itching, and refusing to yield to any outer force.²⁰

The mother's 'hope' is the prospect of her son's social and financial upward mobility. She does not hesitate to say that one must ascend the social ladder, in this case, becoming the Superior of *Kinkakuji*. Mizoguchi suspects that his father may also have approved of her idea. His parents' ambition has propelled Mizoguchi from a remote temple in Cape Nariu in Ura-Nihon to the suburban town of East Maizuru, and then to the big city, Kyoto. While the industrialisation and commercial development of the twentieth century left the Ura-Nihon (lit. Rear-Japan) region behind, Omote-Nihon (lit. Front-Japan) housed major affluent cities such as Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka. Kyoto, the ancient capital, is located between these two regions. It has both the harsh climate of the rear region and a feature common to the big cities of the front: the coexistence of extreme wealth and poverty. The translocation of the young Mizoguchi out of the *rear* was planned by his parents to fulfil their upward ambitions. To achieve these ambitions, Mizoguchi would need to reinvent himself as a man capable of 'self-fashioning'.²¹ The narrator not only lacks this skill but also sees such an upwardly mobile figure as cunning and grotesque, as embodied by his mother.

But who is he to denounce hope? The 'mother who hopes' not only connotes

¹⁷ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 48.

¹⁸ For a further discussion of this, see Otomo, 'The notion of Kegare and Mishima Yukio's poetic'.

¹⁹ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 50. This resonates well with the notion of 'mother with bad milk' discussed by Doane and Hodges. Emphasis added.

²⁰ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 167. Emphasis added.

²¹ This term was coined by Stephen Greenblatt, in reference to a Western man who possesses the power of language and manipulates the existing power relations.

corporeality and poverty but also represents crudity and greed. The narrative of *Kinkakuji* seems to prescribe that the wish for a better life is in ‘bad taste’, something against its aesthetic, and a desire that belongs only to ‘mediocre’ people of a lower class beneath. The portrayal of the mother details her dirty fingernails, her small, cunning, hollow eyes, and the shiny, red lips and large teeth of a country woman: ‘Mother had made her face look as ugly as possible; a fleshy quality remained somewhere in that face like a sediment.’²² She has brought a sack of rice to offer to the Superior who lives in luxury. The novel urges the reader to see her through the narrator’s view that postulates bourgeois sensibilities. In the following section I argue that such bourgeois sensibilities, unbecoming to the class he was born into, in fact derive from the inherent nature of the priesthood.

Brooders—The Class of the Priestly

Those with bourgeois sensibilities who believe in a ‘clean and proper’ self and an orderly world to live in have faith in modernity. They are not necessarily confined to the actual bourgeois class and are compulsively engaged in the task of mapping. The thrust of Mishima’s class-mapping that emerges in this novel is more a case of the abstract mapping of the modern than the actual demarcation of social class. In this vein, I draw on Friedrich Nietzsche’s discussion of class here in order to further elucidate the complexity of Mizoguchi’s position.

The mapping of nobilities against commoners in Ancient Greece was simply indicated by the visible signs of superior power—the rich, the masters, or the commanders—and character traits such as ‘truthful’ and ‘noble’ were attributed to those with such visible power.²³ To this, colour attributes of ‘white and black’ were added in Ancient Rome, creating a fixed map of ‘inside and outside’.²⁴ This time ‘they, the wretched’ indicates ‘outsiders’ instead of the class below in the same community. Walter Kaufman adds to this list of attributes the Latin word *candidus*, which signifies white, bright, beautiful, pure, guileless, candid, honest, happy and fortunate.²⁵ Mizoguchi’s nature is described as everything that is not *candidus*.²⁶ He is instead identified with a stray black dog. While he embodies the black/bad, however, the fact that he is destined to become a priest raises his status close to that of the noble class.

According to Nietzsche, the ‘pure and white’ one is essentially priestly in the sense that the politically highest caste will lay claim to spiritual superiority over others. The aristocrat turns away from action and habitually alternates between brooding and emotional explosions.²⁷ Destined to be a priest, Mizoguchi is, despite his lowly birth, aristocratic. He suffers from ‘unhealthy brooding’ that is peculiar to the class of *agathos* (the well-born), despite the fact that he actually belongs to the class of *kakos* and *deilos* (the ill-born). He belongs to the class of priestly aristocrats for whom introversion

²² Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 49.

