

The Golden Pavilion of Mishima: Story of A Fire-Lighter

MORIN-BOMPART Michelle PhD*

Psychiatrist, Psychoanalyst, Psychosomatician, France.

***Correspondence:**

MORIN-BOMPART Michelle, Psychiatrist, Psychoanalyst, Psychosomatician, France.

Received: 14 November 2020; **Accepted:** 12 December 2020

Citation: MORIN-BOMPART M. The Golden Pavilion of Mishima: Story of A Fire-Lighter. Int J Psychiatr Res. 2020; 3(6): 1-5.

Mishima's novel was inspired by a true story. In 1950, the marvelous Golden Pavilion of the Rokuonji temple is destroyed by an incendiary fire. The country is put in a flutter like for Notre Dame in Paris... The Golden Pavilion was more than five centuries old and will be rebuilt the same. The fire-lighter is arrested [1]: Hayashi Shoken, a novice bonze of twenty-one years old, student in Chinese literature, was found behind the temple. He set the pavilion on fire and wanted to disappear also by stabbing himself and absorbing sleeping pills but he did not.

This is what we know about the fire-lighter. Very young he lost his father and was brought up by his mother. He entered the temple with the help of the Prior but both the Prior and the University had to reprimand him for bad behavior, fugue and absenteeism. Affected by stammering, taciturn and solitary, Hayashi did not gather with the other novices and did not care for the Prior's advices. The day after the fire his mother, he refused to see for four years, commit suicide. Poor, ugly and infirm, Hayashi would have act by "hate of beauty". A few days before, the Prior had announced him that he had no future and sent him away. Hayashi would have act by revenge because he had lost hope to take his place. The psychiatrist's diagnosis was schizoid psychopathy. He was considered as a psychopath with psychotic symptoms.

The psychiatrists and the psychoanalysts have been very little interested in incendiary and criminal fire-lighters. The term of pyromania was introduced for the first time in France in 1833 by the psychiatrist Henri Marc who described an impulsive monomania. For the psychiatrist Henri Ey [3], pyromania often occurs in the behavior of mental illnesses: epileptic's unconscious impulse, aggressive reactions of poor mental developed subjects, revenge acts of persecuted delusion, interpretative or hallucinated persons, psychopaths and alcoholics. This is a quotation of Henri Ey: "*The desire of lighting a fire can reveal important aggressive drives, linked to the symbolism of fire and flame*".

In 2015, Swiss psychiatrists published a paper where they defined pyromania as the action of setting on fire in a repetitive way, without no criminal motive or search of gain or reward.

The DSM IV insists on the repetition, the tension and the excitation before the act, the fascination and the attraction for fire, the pleasure and the relief after the act of pyromania. They don't search to revenge but are often alcoholic and drug addict and have antisocial behavior. One third are psychotics, a quarter mentally retarded and a sixth part criminal.

Claude Balier [2] is the only psychiatric and psychoanalytic reference in France I found about pyromania. In his book *Psychoanalysis of violent behavior*, he analyses the case of an adolescent, Daniel who is awoken by a dream of anguish: a man came out of a dark lane and stab his eyes with a dagger. He will associate with the lover's lane. He thinks to throw himself out of the window then has the impulse to put on fire a public building who has a meaning for him. At the age of ten, Daniel presented night frights and somatic symptoms after a surgery for appendicitis. For me the dream evokes a castration dream by a man who represents the father. His associations link sexuality, death wishes against himself and aggressive drives against a building who may represent the body of the mother. He was very close to his anxious mother. She took care excessively of his young brother of seven years old. He never had sexual intercourse. The diagnosis of "cold psychosis" lays on the splitting of his personality, on one side a quiet and hard-working student, with no affects, on another side a being invaded by drives of suicide and fire-lighting. For Balier, an omnipresent maternal image prevents him from a relationship with his father and confines himself to a mother's identification. The man of the nightmare who pursue Daniel condenses his homosexual desires and the fire represents the aggression against his mother, the realization of his megalomania and the affirmation of his virility.

