

A DEADLY FASCINATION: HETEROLOGY AND FASCISM IN THE WRITINGS OF GEORGES BATAILLE, YUKIO MISHIMA, AND HENRY MILLER

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Why Bataille?

In 1929 André Breton could have had several reasons for being angry at Georges Bataille. While Breton had proclaimed his own supreme leadership of the French Surrealist movement, Bataille was just one of the «original» members who was already beginning to move away from Breton in search of a less dogmatic approach to the surrealist credo. In 1928 Breton had rejected Bataille on the grounds of espousing a revolt so extreme that even the Surrealists were frightened at the prospect and Bataille was dismissed as a proper revolutionary philosopher in Surrealist terms. More specifically Breton, in «The Second Surrealist Manifesto,» condemned Bataille's embrace of the heterogeneous. Breton had acutely observed that a certain glorification and deification of the heterogeneous was at the core of Bataille's philosophical thesis.

M. Bataille's misfortune is to reason: admittedly, he reasons like someone who «has a fly on his nose,» which allies him more closely with the dead than with the living, but *he does reason*. He is trying with the help of the tiny mechanism in him which is not completely out of order, to share his obsessions: this very fact proves that he cannot claim, no matter what he may say, to be opposed to any system, like an unthinking brute. (p. 184 Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, U. of Michigan Press 1969.)

Breton's conclusion, that the attempt to reason about what is simply unreasonable, seemed to him in surrealist terms to be invalid. As the Surrealists embarked upon the study of Automatism, the notion that the un-conscious can be captured in fits of life-affirming inspired writing without the necessary use of reason, Breton necessarily had to disagree with Bataille's conclusion that death and perversion inevitably formed the cornerstones of humanity. The very idea of death as an intrinsic theme, unavoidable to the artistic mind however much it tried to free itself from an existing social network, was for the Surrealists a sign of moral degeneracy. The problem is that Bataille's approach is never as simple as Breton claimed. Bataille never claimed, as the Surrealists did, to be against systems *per se*. Just as Automatic, spontaneous inspiration in surrealist terms was not meant to replace God, neither was degradation and filth a replacement for Bataille. As a sociologist and anthropologist, Bataille wanted to prove among other things that the notion of the heterogeneous and the homogeneous was inseparable from politics as well as the arts and he set out to prove that one sphere was inseparable from the other.

This connection between literature and transgression—as exemplified by Bataille via his definition of the heterogeneous—can be used as a lead into an analysis of the connections between fiction and theory in more general terms as well. Whether it be overtly political or of a more hidden and sacred nature this is a major focal point in the works of Henry Miller, Yukio Mishima, and of course Georges Bataille. In my analysis of Miller I hope to show how he, similar to Bataille, responded to the surrealist notions of 'automatic writing' of the 1930's and incorporated this into his autobiographical writings. The intense and often highly sexualized autobiographical stance is one that re-occurs in Mishima but with entirely different consequences. Since all of these writers deal with the exultation of violence and sexuality and its political implications I have chosen as a starting point Bataille's political critique of Fascism.

Bataille's article «The Psychological Structure of Fascism» from 1933 is important for two reasons. One is that it neatly summarizes most of the main philosophical points behind Bataille's work both as a theorist and a fiction writer. The second reason is that the article contains, if not a full explanation, then at least helpful clues for an understanding of Henry Miller's early obsession with apocalyptic imagery and his later and much different views on militarism, and Mishima Yukio's deadly fascination with death and totalitarianism.

Together, these three authors from three continents may seem extremely different, but a comparison of themes show a distinct affinity towards, in Bataille and Mishima's case a glorification of the heterogeneous, and in Miller's a need to deal with the issues that spring from the same. I shall try to show how taken to the extreme this affinity cannot simply be construed as indicating real fascist tendencies, but must be seen in the light of a more sophisticated view of what the notion of the heterogeneous entails in its various forms. Thus while both Mishima and Miller were influenced by Bataille's notion of the heterogeneous as an essential part of revolutionary writing, I

shall also try to show that while Mishima became increasingly nihilistic, absolving himself in the end from the sphere of fiction writing altogether, Miller refused to let his fascination of the heterogeneous turn him away from the concept of writing as an essential life-affirming activity.

Tropic of Cancer was published in Paris in 1934 and although I don't know of any direct references to Miller having read Bataille, the atmosphere of leftist politics and Surrealism in which he found himself can be seen in essays on the Surrealist movement such as: «An Open Letter to Surrealists Everywhere,» and in his analysis of Buñuel *L'Age D'Or*. It is also interesting to note Miller's later fascination with Yukio Mishima most noticeably evident in his 1972 article «Reflections on the Death of Mishima,» which I shall look at more closely in the section on Miller. Similarly, Mishima wrote an article called «Georges Bataille and Divinus Deus» which was published in a collection of his literary essays entitled *What is the Novel?* shortly before his death in 1970. Mishima's essay on Bataille was re-published as an introduction to Bataille's two stories *Madame Edwarda* and *My Mother* which appeared in *Divinus Deus*, a collection which was still incomplete at the time of Bataille's death and which appeared in 1966 in its incomplete form in French. It is likely that Mishima read these stories translated into Japanese around 1968. Likewise, Bataille wrote in defence of Henry Miller during an obscenity trial in France in 1946. Two articles: «La Morale de Miller» and «L'inculpation d'Henry Miller» were both published in the literary magazine *Critique*. Thus a comparison of these three authors is validated by the interest they quite obviously showed in each other's work.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUCTURE OF FASCISM

A Critical View

From a historical perspective, the *fin-de-siecle* attitudes which both Bataille and Breton had grown up absorbing, together with the post-war/pre-war hectic 1920s, prompted them to believe that the world needed re-imagining. The sense of working as an artist in an age of apocalyptic imagery, was acutely shared by both Bataille and the Surrealists. By the late twenties and early thirties, both Breton and Bataille had disavowed all futurist ideas of machinery as power and freedom, the solution to historical constraint. While the Surrealists proclaimed that reality was insubstantial and that nonsense verse, automatism, violent confrontation, and irony went hand in hand as an overall objective for revolution, Bataille had moved in an altogether different direction.

