

Twentieth-  
Century  
Literature



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Source: *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Summer, 1993), pp. 230-249

Published by: [Hofstra University](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/441840>

Accessed: 22/11/2010 22:12

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# The Obsession to Destroy Monuments: Mishima and Böll

REIKO TACHIBANA NEMOTO

In Japan and in Germany the aftermath of World War II brought a preoccupation with the destruction of monuments (both real and fictional) by fire. In 1950, in the city of Kyoto in Japan, a famous Zen temple that was more than five hundred years old was burned down in an act of arson by a Zen acolyte named Hayashi Yoken, who said that his motive was “antipathy against beauty” (Tasaka 105).<sup>1</sup> This event became the subject of Mishima Yukio’s 1956 novel *Kinkakuji (The Temple of the Golden Pavilion)*, hereafter *Temple*, which retells the destruction of the temple from the retrospective viewpoint of an invented arsonist named Mizoguchi, who is “pursued by the *idée fixe* of beauty” (Nakamura 306).<sup>2</sup> In 1959, three years after Mishima’s sensational work, Heinrich Böll published a novel called *Billard um Halbzehn (Billiards at Half Past Nine)*, hereafter *Billiards* in which the central act is the deliberate burning of St. Anthony’s Abbey, a fictitious structure that, as the book explains, was built at the beginning of the twentieth century by an architect named Heinrich Fähmel and destroyed by his son Robert at the end of the war.<sup>3</sup>

In Japanese and German postwar literature the destruction of buildings or entire cities is a commonly shared experience. In Germany the first literary attempts of several “coming home” writers, including Böll, have been called *Trümmerliteratur* (rubble literature), i.e., literature whose setting is a battlefield or a bomb-ravaged city, usually presented with an immediacy of perspective and a lack of detachment. Similarly, in Japan *genbakubungaku* (atomic-bomb literature) portrays hellish pictures of the devastation in Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The uniqueness of the two novels by Mishima and Böll lies not in their subject matter, but in

their attitude toward their protagonists' deliberate violence against historical monuments. Both authors seem to justify the act of destruction, or at least to find such conduct inevitable in the dehumanized postwar society in which they live: the striking similarity of these novels lies in the ostensible endorsement of violence as a tool of aesthetic, political, and ideological expression. The symbol of the destroyed monument constitutes what Neil H. Donahue calls a "primary nexus" (58), demonstrating, as Ernestine Schlant suggests, that "literary truth often goes deeper than political or economic analysis, and [that] it reflects the conditions and values of the society under which it was created" (1).

The similarities between the two novels can be related, in part, to the fact that Japan and Germany have similar recent political and literary histories. They become modern states at almost the same time. After an approximately three-hundred-year isolation under the feudal Tokugawa shogunate, Japan opened her door to the West during the Meiji Restoration or Revolution of 1868, embarking, as Oda Makoto puts it, upon "the path leading to the status of a modern nation, under the strong and autocratic rule of the ten'no (emperor) system, a path that led to World War II, and Japan's total defeat" (264). Mishima's ideal image of the emperor centers on this period, that of the Meiji (1867–1912), Taisho (1912–1926), and Showa (1926–1945) emperors, in which the concept of *kokutai* (the national polity) or "the sacred nature of the Japanese nation" (Tasker 138), placed great emphasis on the emperor's divinity as a descendant of the Sun Goddess, and on the nobility of the Japanese people as "children" (*sekishi*) of the emperor God. Similarly, the German peoples' dream of the unification of their numerous small states came true in 1871, when the Prussian Count Bismarck established the Second Reich under Kaiser (Emperor) Wilhelm I, the head of an "authoritarian, conservative, 'military-bureaucratic power state'" (Spielvogel 5) with policies which would lead Germany into World War I during the reign of Wilhelm II. Like the Japanese *kokutai* ideology, the German focus on the Kaiser reinforced the ideology of the *Volk* (nation, people, or race), asserting the superiority of German culture and "the idea of a universal mission for the German people. This meant that individuals must be willing to sacrifice themselves for the higher claims of the *Volk*" (Spielvogel 6). The humiliation of the Versailles treaty as the result of Germany's defeat in World War I and the crisis in the Weimar Republic triggered the rise of Hitler, who, emphasizing the concept of the *Volk* and Aryan blood, promised to restore a "great" Germany.