²³ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, the first essay, Section 5, 28–31. Mishima’s reading of Nietzsche is often discussed by critics such as Seikai and Starrs.

²⁴ Nietzsche also elaborates on the etymological connection between the Greek word *melas* (black/dark) and the Latin word *malus* (bad), in relation to the privileged colour of white/good.

²⁵ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, Kaufman’s footnote to the first essay, Section 5, 30.

²⁶ Mishima’s aesthetic is partly formed by Dionysian values that can be described by Kaufman’s term *candidus*. Sadoya’s *Mishima Yukio to seiyō* explores this issue.

²⁷ Nietzsche, *Genealogy*, the first essay, Section 6, 31–33.

is their habitual manner and an impotent body is proof of nobility. In Nietzsche's view of the priest, 'everything becomes more dangerous, ... arrogance, revenge, acuteness, profligacy, love, lust to rule, virtue, disease'.²⁸ He adds that this 'essentially dangerous priestly form' of introversion has made the 'human soul in a higher sense acquire *depth* and become *evil*' (emphasis in original). The heroes of modern novels are anti-heroes in that they all turn to the 'essentially dangerous priestly form and modern novels thrive on their 'unhealthy' introversion. Their bourgeois sensibilities make them feel superior to others who are superficial and without 'depth'. Mizoguchi is predestined to be a priest whose spiritual nobility must be emphasised and whose body suppressed.

In contrast to the brooding priests, the knightly aristocrats²⁹ maintain their nobility through their physicality and spontaneity; action is their means of living. In Mishima's writing all brooders have a love-hate relationship with the caste of knightly aristocrats, the latter being the former's ultimate object of desire. Indeed, one is reminded of Mishima's own metamorphosis, a physical transformation into a samurai/warrior. This transformation, however, does not take place in *Kinkakuji*. Mizoguchi stays within the confines of a self-reflective monologue, always returning to his own ambivalent space. He belongs to the caste of 'unhealthy brooders' that thrives in modern novels. In fact it can be said that modern literature has given rise to this caste. The intensity of *Kinkakuji* is comparable to that of *Notes from the Underground*, in which Dostoevsky's anti-hero, the Underground Man, epitomises the type. Like Mizoguchi, the Underground Man wants to 'make an insect out of' himself, and recognises that he has the disease of 'thinking too much'.³⁰ To him it is 'a real, actual disease' that affects all educated men in the 'unhappy nineteenth century', especially those who have the 'misfortune to live in St. Petersburg, the most abstract and intentional city'.³¹ It goes without saying that Kyoto is an 'intentional' city, an ancient capital where streets were artificially designed in contrast to organically formed fishing and farming villages like Mizoguchi's home town.

Out of spite, the Underground Man criticises the man of action and character, since, just like Mizoguchi, he is unable to act spontaneously. He concedes that: 'I expressed myself clumsy. But all the same I'm firmly convinced that not only a great deal, but every kind, of intellectual activity is a disease. I hold to that.'³² The Underground Man thus sinks into the abject space where there is no action or interaction with the outside world, while still believing in his exceptional ability to recognise beauty. This 'unhealthy brooder' forever remains within a paradox; his narrative continues without arriving at any destination:

[W]hen I was most capable of recognising all the subtle beauties of 'the highest and the best', ... I could not only fail to recognise them, but could actually do such ugly, repulsive things ... The more aware I was of beauty ... ,

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., the first essay, Section 7, 33–34.

³⁰ Dostoevsky, *Notes from the Underground*, 18. The page numbers are taken from the 1989 Penguin Classics edition.

³¹ Ibid., 17.

³² Ibid., 18.

the deeper I sank into my slime, and the more capable I became of immersing myself completely in it.³³

While the 40-year-old Underground Man cannot stop analysing his own psyche, always going back to where he was before, the adolescent narrator, Mizoguchi, struggles to break out of this orbit. He plans the total destruction of beauty, which he is convinced will put an end to his insect-like existence as a brooder.