Around the time of Breton's attack on Bataille in the *Second Surrealist Manifesto*, Bataille started his own group to counterbalance the Surrealists. The group: «Cercle Communist Democratique» published its own journal – *Documents* . It was here primarily that Bataille developed the concept of «the heterogeneous.» «The heterogeneous» was to be a catch phrase for those elements which resist assimilation

into the homogeneous –in Bataille’s terms– or the bourgeoisie, the ruling class. Thus heterogeneous forces were, according to Bataille, those processes that flagrantly violated the rational principles of a commodity and consumption driven society. In this sense, the Surrealists in fact belonged to the heterogeneous since their primary aim was to shock and promote the ecstatic forces of dream-life, the instinct, and the impulsive as set against the forces of normality and conventional behaviour. Bataille also applied the concept to all marginalized social groups, including revolutionaries and poets, two groups of which he considered himself a member. Bataille also posited importantly that it was possible for those within the homogeneous to interact with the heterogeneous in moments of extreme shock, for example via violence or sexual ecstasy, so much that Bataille actually concludes in «The Psychological Structure of Fascism» that: «Heterogeneous reality is that of a force or a shock» (p. 143. in *Visions of Excess*). The notion of the heterogeneous is thus simultaneously an aesthetic concept as well as a political one since it includes both marginalized political groups as well as poets who work in a subversive context. This notion may not be in itself sufficient to explain why Bataille ascribed to fascist leaders a heterogeneous existence, which is his main point in «The Psychological Structure of Fascism.» Was Fascism then heterogeneous in Bataille’s terms simply because it too wanted to disturb conventional modes of perception and experience or did he in fact see Fascism as a feasible solution to the political and social ills of society? If the latter is indeed a feasible solution it poses certain problems from an ideological perspective. It is in itself paradoxical that a fascist / heterogeneous state with the employment of exalted violence should be able to simultaneously function as a sort of divine order of cohesion, capable of eradicating social ills.

Under the heading «Examples of Heterogeneous Elements» Bataille writes:

The fascist leaders are incontestably part of heterogeneous existence. Opposed to democratic politicians, who represent in different countries the platitude inherent to *homogeneous* society, Mussolini and Hitler immediately stand out as something *other*. Whatever emotions their actual existence as political agents of evolution provokes, it is impossible to ignore the *force* that situates them above men, parties, and even laws: a *force* that disrupts the regular course of things, the peaceful but fastidious homogeneity powerless to maintain itself (the fact that laws are broken is only the most obvious sign of the transcendent, *heterogeneous* nature of fascist action). (p. 143. *Visions of Excess*)

A number of reasons may explain why the psychological phenomenon of the fascist movement in particular fascinated Bataille, and more importantly, why there seems to be a value judgement placed upon the two categories. With such words as platitude to describe homogeneous society, and the expression «agents of evolution» to describe the fascist leaders, Bataille seems clearly to indicate that fascism spells

progression while homogeneity is fastidious, slow moving, and above all, weak as opposed to fascism which is forceful and capable of transcending the status quo, (the italics on the word force are Bataille's).

In order to understand why Bataille makes this value judgment it is necessary to remember not only the historical point in time, the article was written in 1933, but the fact that Bataille is building a case study for his theories on human nature in general: For one thing, Bataille used the fascist phenomenon to prove his point that people in general have an excess of energy, a need for «unproductive expenditure»¹ which is stifled in civilized society. (For a more in depth explanation of Bataille's notion of expenditure and economy, *La Part Maudite* from 1967 elaborates on the notion of surplus expenditure as an active principle of the consumer society, and one which ensures the power of the social body). Although «unproductive expenditure» manifests itself in waste (part of our physiological structure – we cannot absorb all that we eat for example) it can also on a mental level manifest itself in arts that have no direct commercial value or in subversive behaviour. In this context the erotic impulse is seen as primarily destructive and heterogenous by nature because it feeds on sexually perverse practices where the aim is non-reproductive. Non-reproductive sex where the search is for pleasure rather than a re-affirmation of the family structure is thus indirectly seen as a negation of Bourgeois society. In primitive cultures (*The Tears of Eros* by Bataille contains his anthropological analysis of this phenomenon) society acknowledged this desire by establishing cult rituals based on sacrifice – another word which for Bataille means the active riddance of excess– which often included violent and hypnotic elements. The violent and hypnotic elements as well as the cult and sacrilegious mass-rituals are precisely what Fascism uniquely exploited, according to Bataille. The other important factor is the human urge for power or complete human sovereignty, which Bataille saw as impossible within traditional democratic structures.

Fascism enables the masses to acquire a sense of power and glorification by idealizing and projecting themselves on to the leader object, so much so that it creates a: «common consciousness of increasingly violent and excessive energies and powers that accumulate in the person of the leader and through him become widely available» (p 143. *Visions of Excess*). It is important that Bataille stresses the availability of violent and excessive energies to the masses for this is essentially the beginning of revolution. If a classless society is to be achieved the boundaries between the homogeneous and the heterogeneous can, according to Bataille, only be penetrated by violent excess. Bataille's premise is thus based on the belief that the dialectic of enlightenment is really in vain and that since the homogeneous is always dependent upon the forces it excludes, the Bourgeoisie can only survive intact if it retains a marginalized proletariat. In this sense, the argument for Fascism has in a round-about manner validated its own populist appeal in the name of socialism, explaining among other things such a term as National Socialism. The overriding questions must be whether this is a valid defense of Fascism. If Fascism's strength lies in the promise of

individual sovereignty, can it then also form a society that reconciles social equality with individual sovereignty?