The author, Hiraoka Kimitake was born in 1925 in Tokyo. He will take his author's name Mishima at age sixteen with his novel "Flowering forests". When he is six years old, he enters Gakushuin, a school for the sons of nobles and imperial family. He is an extremely brilliant child who starts writing poems and stories at fourteen years old.

We shall see how Mishima presents the fire-lighter Hayashi Shoken in his novel. The writer has taken elements of the reality in the trial annals and did embroidery around them to give life to his hero. He tries to explain his entry at the temple with the help of the prior, the origin of his hate for his mother and the drives that caused the fire. His book had a great success when published in 1956, six years after the fire.

Another novel "Confession of a mask", autobiographical, published in 1949 will give us information on the creation process of the Golden Pavilion. The author has projected his own fantasies and problems on his principal personage.

Like dream, the creator's work is a royal path towards unconscious.

The Golden Pavilion [6]

It is a story written in the first person and the name of the principal personage is ignored until the moment it appears in the mouth of Kashiwagi, "Mizogushi". The hero, the narrator is a novice bonze who will develop the fantasy that the Golden Pavilion must be destroyed and acts his fantasies at the end of the novel.

The term of hero expresses the hyper-valorization of this personage by the novelist. We feel some difficulty to identify to the hero. The novel is nearly an intimate journal where the narrator tells in confidence his thoughts and feelings.

The writing is extremely poetic with beautiful descriptions of the Golden Pavilion, of the lake where it is reflected and of the surrounding nature. The author knows how to sustain the attention with a lot of events of the daily life. He maintains the suspense during the typhoon and the last chapters when the hero premeditates the fire.

The novel is a succession of little scenes, with free association which raises up our interest like the material of a psychoanalysis. There is no transfer with a psychoanalyst but with the reader.

The Golden Pavilion idealized by his father

In his childhood, the narrator heard his father, prior of a temple in the country, talk about the Golden Pavilion. He is a lonely son and must leave his parents to study and live with a paternal uncle. We notice here a separation. His father idealizes the Golden Pavilion: nothing equals it in beauty. When the hero contemplates it for the first time, he finds it old and ugly. We can point out the devaluation by the narrator opposed to the father's idealization.

A castrated hero

The hero is puny and stammers. It is an intolerable castration for him. For us psychiatrists and psychoanalysts, stammering is the expression of an intense aggressiveness. The child compensates by the wish of being bonze in a Buddhist community and we notice an identification to his father.

Heterosexual desires and death-wishes

When adolescent, the narrator feels desires for Uiko, a beautiful girl, and dreams of her body at night. One day, he bounces towards her, stammers and she disappears. He wishes her death. She will be murdered by her companion. The novelist evokes heterosexual desire, the treason of a woman and death wishes towards her.

Tsurukawa, an idealized good object

His father was a friend of the Golden Pavilion's prior and asked him to take care of his son after his death. According to his last wills, the narrator enters the Rokuonji temple as a novice bonze. He meets Tsurukawa a kind novice who has a good influence on him. The description of the life in a Zen temple is remarkable.

First fantasy of the Temple's destruction

During the war and the first bombardments on Tokyo in 1944, there were air raids over Kyoto and the narrator developed the fantasy of the Golden Pavilion's destruction by a bomb.

Fantasy of breast feeding

Accompanied by Tsurukawa, he discovers in a tea garden a young woman who opens her kimono. The milk springs out her bosom in the cup of a young officer sitting with her. This is a lactation fantasy of the narrator (and the writer) in the position of a voyeur.

For the narrator it is the revival of Uiko. Is it a fantasy or a delusion? The author will make a link with a primal scene heard and seen.

Remembrance of a primal scene

A parent of his mother came to live with them and they all slept on the same tatami. Awaken, he notices that the mosquito net is shaken. His father is lying next to him and puts his hands in front of his eyes. We suppose that it is to avoid him seeing the gambol of his mother with the parent. He must have felt excluded from this primal scene, with a father who appears weak and castrated.