This brooding life is in Nietzschean terms the ‘essentially dangerous’ priestly form. It is a case of excessive ‘care of the self’, the epidemic of the modern man, a belief in the ‘true’ Self that is ‘pure and clean’.³⁴ Mizoguchi finds his own body impure and polluted, and at the same time fears for the contamination of his ‘true white bourgeois’ self that resides within his polluted black body. He scrutinises himself from outside, away from his own ‘unsightly’ body (the abject space) that envelops the core of his self. This process is disempowering, for he cannot gain a sense of a unified self. Unable to liberate himself from this splitting, the narrator, like the Underground Man, goes into a state of *ressentiment*. *Ressentiment* is a psychological reaction with which the slave strives to repudiate his dependency on the master by re-imagining their power relations.³⁵ The slave believes that he possesses knowledge that his master does not, which subverts the existing power balance without actually exchanging their positions. Such empowerment is, of course, purely imaginary.³⁶ Mizoguchi imagines the ‘hostile’ external world in order to mark a clear division between inside and outside. As long as his internal world is being re-imagined through his words, his storytelling continues. The first-person narrative of the modern novel often exploits this mechanism of *ressentiment*.

Repeated descriptions of Mizoguchi’s poverty enhance the contrast with the rich interior he creates. Otherness is mapped as being ‘out there’ in the material world where people are concerned with neither spirituality nor beauty. There is an episode on a train which sheds light on Mizoguchi’s self-mapping and his inability to relate to the worldview of the working class out there.³⁷ During a train journey to his homeland, Mizoguchi learns of the Superior’s corruption when he overhears a conversation between strangers. The annual income of *Kinkakuji* exceeds five million yen, and the cost of running the temple is no more than 200,000 yen. With the privilege of tax exemption, a huge amount of the balance would fall into the Superior’s hands, and he would spend it on his frequent nights out to pleasure quarters, while acolytes and other priests lived in harsh conditions. Acknowledging these strangers’ claims as fact, Mizoguchi refuses to share their view. ‘It was intolerable that I should be understood by “their” words. For “My” words were of a different nature.’³⁸

‘Their’ words are the strangers’ criticism of the hypocrisy of religious institutions. They appear to be lowly public officials, who have ‘sunburned/peasant’ faces, and are wearing ‘worn-out suits’ and travelling in a third-class carriage.³⁹ ‘Their’ words represent socialist views on the existing inequality of society. Mizoguchi, who is also

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Foucault’s definition of a ‘modern man’ in ‘What is Enlightenment?’ in *Ethics*, 309–319.

³⁵ See Nietzsche, *On Genealogy of Morals*, the first essay, Section 10, 36–39.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 153–155.

³⁸ Ibid., 155.

³⁹ Ibid., 154.

travelling in a third-class carriage, finds ‘their’ words alien. To him, they are materialistic views and, therefore, not relevant to spiritual/religious institutions. He has been assimilated too deeply by the religious institution to adopt the ethical standards of the strangers. The I–they mapping in this episode elucidates the narrator’s position—‘they’ as commoners and ‘I’ as belonging to the class of the priestly—a spiritually aristocratic one.

It should be noted here that the poverty in which Mizoguchi has always lived does not render him a member of ‘their’ class. This social displacement is, along with his Oedipal conditioning, partly responsible for his tragedy. He is unable to speak his mother tongue—the language of the poor. The priestly class is formed outside the usual class formation; it is an imagined class that exists only inside one’s consciousness. The real cause of his tragedy ought to be found in the narrator’s excessive introversion, self-consciousness and self-searching. One acquires ‘depth’ through introversion, but it is also harmful and death-bearing. Modern literature—confessional and autobiographical narratives in particular—embraces this class of unhappy ‘brooders’. By creating a Japanese brooder par excellence in *Kinkakuji*, Mishima’s messages carry the Dostoevskian aesthetic⁴⁰ that beauty (or truth) exists in the most unlikely location, that is, the ‘abject’ site of the brooder’s mind.