Jurgen Habermas attempts to answer this question in an article called «Between Eroticism and General Economics: Bataille.» For the sake of discussion, Habermas seems to give Bataille the benefit of the doubt in the question of violence as the transcending force between the heterogeneous and the homogeneous. Bataille may claim that Fascism is no more: «than an acute reactivation of the latent sovereign agency» (p. 149 in *Vision of Excess*), but Habermas nevertheless wonders if there may not be other ways to reactivate sovereignty other than via the violence of Fascism. Habermas' conclusion points to the near impossibility for Bataille to do so.

Without such a violence-transcending point of reference, Bataille runs into difficulty making plausible the distinction that remains so important for him – namely, that between the socialist revolution and the fascist takeover of power, which merely seems like the former. What Benjamin affirms of the enterprise of surrealism as a whole – that it wanted «to win the energies of intoxication for the revolution» – Bataille also has in mind; it is the dream of the aestheticized, poetic politics purified of all moral elements. Indeed this is what fascinates him about fascism: «The example of fascism, which today calls into question even the existence of the labour movement, suffices to demonstrate what we might expect from a favourable recourse to renewed effective forces.» But then the question arises as to how the subversively spontaneous expression of these forces and the fascist canalizing of them really differ. The question becomes uncomfortable if, with Bataille, one proceeds from the assumption that the difference should be identified already in the forms and patterns of politics and not merely in their concrete material consequences. (p. 220-221, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*)

Bataille's undaunted embrace of violence or the expulsion of excess energy, to put it in safer terms, is probably the most difficult and least comfortable point to accept within his theoretical system. However, putting this aside, Habermas has realized that this in itself does not constitute the basic fault in Bataille's theory. In his eagerness to see the return of «renewed effective forces,» or of primary and pure energy, Bataille seems ready to accept a canalizing in fascist terms rather than stagnation in social terms. With the benefit of hindsight, we of course, can point to the risks involved in such action and it is difficult today to see how anyone could consider Fascism as part of a «dream of an aestheticized poetic politics» even though it may be «purified of all moral elements.» However wiser we may be in retrospect, the fact remains that many intellectual and creative writers from Lawrence to the more obvious case of Pound were attracted by Fascist ideology. The «dream of an aestheticized poetic politics» is among other things the desire for a political agenda which takes into account the

spiritual and creative urges of the populace rather than simply focusing on the industrial and economic structures of society.

In order to justify such a clause, Bataille must once again return to the fundamental premise of his theory - namely the science of the sacred. With such a word purify and the concept of transcendence in politics, political action becomes almost a cleansing process, a mystical rite of force, and one that is based on a fact that cannot be proved; that man seeks at all costs ultimate sovereignty, even if «it requires the bloody repression of what is contrary to it» (p. 148 in *Vision of Excess*). Thus said, there cannot be any science of the sacred, simply because the notion of sacred excess energy is a metaphysical trope rather than a historically, provable fact.

It is the notion of sovereignty and the absolute importance which Bataille gives it which will show the connection between the politics of expenditure and how this manifests itself in the creative act of writing as well. Bataille defines sovereignty as above all the desire for power and self-assertion. While this desire may manifest itself in political action and in the aggressive nature of heterogeneous social groups, it also manifests itself in the process of writing.

In pairing sovereignty with the need for expenditure, writing becomes in other words creation by means of loss, which mimics according to Bataille the ritual of sacrifice as well. Bataille repeatedly points to this by stressing the similarity between the unfettered movement of heterogeneous forces and literary creation. In the preface to *Literature and Evil* (1957) – a collection of literary criticism, Bataille partly explains his close relationship to such authors as Sade, Kafka and Genet in these terms:

I belong to a turbulent generation, born to literary life in the tumult of surrealism. In the years after the Great War there was a feeling which was about to overflow. Literature was stifling within its limitations and seemed pregnant with revolution. (*Literature and Evil*, The Preface).

Two issues appear here to be vital to Bataille's outlook on literature; first of all he positions himself as a post war writer, heavily influenced by the surrealist theories of the 1920s, and secondly Bataille stresses the urgency of viewing literature in terms of revolution and tumult – two words which are commonly associated with violence and politics. Text in other words can entail real emancipatory energy but it can also be evil, according to Bataille, because truly revolutionary writings tend to entail excess, sovereignty (wanting to master the created story which in turn becomes an allegory for mastering one's own life), and sacrifice – three key elements in Fascism. In an earlier essay from 1930, «Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh,» Bataille defines sacrifice in creative terms as: «the necessity of throwing oneself or something of oneself *out of oneself*» (p 67 in *Visions of Excess*) and again as: «the rupture of personal homogeneity and the projection *outside the self* of a part of oneself» (p. 68 in *Visions of Excess*). In these terms it is clear that the break between heterogeneity

and homogeneity is necessary not simply for political change but for the entire process of creativity and thus the political scene becomes analogous to the mind set of the artist. While «The Psychological Structure of Fascism» sets out to incorporate the natural desire for excess in social organisms outside literature, it also constantly refers back to the politics of expenditure within the act of writing itself, and Bataille does not want to separate one from the other. Thus to exemplify the complicity between literature and transgression becomes one of the main goals for Bataille as well as for Miller and Mishima. However, a precarious balance is struck once the writer tries to operate within this framework, and with Mishima I hope to show the perils inherent in the quest for, in Habermas' terms, the dream of an aestheticized poetic politics. For Bataille writing requires desire, consciousness of the desire (and here he breaks fundamentally with the Surrealist notion of Automatism), frustration, and the sense of oneself being on the verge of excess. The proper balance is first struck once the writer has learnt not to let his or her consciousness censure or stifle the desire while simultaneously not giving in to it.

MISHIMA

Heroic Narcissism

Confessions of a Mask (Kamen no Kokuhaku), Mishima's second full-length novel, appeared in 1949. Only four years after the end of the war, the novel breaks with the post war tradition in literature by presenting a radical departure in the accepted attitude towards the war. Although the main character's overt homosexual tendencies shocked as a literary subject in itself, it was the attitude to the war, diametrically opposed to the humanistic criticism of the times, which seemed to express an unprecedented and shocking new temperament in literature.