The narrator says to his mother not to come and visit him and we understand his aggressiveness against his mother. To pay her debts, the mother is going to give away the rights on the father's temple and go and live with an uncle. She says to her son that he has nothing else to do but become prior of the Golden Pavilion, like the friend of the father.

Breast feeding remembrance and masturbation

The narrator remembers the sweating smell of his mother breast feeding him (this is a fantasy because it is not possible). Then

during a hot night, he masturbates himself thinking of a black dog running along a dark street and panting with a rattle around the neck. The more the rattle rings, the biggest is his excitement. He sees Uiko's breast and thighs. The dog could be a homosexual fantasy and Uiko an heterosexual fantasy.

The American soldier and the prostitute

A drunk American soldier comes to visit the Golden Pavilion with a pregnant prostitute. He insults her and asks the narrator to stamp on her belly. He executes it in a state of great excitement. This is an acting of his hate for women and more particularly for his mother, for a pregnant mother and the child who would come to take his place. This is not the case of the narrator, a lonely child but it is the case of the author who is the eldest and has a younger brother and sister.

The prostitute loses the baby and complains of being stamped by a novice bonze and he is suspected. But the prior doesn't say anything and he enters the university. This is a turn in his life, a path going to hell.

We enter the second part of the novel, with the veneration of the Ugly, the Bad and the Evil.

A voyeurist and fetishist scene

He meets Kashiwagi, club-footed, somebody who has also a physical infirmity but uses it as a triumph and a delight. Kashiwagi is a bad, sadistic boy. There is a split between the good object Tsurukawa and the bad object Kashiwagi. I understand it also like the splitting of the ego of the author. Kashiwagi will guess that the narrator is a virgin and tells him about the loss of his virginity.

Kashiwagi visits a sixty years old widow, on the anniversary day of her husband's death. The staging is well prepared and we admire his art of manipulation. The widow pours the tea and he asks to take a bath and stands naked. The widow spills water on him and he uses Buddha and the religion to lead her to adore his club foot. Excited, he throws over the old woman.

The narrator says that in the same time he looks, he must also be looked at. His desire is a sort of appearance and he ejaculates in the direction of the reality he fixes. To look and to be looked at evokes voyeurist and fetishist tendencies, and also an ejaculation and an orgasm without any physical contact between the subject and the object. There is no sexual intercourse. He is excited by the vision of the old widow adoring his idolized club-foot, a fetish.

For Freud [4], the fetish is a substitute of a penis. The child thinks that his mother has a penis. The fetishist don't want to give up this idea and an object takes the place of the penis (shoe, silk, foot...).

In this case, Kashiwagi chooses the fetish on his own body: his club-foot adored by an old widow. Of course, I link it to the grandmother of the author who asked a massage from him when he was a child.

The narrator discovers impotence with women

Kashiwagi leads him to miss the university courses and organizes a picnic with his girlfriend and a girl for the narrator. This girl tells him that she gave birth to a dead child and that her boyfriend was an officer who was leaving for the battlefield and wanted to drink some of her milk. She gushed it up from her breast in a cup of tea. He recognizes the scene he saw with Tsurukawa and kisses the girl, a long kiss which stimulates his desire. A vision of the Golden Pavilion makes him impotent. Is it a fantasy or a psychotic delusion? The girl shows contempt for him.

The desire for a woman can't lead to a sexual intercourse. A vision appears and inhibits him: is it the representation of a father who forbids or the one of a hated mother?

Fantasy of lactation: the girl with the milk gush

Kashiwagi invites the narrator at his home with a young and beautiful girl. Is she the same than the picnic? She had a boyfriend who was a soldier and did an abortion. Kashiwagi is sadistic with her and she escapes. The narrator runs after her. He reminds her of the milk gush in the tea cup. She gives him her breast and the milk flows. The Golden Pavilion appears for a second time. He is impotent and notices her contempt.

What can represent this vision or delusion of the Golden Pavilion? It could be impossible oedipian desires, incestuous forbidden fantasies leading to a negative Oedipus with homosexual desires or the hate of his mother and oral pleasures.