The literary movements of Japan and Germany reflect the contemporary social and political situation. During the 1920s and early 1930s harsh conditions led to the development of an active "literature of the left" in both countries (Donahue 59). In Japan, however, after the 1933 police murder of Kobayashi Takiji, one of the dominant leftist figures, literary protest waned. Prudently, many Japanese leftist writers then chose to practice *tenko* or "conversion" literature, which was characterized by a complete reversal of the writers' earlier political stance, that is, by their total submission to authority. There was no significant literary objection when in 1937 Japan declared a "holy war" on China in the name of the "divine" Emperor. In Germany, as in Japan, the economic crisis of the 1920s enabled a protest movement to develop, but here too it was short-lived. The major leftist literary figures, such as Bertolt Brecht, Heinrich and Thomas Mann, and Alfred Döblin, were forced into exile when Paul von Hindenburg handed power over to Adolf Hitler in 1933. Writers and intellectuals who remained in the Third Reich either lived in a condition of "internal exile," that is, passive resistance, or became dutiful supporters of the Nazis. Thus for both Germany and Japan 1933 marked the death of intellectual freedom and the silencing of critical literature.

After their defeat in World War II in 1945, under Allied occupation the Japanese and the Germans devoted themselves to "the sublimated attempt to dominate the world economically instead of militarily" (Schlant 11). In both countries writers expressed their discomfort with the fact that the change in national policy involved means but not ends. It is not a mere coincidence that Mishima's and Böll's novels appeared in the late 1950s, when Japan and Germany were "enjoying" economic miracles. Böll's and Mishima's descriptions of postwar society closely resemble one another: both authors see madness and emptiness in the postwar world, portray their characters as alienated from that world, and thus express their disillusionment with modern existence. In a speech delivered in 1975 Böll clearly manifested his discontent with the situation in Germany:

After [World War II], quite apart from questions of de-Nazification . . . we ought to have started something which might have been called socialism, links between Christian and social or socialist ideas. . . . But in the end it turned out that what we call Restoration almost unavoidably recreated the old structures: family egoism, striving for possessions again, middle-class values again. (Reid 43)

Böll's disappointment with postwar Germany is also shown in his

resentment of Konrad Adenauer, who served as Chancellor from 1949 to 1963. Adenauer, like Böll a pious Catholic and a resister of the Third Reich, nevertheless pursued mere economic gains, as Böll saw it, and constructed a new Germany based on old political and social structures. For Böll this continuing presence of the undesirable past in modern society has seemed intolerable. Correspondingly, Mishima was discontented with modern Japan, although for very different reasons: for him the past had been too readily abandoned. He strongly believed that the moral degradation he perceived in postwar Japanese society resulted from Emperor Hirohito's denial of divinity under pressure from the Allied Powers. For Mishima the loss of the Emperor's divine identity meant the loss of the Japanese soul, with social chaos as the result.

Mishima's *Temple* is a confessional story in which Mizoguchi, serving as the first-person narrator, tells why and how he "killed" the Golden Temple, even though the monument was both his personal ideal of beauty and a national treasure, a symbol of the old Japan and of the imperishability of Japan's cultural heritage. Mizoguchi's combined love and hatred for the monument reflect the ambivalent feelings of the Japanese people, and especially of Mishima's generation, toward the Emperor who, they feel, betrayed them through his *Ningen-Sengen* of 1945, the proclamation that changed a divine figure of authority into a merely human function of the state. Mishima considers his hero Mizoguchi to be a victim of this evil world that has lost its traditional moral center, and this loss accounts for the desperation of the young man's actions. As Noguchi Takehiko puts it, "for Mishima, the Golden Temple is synonymous with postwar Japan, which should have vanished at the defeat in the war. By killing the temple in his writing, Mishima took revenge on the world in which he lived" (305).<sup>4</sup> For *Billiards* the Catholic Böll chooses a Catholic abbey, presented as "a historical and artistic monument of the first rank" (155), to symbolize Germany's surrender to the evil powers of the Third Reich. The reason why Robert Fähhmel demolishes the abbey is revealed by first- and third-person narrators and flashbacks: the abbey represents the guilt of the Church as an institution and the guilt of those individual Germans who directly or indirectly supported the Nazis. Fähhmel's action is described as revenge for the people whose lives were ruined in the Third Reich.