The World of the Black Dog

According to Mary Douglas, the sites of abjection (and margins in general) represent the frailty of order.⁴¹ In other words, the validity of authority depends on its margins. The stronger the danger of marginal power, the clearer the demarcation of the central. The body of the modern subject imagines a clear mapping of inside and outside (centre and periphery). Novels often problematise the demarcation of the centre (the Self) by narrativising the centre’s embedded fear of and desire for the periphery (the abject Other). As the danger of pollution increases, the original centre—the clean, intelligent, noble and bourgeois self—attempts to secure its boundaries. In the case of *Kinkakuji*, the polluting Other resides within the body of the narrator. As Mizoguchi struggles to reinvent himself as a man of power and control, he remains an abject entity, a battlefield of the semiotic and the symbolic. When he imagines an external gaze to narrate himself, he often makes allusion to an insect or a dog. The next passage refers to his first love, Uiko, whose beauty is as sublime as *Kinkakuji*:

When I masturbated, my mind would be filled with demonic images. I could see Uiko’s breasts, then her thighs would appear before me. And meanwhile I had turned into an incomparably small, ugly insect.⁴²

On another occasion a passing encounter with a young woman brings him confusion:

I could not understand why she should associate with me ... what impulse drove her to this desire for contamination ... this girl simply let my hands

⁴⁰ I refer here to a passage from *Brothers Karamazov* which Mishima quotes in the preface to *Confessions of a Mask*.

⁴¹ Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, 121.

⁴² Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 58. Uiko later falls from grace, in Mizoguchi’s view, by helping a deserting soldier whom she then betrays by helping the authorities to capture him. She is also demonised as a Medusa-like figure who turns him into stone, and is referred to as an *umazume* (infertile woman/stone-woman) who cannot become a mother.

gather on her own small, plump hands, like flies gathering on someone who is taking a nap.⁴³

There are other occasions on which a black dog appears on the scene suddenly and out of context. In the following passage, Mizoguchi is watching a black dog running in his dream:

[A] black dog would be running down a dark street: I could see its panting breath escaping like flames from its mouth, and my excitement grew with the ringing of the bell that hung from its neck; then, as the bell reached its loudest pitch, I would have an ejaculation.⁴⁴

Mizoguchi's identification with the black dog is more explicit in the following scene, in which he follows a battered black dog through the crowded streets of Kyoto. Mizoguchi's interior is reflected in the description of the dog; it is a one-eyed dog that 'stubbornly carried within himself a world that was totally different from this bright, bustling street'.⁴⁵ The world in which the dog lives is filled with the smell of urine:

... the faint, unpleasant odor that emanated from the internal organs of human beings. ... This world was superimposed on that of human streets, and in effect the lights of the city, the songs that come from gramophone records, and the sound of human laughter were all being threatened by persistent, dark smells.⁴⁶

This passage illuminates the contrast between outside and inside, surface and beneath, and light and darkness. The emphasis is on the world of 'dark smells', the space of the 'black dog' that threatens the bright white world outside. The class of the 'black dog' is an uncanny class in Mishima's discourse; it is placed on the periphery as the antithesis of beauty, but at the same time this space of abjection is a central force that creates beauty. Nevertheless, the acknowledgment as such does not ease Mizoguchi's difficulties in forming the subject which is one.

Kashiwagi's Solution

Mishima offers Mizoguchi a choice of solution through his fellow student of the Buddhist university, club-footed Kashiwagi. Being the son of a poor priest like Mizoguchi, Kashiwagi is predestined to be equally powerless. Moreover, his deformity puts him in a more feminised position than that of the narrator. Kashiwagi overcomes his disadvantages by using his self-fashioning skills: verbal manipulation and an ability to access knowledge. He turns the abnormality of his body into something sacred and masculine, which leads women to see their own normality as a 'lack' or even a handicap. For Mizoguchi, Kashiwagi's articulacy is impressive. It promises a more powerful position that Mizoguchi, too, may be able to achieve. Kashiwagi, the mastermind, is 'thoroughly' self-conscious, as if there were nothing subterranean unexplored in his narrativisation of the inner landscape. He claims to be one who *sees* everything. The following passage demonstrates the ways in which Kashiwagi creates his own

⁴³ Ibid., 103.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 58.