Fugue, sexuality and incendiary fantasies

The prior reproaches him his absences and bad results. He says to him that he had the idea to choose him as a successor but changed his mind. The next day the narrator makes a fugue on a sudden impulsion and leaves to go to his father's tomb in his birth country. Then an idea haunts himself: "I must put on fire the Golden Pavilion".

He finishes his studies at the University, last of the class. The three last chapters are dedicated to the fire's preparation. The fire is premeditated and seems to be a sexual equivalence of the loss of virginity, or to have an orgasm with a woman.

The narrator associates with death and the cut of his penis. He goes to a brothel and describes an orgasm with no pleasure and an ejaculation but we don't understand if there was sexual intercourse or not. Sexuality seems linked to anality, castration and death and to the incendiary drives, the ecstasy he imagines.

The premeditated act of pyromania

In the Golden Pavilion, in front of the statue of a famous bonze, he sets the fire with three trusses of straw, then flies away at the back of the pavilion, willing to stay alive. This is a premeditated fire, an act of revenge against the prior and also a profanation.

We can notice that Mishima gave life to his hero with a lot of fantasies we usually don't find in psychopathy and delinquents.

We can think that he used his own fantasies. The author must have found documentation on psychopathy and pyromania to give likelihood to his hero. He did not describe a particular excitation before the incendiary act nor a relief after. He describes at several times visions of the Golden Pavilion which gave impotence to the narrator. Did he want to describe delirious hallucinations?

The author is a poet who likes beauty and tries to magnify it. The marvelous Golden Pavilion gave him the opportunity and the pyromaniac who set on fire by hate of the beauty may have puzzled him. He could identify to him by the age because Mishima Hayashi Shoken was twenty-one years old in 1950. Both experienced the bombing of Tokyo.

Confession of a mask: an autobiographic novel of Mishima [7]

In 1946, Mishima publishes his first novel at age twenty-one, then three years later this novel he recognizes for a part autobiographic. Through his principal personage Kochan, who speaks in the first person like in the Golden Pavilion later, he reveals sadistic fantasies and homosexual desires. The author always wanted to hide them (behind a mask).

Separation from his mother at one month and a half

He was a new born baby with little weight and was breast-fed by his mother. His parents lived in the paternal grand-mother's house, a big house with a garden and servants. When he is one month and a half, the grand-mother decided to take him in her room and to brought him up on her own way. But his mother is still breast-feeding her baby. We can understand the traumatism of this tearing away from the care and the love of his mother and the numerous fantasies of lactation in both novels. His paternal grand-father was governor of the Sakhalin Island. He had to resign and sell his properties one after the others. He is a fallen grand-father.

An all mighty, sadistic and incestual paternal grand-mother

The narrator describes his paternal grand-mother as a cultivated woman who reads French and German and loves Kabuchi. We can understand Mishima's inclination for theater and poetry. She asks her grand-son to massage her, acting as an incestual grand-mother. She forbids him to go in the sun, to practice sports and to play with boys. She obliges him to play with his "she cousins". He will be a puny and fragile child, effeminate. She behaves like an all-mighty sadistic grand-mother, who feminizes him and have emprise on her grand-son. The narrator doesn't say anything about his grand-father. Vomiting crisis after age of four evokes an unconscious rejection of his grand-mother. The idolized child, without a rival and undergoing the grand-ma's emprise protests with psychosomatic symptoms.

We learn by his biographer Bernard Marillier that his grand-mother comes from a family of "samourai", warriors who are not afraid of death and we understand his transformation later. Bernard Marillier insists on the fact that he is going to grow up in the room of a sick person filled with smells of oldness and sickness.

Masturbation and discovery of his homosexuality

The narrator discovers masturbation when he is twelve years old and like Mishima at the same age rejoin his parents and a younger sister and brother, brought up by them in a free-way. He still goes to see his grand-ma, a night every week "*A sixty years old tender lover*" says Mishima. The image of San Sebastian provokes his first ejaculation with fantasies on the Christian martyr. Images of naked women don't stimulate him. He experiences his first homosexual flutters with Omi a boy who has a bad behavior and accumulates numerous feminine conquests. We immediately remember Kashiwagi. The narrator is jealous of Omi's axillary hair and muscles testifying his virility.