Through these religious monuments both Mishima and Böll express a Manichean or dichotomized view of the world as constituted of fundamental dualities—good and evil, beauty and decay, life and death. Mishima traces symbolic dualities drawn from the traditions of

Zen Buddhism, while Böll's dualities are derived from a non-institutional Catholicism. *Temple* illustrates the theme of an intertwined obsession with beauty and destruction through two main dichotomies: the contrast between Mizoguchi and his friend Kashiwagi at the Zen university; and the opposition between the Life-Giving Sword (*kat-suninken*) and the Murdering Sword (*setsuninto*) in the Zen story of the cat. In *Billiards* Böll symbolizes the eternal confrontation between victims and victimizers, and good and evil, in the dichotomy between the Host of the Lamb and the Host of the Beast.

Throughout his novel Mishima emphasizes his hero Mizoguchi's alienation from the world, a distancing originally due to his childhood stuttering and physical ugliness. In this alienated context the young Mizoguchi's obsession with the Golden Temple begins and grows, fed by comments made by his priest father. "Ever since my childhood, Father had often spoken to me about the Golden Temple" (3), says Mizoguchi at the beginning of the story. The monument thus represents the child's desire to fulfill the value system of his father, as well as the collective Japanese cultural devotion to the traditional past. Living far away from the temple, and seeing it only in pictures, the boy increasingly escapes from reality by living in a romanticized inner world that is suffused with the monument's imagined beauty. When Mizoguchi actually travels to see the temple, however, he feels betrayed, and it is not until his return to the provinces that an awareness of its beauty revives within him. His view of reality at this point is severely affected by the standards he has created in his mind: the temple seems most beautiful when it is absent. The seed of Mizoguchi's compulsion to destroy or deface beauty is planted here. When a young hero from the Naval Engineering Academy visits the boy's school and proudly talks to the students about his experience, Mizoguchi, as an outsider among his peers, secretly engraves "ugly" cuts on the scabbard of the hero's beautiful sword, which is the object of admiration of all the other listeners. His simultaneous idolization of beauty and wish for its destruction foreshadow the burning of Kinkakuji.

Even when Mizoguchi moves to join the community at the Golden Temple as an acolyte, an event the novel places in the summer of 1944, when the war was already going badly, the distance between the beauty in his mind and the real monument remains. However, the romanticized, imaginary temple and the real one paradoxically seem to merge through the possibility that the temple might be burned down during an air raid. In the protagonist's mind the tragic beauty of the object that awaits its own imminent destruction, and the idea that he too

might share its fate, unexpectedly shorten the psychological distance between him and the temple, and between the imaginary and the real. His expectation of bombing leads him to the thought that the destruction of the whole world is both inevitable and desirable. The idea of beauty, by now firmly entangled with the idea of destruction, gives him the “darkest thoughts that exist in this world” (48) and alienates him from what would seem to be normal perceptions and experiences. He retreats into a “dreamlike” state during the war: “Because of the war, life is far away. . . . For us boys, war was a dreamlike sort of experience lacking any real substance, something like an isolation ward in which one is cut off from the meaning of life” (46–47). But in spite of his expectation, at the end of the war the Golden Temple remains unchanged—and to him this outcome is unwelcome. “The bond between the Golden Temple and myself has been cut” (64) and the Golden Temple’s eternity “awoke, was resuscitated, and asserted its rights” (64), says Mizoguchi, on August 15, 1945, the day of Japan’s surrender. In the chaotic postwar world, Mizoguchi’s obsession with the destruction of beauty grows, as his passion for imaginary loveliness overpowers his ability to accept what is real.