Written in the first person, *Confessions of a Mask* seems to a large extent to be autobiographical since the main protagonist's biographical data are nearly identical to the author's. However, Mishima stressed that *Confessions of a Mask* should not be taken as a necessarily authentic account of his own private life. Written when he was in his early twenties, Mishima's main goal was not authenticity but the use of his own experiences as a setting for an exposé of the «real» face of the protagonist, so that the events narrated become props in a sense, placed to facilitate the removal of the social masks and gestures which hinder the protagonist from realizing and analysing his inner self. The symbol of the mask is then both self-revelation and a means of fictionalizing an inner drama.

Upon a closer reading of Mishima, the desire for self-revelation seems to stem from other reasons than merely ethical or artistic. Although the first person mode of tell-all provides the structure and the materials for both Miller and Mishima to a large extent, it is foremost an attempt to construct a fictional world quite different from that of everyday life. The result is unorthodox in the sense that it deals with the revelation

of an unusual psyche rather an attempt at showing the reader how this psyche was formed. In common with Miller in the *Tropics*, Mishima will rarely question the mind set of his narrator but instead challenges the reader to accept him as a being who cannot and will not change. Psychological clues are set in order to draw the reader into the depths of the protagonist's world, while the stylistic structure of the novel simultaneously attempts to draw the reader's attention to the novel as another «mask,» a picture presented to the outside world. In essence the mask enables the writer to survive intact. Within the constructed narrative of self-revelation he gives us just enough to identify him as a man who lives in social life, but at the same time he withholds just enough information to survive as a writer, to retain the position of a creator in control, or as a sovereign person who retains the sensations of being on the verge of excess. The fact that in technical terms Mishima could orchestrate a total removal of the mask, is titillating as well as psychologically impossible.

The use of this balancing act in fiction writing is an essential ingredient for the success of both Mishima and Miller's novels. What connects the two so distinctly to Bataille is the overriding theme of beauty and brilliance as being dependent on its impending annihilation. Again and again the sensational surge felt within the proximity of heterogeneous forces, whether it be violence or madness, is erotic, exciting to both Miller and Mishima. But Mishima takes it one step further. Penetration of the homogeneous is never quite enough and it is as if Mishima must die in order to break through. As Mishima moves towards an increasingly violent end, in the search for a truth that will finally ratify his sense of self-hood, he realizes that this is the very end which will annihilate him as well. Mishima's homosexuality with its accentuation on sado-masochistic practices becomes an example of his «otherness» as well as his desire to release himself from traditional emotional and social bonds. In practice this means that an ever more violent stimulus is required for the artist to really *feel*.

In Mishima's case, there is no doubt that he felt lost and threatened in the post-war era of peace, simply because the threat of immediate death, having been drastically diffused, also deprived his writing of its underlying metaphysics. In an uncomfortable way, the drama of war appears to exemplify the sense of resolution which Mishima cannot find within himself. Mishima tries to solve this by creating and describing new predicaments, predicaments which although not deadly in a traditional sense, are nevertheless capable of lending an aura of «ending» to the narrative. Such of course are Miller's extreme apocalypses, and one may argue, Bataille's nihilistic theory of the human condition.

Looking through the lens of Bataille's theory on the erotic and his extreme fascination with the aesthetics of violence and death, Mishima seems to have shared his outlook even at the early age when he completed *Confessions of a Mask*. In Mishima's «George Bataille and Divinus Divus,» he praises Bataille's work because in it «there can be found a vivid, harsh, shocking and immediate connection between metaphysics and the human flesh that forms a direct link between the eighteenth and twentieth

centuries, by-passing the nineteenth (p. 11, Intro. to George Bataille's *The Mother*) (I assume Mishima refers to De Sade when he mentions the eighteenth century). Similarly Mishima sets out to form an unavoidable link between his metaphysics and the human flesh, by creating in *Confessions of a Mask*, a protagonist who is obsessed with the workings of his own flesh. This is exemplified in the many masturbation scenes and the protagonist's self-identification as a masochistic homosexual. The establishing of his «inversion» which Mishima calls homosexuality, enables the protagonist's to feel different from other people, it gives him a story to tell, and most importantly, it forces, he hopes, the outside world to condemn him. While Mishima may view the flesh as dynamic and stronger than the spirit, his sexuality is nevertheless kept deliberately estranged from any possible outlets (he never embarks upon a homosexual relationship for example). Mishima seems conscious of the fact that he is by-passing important Western notions of mutuality and reciprocity. While Mishima both distances himself from and provokes the reader's expectations at the same time, his goal though is closer to Bataille's than to Miller's boisterous proclamations of sexual and emotional independence. Miller may glorify his emotionally free bachelor life but he is inevitably obsessively drawn to that which is different from himself and which he contrary to Mishima, sees as intrinsically female. Miller's love objects are therefore always the embodiments of highly sexed and strong women; women that crave attention and reciprocity thereby breaking the cycle of introversion which Mishima so adamantly takes upon himself.

Nevertheless, Mishima and Miller are still intrinsically linked by the importance they both accord the active narrator. In these fictive «biographies» action is always perceived from the stand-point of the agent. This extreme urge which he shares with Miller, to be identified as a rebel and a tragic hero at the same time, can be viewed according to Bataille as another way to penetrate the boundary between heterogeneous and homogeneous culture. The hero/rebel wants to go «beyond the reach of human infirmities» (p. 148 in *Visions of Excess*), a place Bataille designates to the sacred area of sovereignty. The tragedy of Mishima as opposed to Miller, ultimately lay in their differing views on how to reach this area, and how to connect the being and action which would bring one there; the tragedy being that Mishima ended up seeing the writer as incapable of truly participating in tragedy, although he may have been able to create a fiction of the same. In his introduction to Bataille, Mishima refers to this dichotomy, the inability to truly act in fiction combined with the necessity of describing the sacred. In a sense, this reflects directly back to the opening statement by Breton. Although Mishima finds Bataille capable of describing in words what language otherwise cannot ordinarily reach, he does not however explain why.