⁴⁵ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 134.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Panopticon watchtower⁴⁷ in order to obtain a full view of the world around him and thus consolidate his power over others:

I knew the reason that I had been impotent. It was the thought, when the time came, of my deformed clubfeet touching her beautiful bare feet ... my flesh had betrayed me. What I had wanted to do with my spirit, my flesh had performed in its place ... my flesh began to attract my attention more than my spirit ... I *became like the wind*. I became a thing which cannot be seen by others, but which itself *sees everything*, which lightly approaches its objective, caresses it all over and finally penetrates its innermost part. ... For me to realize myself as a single body, a single desire, meant that I became transparent, invisible, in other words, like the wind.⁴⁸

Kashiwagi's strategy of becoming the 'wind that sees' involves valorising his own body—the source of his misery—and turning it into an icon that can be worshipped by others. Unable to separate his mind from his 'unsightly' body, that is to say, unable to assimilate his fragmented body—clubfeet and desire—into a homogeneous whole, Kashiwagi learns to free his mind from his body. With this severance, he can protect himself (his spiritual self) from the danger of self-defilement. The distance must be created between himself and the object of his gaze, which includes his own body. 'My clubfeet and my women all stayed at the same distance from *me*.'⁴⁹ This 'me' is a clean, proper and autonomous self that rules over his body and those of women. Only then can Kashiwagi's core-self rest in peace, being in utter control. By 'looking' at the female body as an object, and at the same time subjecting his 'unsightly' body to being thoroughly 'looked' at by women, Kashiwagi manages to attain the sovereignty of his ego. In this way, he also eliminates any possibility of further self-consuming interaction with reality.

It must be noted that sexual connotations are given to this model of communication with reality. Reality for Kashiwagi is commodified so that his voyeuristic self can enjoy 'looking', as if reality was 'his' own possession:

Reality lay there; desire was merely an apparition ... as I *looked*, I felt myself tumbling down endlessly into that apparition and at the same time being ejaculated onto the surface of the reality at which I was *looking*.⁵⁰

'Looking' is so empowering that it exercises absolute power over the object of the gaze. The difference between 'looking' and 'being looked at' is in fact the difference between life and death. Mishima problematises this from the beginning of the novel when the narrator looks at his father's dead body:

The corpse was just being looked at. I was just looking. To know that *looking* (the act, that is, of looking at someone, as one ordinarily does, without any special awareness) was such a proof of the rights of those who are alive, and

⁴⁷ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. The concept of the Panopticon, which was promoted in Bentham's Utilitarianism, was first conceived for prison architecture; it involved the placing of prison cells in a particular way so that prisoners would be always aware of being watched, regardless of the prison guard's presence. The Foucauldian analysis of the ways in which modern power operates systematically on people is particularly useful in discussing the concept of the gaze in literature.

⁴⁸ Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 81–82; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 85; emphasis added.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*; emphasis added.

that this looking could also be an expression of cruelty ... Thus did the young boy ... ascertain the facts of his own existence.⁵¹

'Looking' thus offers one the only reliable confirmation of being alive, to the extent that the 'looker' can successfully sever himself from the object. The safe distance that Mizoguchi establishes with the object of gaze in the above passage turns out to be merely temporary. Kashiwagi's solution cannot be his.

On one occasion Mizoguchi found it 'agreeable' to see 'the Superior looking at him as though he [the Superior] were observing a *leper*'.⁵² Mizoguchi's gaze thus overlaps with that of the Superior, which is in fact his own imaginary gaze. He internalises the other's gaze and as a result renders himself fragmented. This manifests the nature of narcissism in which the malady of the split subject is interminable. Mizoguchi's gaze splits into one that looks down on the body of the black dog (or leper) and another that remains on the level of the black dog/leper, on the lowest level of socio-aesthetic order. He thus embodies the horror that threatens the modern space of the 'clean and proper'. When Mizoguchi's split narcissistic gaze locates the abject within, the safe distance has been erased. The body of Mizoguchi becomes simultaneously the source of contamination and the contaminated 'clean and proper' self.