Alone on a rock beside the sea, the souvenir of Omi, the image of San Sebastian and a glance on his axillary hair provokes a sexual desire and ejaculation. Sexuality and autoerotism have an important place in the novel and the author don't hesitate to exhibit it. His axillary hair could be a fetish. He confesses his homosexuality which stays platonic and guilty.

Primal fantasies

As the painter Salvador Dali, Mishima remembers his birth, having a bath in a shallow basin with a beam of light. Of course, it is impossible. I associate on the maternal uterus. Is it a desire to go back in the maternal womb? or the pleasure of finding again the maternal element in which he bathed.

Feminine identification and travesty

The narrator will first identify to a scavenger of excrement, a man who punches tickets in the subway, a tram conductor, then to women, a magician Tenkatsu and a queen of Egypt Cleopatra. He will disguise himself with his mother's clothes. His biographer Henri Alexis Baatsch reveals to us that his grand-mother used to dress him with girl clothes. He read the Anderson tales and fell in love with young men going to be killed.

Sexual desires for younger boys

Before he was attracted by older boys now by younger boys and have fantasies on the body of a seventeen years old school boy.

Interest for the body of young girls

He notices the sister of his friend Nukada and her red lips. Then the lips of the sister of his friend Kusano, seventeen, with beautiful legs and agile feet but flies away at the idea of marriage.

Conclusion

The Golden Pavilion and Confession of a mask shows voyeurist and fetishist fantasies and tendencies of the narrator and of the author: the venerated club-foot, the mother's sweating smell, the breast with the milk gush, the stamped belly of the pregnant prostitute in the Golden Pavilion, Omi's sweat smell and axillary hair and the image of San Sebastian pierced with arrows in Confession of a mask. We have sadistic, masochistic fantasies and anality in both novels. The homosexuality of Mishima is well known, linked to fetishism and heterosexuality. He married a woman and had two children.

We find the usual family pattern of the pervert. For Mishima it is not a mother but an incestual grand-mother who despises her husband and gives her grand-son the illusion that he is an adequate partner for her, denying the genital penis of her husband.

Mishima says that Confession of a mask is inspired by his life. The novel seems very similar to his own story. I lay down the principle that the author confesses his own fantasies, homosexual and heterosexual desires. What he reveals to us help us to understand his bisexuality and his voyeurist and fetishist tendencies.

Bernard Marillier [5], his biographer, tells us about a very close relationship with his mother after the age of twelve. She reconforts him and encourages him to read. It is more a close dependent relationship than an œdipian one counterbalancing the lack and the need of his mother in his childhood and the traumatism of separation. His father is a brutal man who violates his intimacy and wants to forbid his passion for writing. At age thirty he will build an athletic body. Can the whole body be considered as a fetish? He haunts homosexual bars, then get married when he is thirty-three years old and will be the father of two children he neglected.

He will have several homosexual companions: Siro Fukushima who published a book on their relationship and Morita with whom he will commit suicide in 1970 at age forty-five. He tried to put back the Emperor on the throne but failed and following the rite he did “harakiri” and “seppuku” from the hand of Morita who followed him in death. (1) With this spectacular death exhibited and magnified, he identifies to the Samouraï heros of his paternal grand-mother.

References

1. Baatsch Henri-Alexis, Mishima. Modernity, rite and death. Editions du Rocher. 2006.
2. Balier Claude. Psychoanalysis of violent sexual behavior. Le fil rouge, PUF. 1996.
3. Ey Henri. Manual of psychiatry. Masson & Cie. 1967.
4. Freud Sigmund. The sexual life. Fetichism, PUF. 1927.
5. Marillier Bernard, Mishima. Qui suis-je? Pardès. 2006.
6. Mishima Yukio. The Golden Pavilion. Folio, Gallimard. 1975.
7. Mishima Yukio. Confession of a Mask. Folio, Gallimard. 1958.