What is certain, nevertheless, is that, being aware that the sacred quality hidden in the experience of eroticism is something impossible for language to reach (this is also due to the impossibility of re-experiencing anything through

language), Bataille still expresses it in words. It is the verbalization of the silence called God, and it is also certain that a novelist's greatest ambition could not lie anywhere else but here. (p. 12 in the Intro. to Bataille's *My Mother*).

The word God which Bataille names the silence, or the sacred quality behind the obvious, refers back to the religious sense underlying the artistic process. Bataille himself starts off this process when he says that man's desire is a force above and beyond human control. If the act of writing itself is a transgression, an activity of the heterogeneous, then it must have something to transgress against. In other words heterogeneity is linked to concepts of profanity as well as religion. The concept of sacrifice as well pre-supposes that there is a deity accepting the offering. This is one of the key points however where Mishima seems to differ from both Bataille and Miller. Sacrifice for Mishima must entail annihilation in order to determine successful completion. In Japanese thinking, the entrails signify, and are the locale of human sincerity. Thus the gesture of hara kiri is the most sincere gesture of all, not surprisingly so since suicide is an act which simply cannot be reversed. The heroic tragic death may have enamoured Bataille in a symbolic sense, but for Mishima a sacrifice was not simply, in anthropological terms, a way to approach death but an irreversible act and one which has no meaning until enacted in life. In this sense literature is bound to fail by nature because it is can be revised and changed endless times.

With this in mind, it is easy to see how the main difference between Miller and Mishima is both socially and culturally determined. While Miller strove to survive at all costs, and praised the life-giving aspect of sexuality as well as the deadly one, Mishima strove to maintain an essentially negative outlook on his own sexuality. The homosexual aspect of *Confessions of a Mask* therefore never signals a fruitful or joyous awakening but a painful need to exist constantly in the consciousness of others. This is one reason why masochism for Mishima is considered such an essential quality in homosexual behaviour, precisely because it (as Simone De Beauvoir describes in her analysis of De Sade), is the most extreme and effective way to fantasize legitimately about being a victim, thus turning violence toward himself and others into a political and sensual game. The game playing inherent in sado/masochism is reflected in Mishima's tone of voice and the way in which he engages the reader as well. The unravelling or removal of the mask as before mentioned can never really occur. For how can one substitute one fiction for another and yet call the second version a more truthful one? In Mishima's case the writer/protagonist engages himself in a dialogue with his readers every time he needs condemnation or acknowledgment in order to continue, in order to be provocative, and this happens very frequently. It is a deliberate tactic of Mishima's to set up the analogy of the homosexual as sharing the essential characteristics of heterogeneous writers, that is writers who are interested in transgression as a way to break through the homogeneous establishment. In breaking taboos, both the writer/homosexual and the sado/masochist shed their mask, but also

put another one on in their re-enactment of a hierarchy where the sadist and masochist take turns playing out the roles of master and slave.

According to Bataille the politics of master/slave relationships are indicative of almost all human behaviour but he often stops short, as does Mishima, of placing moral judgement on the structure itself. This accounts to a large extent for the criticism placed on him by a morally conscious philosopher such as Habermas and also places him in many ways directly opposite to Miller. Mishima however closely follows in Bataille's footsteps when he insists on man's basic psychic force going its own irresistible way. Although Mishima and Miller share a deep distrust and concern over what they consider a widening dichotomy between mind and body in modern civilization, Mishima contrary to Miller does not see a feasible resolution of this dichotomy. For Mishima violence and separation inevitably follow, leading eventually to the incompatibility between literature and external nature, or between language and the hidden sacred qualities. To return to Habermas' critique of the violence transcending point of reference, Mishima suddenly appears as someone who is so narcissistically absorbed, so caught up in the ramifications of his sexuality and the possibility of violent gestures within this sexuality and the possibility of violent gestures within this sexuality, it is hard to imagine, with a book like *Confessions of a Mask*, that he would want to disperse his own effective energy to others, to lead them to revolution. The incompatibility between the extreme narcissism of Mishima and the desire to be leader, may seem understandable if one imagines a need to be idolized as inherently narcissistic. However, at the time of Mishima's conversion to military principles, he was a well-known and revered, prize winning author in his own country. In looking for direct action which could supersede literary activity Mishima had to look in a totally new direction.

Mishima found the solution in Bunbu Ryodo – the highest ethical principle of the traditional samurai culture. Bunbu Ryodo demanded that a samurai discipline himself in both the military and literary arts, since they considered death to be at the root of both. A perfect soldier and a perfect poet was he who was perfectly prepared for death.

Mishima's complete faith in Bunbu Ryodo lead him in his last years to form the Shield Society – Tatenokai, a small private army dedicated to the defense of the emperor. This purpose was from the onset politically suspicious in itself. By the late 1960s the emperor Hirohito had renounced his godhead for over 30 years and was considered a figure head rather than a divine and/or political figure that needed defending to the point of death. Mishima himself had in fact in 1966 written a short story about the ramifications of Hirohito's decision; *The Voice of the Hero Spirits* deals with the disillusioned kamikaze flyers of the Pacific War who find their *raison d'être* abolished once they no longer have a divine emperor to die for. Perhaps Mishima thought that in defending the throne he would somehow be able to dislodge the increasingly materialistic and Western views of his fellow country men? Nevertheless,

it seems more probable, taking Mishima's writings into account, that the sword represented a promise of strength and renewal which he could not find elsewhere. As far as Mishima was concerned since literature and language had become ineffective in re-shaping nature, it would not be able to change what he considered a dangerous trend in Japan, namely towards democracy and plurality. Ultimately only action supplemented by the power of speech could bring about true change. Perplexed Mishima realized that no one would listen to him when he attempted a coup in 1970 at the headquarters of Japan's Self-Defense Force, and in true samurai manner he killed himself publicly instead.