Conclusion

Unlike 'being', 'seeing' and 'being seen' (or appearing) require a narrator. A witness narrates what s/he has seen. 'Seeing' thus becomes a crucial agent of storytelling. 'Seeing' marks the beginning of a story, setting up the power relation between the gazer and the object of gaze. 'Seeing' can also involve 'mis-seeing' that requires correction, which initialises a journey of correction that can provide the novel with plots. 'Seeing' in *Kinkakuji* keeps to its modernist agenda, claiming objectivity and engaging in a search for Truth.⁵³ 'Seeing' forms the basis of one's knowledge but does not lead one to recognising the Other. Mizoguchi obtains knowledge through 'seeing', but this knowledge amounts only to a self-referential one that fails to direct him to meet the outside world. He has a stutter⁵⁴ and feels most at ease when being a 'masked' spectator, a voyeur. This condition was established at the beginning of the novel: the moment Mizoguchi saw his mother's adultery and shared that 'vision' with his father. Struggling to break away from his condition of the 'masked' spectator, he resorts to 'action'. In 'action', 'seeing' will no longer be privileged and the transition from 'voyeur' to 'doer' should finally be granted. Burning down *Kinkakuji* was part of Mizoguchi's plan of action, which ended in his imprisonment or hospitalisation in a mental institution. As a precursor to this final action, the narrator visits a brothel where he meets Mariko, a prostitute who is obviously a substitute for Uiko. This event

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 26; emphasis in original.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 146.

⁵³ It should be noted that in his last novel, *The Sea of Fertility*, Mishima treats such a modernist agenda with bitter irony. While 'seeing' still determines its storytelling—the protagonist being the sole witness to reincarnation that takes place over the four volumes—it is vigorously problematised to the extent that the narrative ceases to purport realism, its claim to objectivity and truth-telling.

⁵⁴ The name 'Mizoguchi' (the point where a gutter begins/a ditch-shaped mouth) needs to be considered here. The narrator's speech impediment is used to explain not only his failure in human interaction but his difficulties in subject formation. The delay in his speech leads to a delay in perception, while seeing brings more spontaneous and direct perception. Mishima, *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion*, 3, 127.

provides a certain kind of emancipation, and the haunting images of Uiko (and *Kinkakuji*) miraculously disappear from his mental vision. There is, however, something dubious about this emancipation, for he begins to define this first-hand experience as mimicry of his original imagination:

[T]he acts which I perform in my real life are inclined to end as faithful copies of what is in my imagination ... the memory of my own well-springs ... perhaps with Uiko—I had known a more violent form of carnal joy, a sensuality that had made my entire body seem numb.⁵⁵

If authenticity is given to imagery, and if action faithfully imitates the original image, does this not mean that ‘acting’ will not overcome ‘seeing’ after all? Far from being liberated, Mizoguchi in fact returns to his familiar position as a ‘masked’ spectator:

[T]he fly had alighted on her breast, it stuck there closely ... Mariko did not seem to find it altogether unpleasant to be caressed in this way by an insect ... (s)he lay there like a corpse and on the roundness of her bosom, which was illuminated by the bed lamp, the fly, too, was motionless and had evidently dozed off.⁵⁶

In contrast to both Mariko and the fly, who are both dozing, the narrator is wide awake, watching them. Mariko’s generosity in accepting him (and the fly) is interpreted by the narrator as a revelation (and confirmation) of the impurity of her body. Even after such a decisive physical act as intercourse, Mizoguchi’s belief in his own spiritual nobility remains unscathed. Repudiating profanation and debasement, he is covertly proclaiming his nobility. He has not ‘met’ Mariko in the full sense of human interaction, and stubbornly retains his solitude. One can therefore conclude that setting fire to the actual Golden Temple will not grant him emancipation but only exacerbate his solitude as a voyeur.

The abject world of the black body was both imagined and emphasised in the text; it pushed the white body to the margins. Mizoguchi’s uncanny black body (the abject space) became the cause of anxiety and hindered his subject formation. He was unable to form a unified and coherent subject of his own. He believed in his hidden nobility and regarded it as his ‘true’ self, but his identification with the image of the black dog threatened this belief. Mizoguchi’s fantasy—his possession of a core self that was pure and sacred—led to the tragic ending of *Kinkakuji*, where madness finally overtook him. The concept of a coherent and unified subject stems from Enlightenment Humanism, which the modern novel feeds on. Despite its setting—the misery of an underdog and his imbedded *ressentiment*—*Kinkakuji* is not about the margins of society. The novel is rather a timely manifestation of modernity in the context of post-war Japan, through which Mishima, in line with other writers, attempted to construct the unique, autonomous, Japanese subject.

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⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 195.

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