Whether Mishima's suicide was a well calculated public gesture or the desperate act of a man who knew he had gone too far, is impossible to say. Regardless, the ending was sadly appropriate for a man who again and again in the course of his *oeuvre* described his writing as a desperate effort to diminish the chaos of the external and internal worlds which filled him with unease, anxiety, and nihilism. Mishima seems ultimately to have been disillusioned with his literary effort, or in any case impatient with the results of it. The recording of man's battle with anxiety was not enough, within the narrative structure as well as in his own life, Mishima needed a resolution.

The notion of literature as operating within the realm of action, the ancient Japanese notion of the sword and the pen as one, was important to Mishima in narcissistic terms on a more basic level as well. Mishima insisted on placing physical bodily beauty on the same level as the intellect in the traditional Greek sense. The male body was worshipped by him continuously, from the early homages in *Confessions of a Mask*, to his later obsession with body-building. Mishima's obsession with kendo and karate increased the last couple of years before his death. At the same time, his frequent articles and essays published in Japan began to contain an increasing dose of nationalistic rhetoric glorifying the Imperial past, often using slightly archaic vocabulary and dismissing the recent wartime years, favouring instead a return to ancient samurai ideals. Mishima's move to the extreme right puzzled other Japanese writers as well as close friends who simply could not understand how the artist incarnate ultimately disavowed art in favour of extremist political action. The seeds of Mishima's imperialist tendencies lie deep however and it would be a mistake to see him as having had a complete turn-round at some point. Mishima's revival of samurai traditions in the service of emperor Hirohito provided him with a ruling metaphor—namely that only through acts of courage could true beauty, loyalty, and wisdom be found. With its emphasis on maleness and bonding through rigorous physical training, the samurai code provided an ideal touchstone for Mishima's ideals. Even when one takes into account the ideological concepts as set up by Bataille, Mishima's family background which included an upper class upbringing and aristocratic schooling is acknowledged by himself as having been influential in his political preferences. However the contradiction remains, was Mishima an extreme rightist to the point of Fascism or above all a narcissist and masochist whose ultimate punishment death was also his ultimate thrill?

In *Confessions of a Mask*, which was written when Mishima was only 24, the aristocratic setting and the background of the newly finished war, is used to hint at a fascist ideology which in its tone and implications lies close to Bataille's theories on Fascism. As I pointed out in the beginning, the initial outrage over Mishima's second book was not so much because of the homosexual element, as in the bold and provocative way the war was dealt with. One scene in particular deals with the narrator's return to Tokyo on March 10, 1945 in which he comments on the destruction of an area in Tokyo mainly populated by working-class families:

I was emboldened and strengthened by the parade of misery passing before my eyes. I was experiencing the same excitement that a revolution causes. In the fire these miserable ones had witnessed the total destruction of every evidence that they existed as human beings. Before their eyes they had seen human relationships, loves and hatreds, reason, property, all go up in flames. And at the time it had not been against the flames they fought, but against human relationships, against loves and hatreds, against reason, against property. At the time, like the crew of a wrecked ship, they had found themselves in a situation where it was permissible to kill one person in order that another might live. A man who died trying to rescue his sweet-heart was killed, not by the flames, but by his sweetheart; and it was none other than the child who murdered its own mother when she was trying to save it. The condition they had faced and fought against there –that of a life for a life– had probably been the most universal and elemental that mankind ever encounters.

The returning narrator seems almost to lament the death denied him. In one of many glorifications of the precious moment which precedes death, the true nature of humanity presents itself. And it is perhaps this aspect which makes this passage so very pessimistic, almost to the point of nihilism. Mishima seems to indicate that war always operates on various levels and that survival necessitates «a life for a life,» a rather poisonous view of human nature, if the premise is that in the extreme murder becomes «permissible.» Not only that, but Mishima finishes by saying that this dog-eat-dog attitude is «the most universal and elemental that mankind ever encounters.» Mishima/the narrator finds himself «emboldened and strengthened» by the misery, bringing to mind Miller's hyperactive visions of impending doom, an odd mixture of relief over having been spared, but also annoyance at not being part of «the total destruction.» Death seems to condense both the future and the past into the present moment and thus becomes the rescuer from ugly and pointless decline, the preference being that all evidence be eradicated of humanity, rather than have it decay, much in the same way that Mishima the narcissistic person fears the image of himself aging.

Adding to the horror of this scene which Mishima describes in Tokyo is the fact that the relationships which disintegrate in the face of death are the sacred ones, mother

and child are opposed, two lovers, etc. There is no respect or reverence in Mishima's dealings with «the family,» nor in his descriptions of traditional love affairs. The sterility of Bataille's sociologist/anthropologist tone in his essays is echoed oddly in much of Mishima's fiction. Sometimes the cool, cynical voice of the narrator serves to accentuate the horrors described, but at other times it is as though the narrator is observing events from a safe distance, incapable of an emotional reaction, or unwilling to give us one. While Mishima clearly wants to show us how the public sphere, in this case the army, and the private collide destructively in wartime, he does not dramatize the events but rather describes the destruction from a distance. The effect overall is similar to Bataille's ideal writer who is poised on the edge of blindly following his desire or remaining lucidly conscious of it in a permanent state of frustration. Mishima is conscious of the tension he creates and propels the action of his books as a combustion engine with sparks of emotion when extreme violence meets lucid consciousness.

Confessions of a Mask posits death as the ultimate proof that man's most singular gesture of sovereignty is his capability to take life into his own hands. In this sense, Mishima's fiction exemplifies Bataille's theory that absolute power. «manifests, at the top, the fundamental tendency and principle of all authority: the reduction to a personal entity, the individualization of power» (p. 148 in *Vision of Excess*). In these terms, Mishima achieved an absolute reduction to a personal entity the moment he ended his totalitarian political career in an act of defiance which simultaneously cut him off from any future political activity. If the choice lay between an expulsion of the heterogeneous in individual excess and in cult excess, it is hard to see what Mishima would have chosen. The question of whether Mishima died to gratify his own tendency towards annihilation or for a larger cause is one which Henry Miller ponders in his essay from 1972: «Reflections on The Death of Mishima.»

Henry Miller

In a piece characteristic of Miller's later writing «Reflections on The Death of Mishima» has a distinctly pacifist edge to it and in tone and mood is significantly different from the black apocalyptic visions of Miller's earlier books. «Reflections on The Death of Mishima» shows an overall sensible view of Mishima's political stance, which neither tries to defend Mishima's fascination of militarism nor explain it from a psychological point of view. Although Miller did not comprehend to a full extent the immense nihilism and negation that underlay Mishima's final decision, he nevertheless felt close to him as a writer, and the similarities in temperament which Miller refers to in the essay are chiefly thematic similarities in their first works of fiction rather than in their later political positions.

Mishima and Miller both broke into the literary scene via semi-autobiographical fictions which deliberately set out to present a truthful picture of physical life. If one compares *Confessions of a Mask* with either of the *Tropics*, it turns out that in spite of

the cultural and chronological gap, they are very similar thematically. Both authors focus on the exploits of a male character who learns by default and tries to remain intact in a world of increasing strife and confusion. Although Mishima imposes an extremely calculated tone of voice for his first person narrator and Miller's is forever digressing, nevertheless throughout the narrative the analytic comments connect the episodes and in both cases lead to a concentration on the main characters' sexual impulses. For both Mishima and Miller the calculated aura of exposure is meant to deflate any suspicion of dishonesty. They are both essentially determined to show the dark side of their sexuality in order to dismiss possible charges of deception and hypocrisy. While Mishima's first person narrator struggles to keep his homosexual responses free of ambiguities, the combination of paranoia and affection which he feels towards his beloved closely echoes Miller's muddled behaviour towards Mona/Mara – his main love object in the Tropics. Both writers deny on a basic level the need for emotional and social bonding but Miller, contrary to Mishima, realizes in the course of his amorous pursuits that the erotic tie cannot exist only for itself, and this as it turns out ends up distinguishing the two authors profoundly from each other.

Like Miller in *Black Spring*, Mishima in the course of *Confessions of a Mask* is never simply a record of a closet homosexual, just as the Tropics are not the memoirs of a womanizer, instead, both authors are consciously using eroticism as discourse. In the same way that Bataille describes twentieth century politics as intrinsically connected to sexual/instinctual politics, Mishima and Miller use their sexuality as the starting point and the pivotal point for all events of importance.

This is the background for Miller's sense of soul connection between himself and Mishima, and the reason simultaneously why Miller laments the fact that Mishima did not realize what Miller sees him as having been capable of – namely the futility inherent in military power. What Miller strongly hints at is Mishima's tendency to aestheticize politics for the sake of exemplifying his own personal obsessions. Interestingly, Miller's disdain for political relevance, which is more apparent in his early work, seems to have shifted by the early 1970s and Miller is clearly influenced both by his own growing interest in Buddhism and the «make love not war» attitude of the times.

A small anecdote in the essay illustrates Miller's way of connecting himself with his subject:

The shock I experienced on learning of Mishima's dramatic and gruesome death was reinforced by the recollection of a strange incident which happened to me in Paris about thirty-five years ago. One day, I happened to pick up a magazine, in which there were photos of the decapitated heads of Mishima and his comrade on the floor. Two things struck me at once: one, the heads were not lying on their sides but standing upright; two, one of the heads bore a striking resemblance to my own which I had once seen lying on the floor, but in pieces.

Whether real or imaginary the resemblance between Mishima's head and my own was frightening... (p. 41 in *Sextet*)

Miller continues to tell of how a young artist friend of his had sculpted a head of him in 1936 which he accidentally knocked over, causing it to be irreparable. A picture of the head taken before the accident is on the cover of Miller's *Sunday After The War* (a collection of among other things pacifist essays!) and is as Miller himself pointed out «a very true likeness, which has always haunted me» (p. 42 in *Sextet*). A further reference point can be made to Bataille's image of the Acephale, the headless God who represents among other things the ideal state of the body politic in its most heterogeneous form, namely freed from intellectual and reasoned rule. This image first appears in 1936 in an essay entitled appropriately «The Sacred Conspiracy» and continues to be a focal point and illustration for Bataille's further theories on the heterogeneous.

Apart from Miller's sense of the macabre and the entertainment value and sensationalism inherent in the decapitation, it is also a way to project his own presence into a situation where he realistically speaking has no place to be, or one could say into a story which is not his own. While the fact that the decapitated heads were standing upright has no bearing on the actual point of the anecdote (Miller obviously did not know that it is a Japanese custom to raise the heads and close the eyes before they are shown to the outside world), the fact that one head resembles his own is what Miller finds so extraordinarily uncanny. The other interesting point is that Miller acknowledges that the resemblance may be a mere projection, that he himself wants to resemble Mishima in death. The third point to the anecdote is of course that Miller escapes absolute resemblance simply because his 1936 self has been shattered in an accident which he himself caused.

If one compares the symbol of the mask with the shattered head, an interesting dichotomy appears. While the mask can be worn or taken off alternatively, the head is forever gone, irreplaceable as an object but also symbolic of Miller's past ideals which were rather disdainful of political action and which are now superseded by a much more concerned and life-affirmative attitude. If Miller here indirectly tells the reader that the Mishima side of him is of the past, then he also indicates a belief that the desire towards death, which he sees Mishima is obsessively driven by, can be overwon. For Miller the heterogeneous elements in Mishima seem to be those of tragedy foremost and thus Mishima's tale, as far as Miller is concerned, is that of a man obsessed beyond redemption:

Youth, beauty, death – these are the themes which inform Mishima's writing. His obsessions we might call them. Typical, one might say, of Western poets, or the romantic ones at least. For this Trinity he crucifies himself (p. 26 in *Sextet*),

and likewise,

Mishima's love of youth, beauty, death seems to fall into a special category. And it is tainted with Narcissism. To open most any one of his books one senses immediately the pattern of his life and inevitable doom. He repeats the three motifs, youth, beauty, death, over and over again, like a musician. He gives us the feeling of being an exile here below. (p. 43 in *Sextet*)

One should not be misled however into believing, because Miller makes an analogy between Christ and Mishima, that he considers Mishima's death to have a religious redemptive value. For as Miller rhetorically phrases it: «He (Mishima) who was endowed with high intelligence, did he not perceive the hopelessness of trying to alter the mind of the masses? So far no one has ever yet been able to accomplish this. Not Alexander The Great, not Napoleon, nor The Buddah, nor Jesus...» (p. 35 in *Sextet*)

Such statements make it sound as if Miller is convinced that Mishima's agenda was primarily political awakening. But even Miller finds this answer to the riddle a bit too simplistic. «I ask myself again and again – did Mishima really hope to change the behaviour of his countrymen? I mean, did he ever seriously contemplate a fundamental change, a genuine emancipation?» (p. 34 in *Sextet*)

If even Miller is doubtful as to Mishima's earnestness in his political endeavours, what then does he posit as the real motive behind his suicide? The three obsessions which Miller constantly refers back to are the clues. Miller is obviously aware of the deeper psychological motifs which must have governed Mishima's obsessions. In spite of this, Miller seems incapable of abstracting from Mishima's blatant militarism. «Judging from what I have read of you, my dear Mishima, this subject of peace does not seem to occupy a great place in your work.» (p. 53 in *Sextet*)

There are several motives behind Miller's annoyance with Mishima's politics. In questioning the actual purpose of Mishima's attempted coup, Miller seems to realize that Mishima's actions are prompted by a firm belief in force. As with Bataille's disillusionment with peaceful solutions, Mishima searches for a breakthrough via violence rather than negotiation. The concept of physical violence, with its sexual overtones, as the transcending point for the breakthrough of the heterogeneous into the homogeneous, is the major point of difference between Miller and Mishima. But the debate extends itself further than simply questioning the use of certain methods to reach a revolutionary goal. For while Miller believes in the importance and effectiveness of heterogeneous elements, his distrust in the established and militarized political sphere in general, leads him to exclude marginalized political groups, whether they be leftist or right wing, from his concept of the heterogeneous. In this sense, Miller's focus is almost uniquely on the subversiveness of the poetic act in itself, the act of writing out one's violence rather than enacting it in the «real» world. Miller never wanted to align himself with any movement or political groups, insisting upon peace and inner tranquility he constantly returned in his art to the romantic notion of the lonely poet who struggles against injustice without allying himself with any particular political group.

This sense of individualism, which is perhaps very American in nature as opposed to the Japanese and French sensibilities of Mishima and Bataille respectively, explains to a certain extent Miller's stress on the impotence of leaders whether they be of a political or religious nature and becomes one of the key points in his critique of Mishima.

Ultimately, Miller did not believe in an aesthetic which was purified of all moral elements, to use Habermas's expression. While on the one hand, Miller, like the Surrealists, wanted to shock and promote the forces of dream-life and use the energies of intoxication in his writing, the means to do this was most often via the raw energy of sexuality as a provocation against the establishment. The violence encountered in the *Tropics* for example seems to spring from frustration rather than desire and nearly always culminates in a comical defusing of an otherwise potentially dangerous situation. Although Miller concurred with the notion of unproductive expenditure as yet another term for the creative process, he added an extra element that to him was inseparable from creativity as well – namely the concept of love.

In the realm of love all things are possible. To the devout lover nothing is impossible. For him or her the important thing is – to love. Such individuals do not fall in love, they simply love. They do not ask to possess, but to be possessed, possessed by love. When, as is sometimes the case, this love becomes universal, including man, beast, stone, even vermin, one begins to wonder if love may not be something which we ordinary mortals know but faintly. (p. 43 in *Sextet*)

What Miller has done is reactivate sovereignty not via action but via love. Here is suddenly a possible expenditure of energy which breaks the sado/masochistic mould, which in its universal and generous nature, does not engage in the necessity of games or masks. It simply is. While the concept of love is not presented as a solution to an increasingly hostile and militarised world, it is presented as a feasible alternative to the deadly trilogy of Mishima, where youth, beauty, and death are concepts which fade with time, whereas Miller's «love» is everlasting, almost Godly in proportion and therefore only known by us superficially. Miller thus ultimately has a force which exceeds both the heterogeneous and the homogeneous spheres. In using such words as man, beast, stone, and vermin, Miller connects human aspects with inanimate objects as well as the heterogeneous – vermin. This force of love connects all of these things via the basic premise that regardless of political orientation or social status sovereignty can be found once the individual learns to love rather than let hate propel progression. Revolution is therefore foremost a personal realization and ultimately Fascism, the need in Bataille's terms, to «accumulate excessive violent energies in the person of the leader» is not a necessity for evolution in Miller's terms. In order to preserve an intrinsically positive and peaceful sense of humanity, Miller must question Mishima's

actions and conclude finally that although Mishima's suicide was a heterogeneous gesture, it failed in bringing the heterogeneous closer together.

For Mishima, only death could ultimately bridge the complex separations between self and activity and provide him with a purpose if not for living then for dying. It is here that Miller makes his position quite clear, if there is nothing else that we can be sure of we must acknowledge that there is something greater than ourselves. Nihilism must not be at the core of literary creation, even if this means a return to more traditional concepts of romantic love as fuelling the creative process. Bataille's model of revolution via violence and transgression is useful in looking at literary impulse from different perspectives. But Miller, however obsessed or obscene he appears to be at times, is essentially too «possessed by love» to remove his writings from the hope that text is always fertile and life-affirming rather than pointed towards death.

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