Through traditional elements of Zen Buddhism, Mishima illustrates the process by which Mizoguchi’s combined love and hatred of ideal beauty develops. The famous *koan* (parable) known as “Nansen Kills a Cat”—an episode from the *Mumonkan*, a thirteenth-century collection of forty-eight *koan*—is discussed at the Golden Temple during the last night of the war. In this story, while a group of monks are quarreling about a cat, Master Nansen lifts the cat up, saying that it will be saved if any of them can speak a word of Zen, but that otherwise he will kill it. Nobody is able to answer and so Nansen kills the cat. When Nansen later meets the chief disciple Choshu, tells him what has happened, and asks for his opinion, Choshu removes his shoes and puts them on his head. Nansen laments, saying that if Choshu had been there earlier, the cat’s life could have been saved. In Mishima’s novel the Superior at the Golden Temple explains that Nansen, the man of action, killed the cat in order to “cut away the illusion of self and to cut off all contradiction, opposition, and discord between self and others” (66–67). This is the Murdering Sword. By contrast, Choshu’s action is the Life-Giving Sword: “By performing an action of such infinite magnanimity as wearing filthy and despised objects like shoes on his head, he had given a practical demonstration of the way of the Bodhisattva” (66). Through the Superior’s choice of this *koan* to analyze

on the night following the Emperor's surrender, which was broadcast on the radio, Mishima implies the death of Imperial Japan and of the divine Emperor by the Murdering Sword; because no voices of wisdom spoke on their behalf, and no one performed actions of "magnanimity," they, like the cat, had to die. In a sense Mizoguchi has sought the Life-giving Sword throughout his life, but has failed to find it. He takes up the Murdering Sword instead and kills the beauty of the Golden Temple, as Mishima would later choose the Murdering Sword to kill himself (he committed harakiri in 1970).

The theme of freeing oneself from a romanticized inner world not by changing one's perception of reality but by destroying the object of romanticization and thus changing the world is clearly reflected in Nansen's killing of the cat. Mizoguchi's university friend Kashiwagi sees that the cat is equivalent to the Golden Temple. "[The cat] was beautiful," he remarks, "you know. . . . Incomparably beautiful. Her eyes were golden, her fur was glossy" (143). However, killing the cat, an object of obsession, does not lead to a solution, because "the root of the beauty had not been severed and, even though the [cat] was dead, the [cat]'s beauty might very well still be alive" (144). On the premise that beauty derives from knowledge (*ninshiki*) of the world, the concept of beauty remains even though the object of beauty is destroyed. In contrast to Mizoguchi's emphasis on action, his friend Kashiwagi here insists on the significance of knowledge, saying, "What transforms this world is—knowledge. . . . Nothing else can change anything in this world . . . human beings possess the weapon of knowledge in order to make life bearable" (215–16). But Mizoguchi is committed to action. He had happily expected that he and the Golden Temple would die together during the American wartime raids, and his happiness can return only when he decides to destroy the temple. In fact, his belief that his world and the world of beauty will become one through his act of arson makes him ecstatic. Toward the end of the novel he recalls how, a few hours before the accomplishment of his desire, he was filled with anticipation of the happiest moment in his life:

It wouldn't be long now, I thought; I must just remain patient for a short while. The rusty key that opened the door between the outer world and my inner world would turn smoothly in its lock. My world would be ventilated as the breeze blew freely between it and the outer world. The well bucket would rise, swaying lightly in the wind and everything would open up before me in the form of a vast field and the secret room would be destroyed. . . . Now it is before my eyes and my hands are just about to stretch out



and reach it . . . I was filled with happiness as I sat there in the darkness for about an hour. I felt that I had never been as happy in my entire life. (247–48)

Mishima allows the protagonist to use words from Zen tradition to justify his action, though he misinterprets them according to his own perception: “When ye meet the Buddha, kill the Buddha! . . . when ye meet your father and mother, kill your father and mother . . . only thus will ye attain deliverance” (258). Rinzai, the original speaker of these words from the *Rinzairoku* (the ninth-century record of Rinzai’s sermons, compiled by his disciples), was not insisting on actual murder. Instead, he was affirming the principle that a bond with any object likely to entail dependence should be cut off. In contrast, Mizoguchi misreads the remark, taking it literally, and kills the temple “precisely because it [is] so futile” (258). Mishima concludes the story at the moment of Mizoguchi’s act of destruction, which coincides with his remarkable statement of satisfaction: “I . . . started smoking. I felt like a man who settles down for a smoke after finishing a job of work. I wanted to live” (262).<sup>5</sup> The smoke of the destructive fire and the smoke of the cigarette have coalesced into an image of restfulness and comfort. This finale clearly manifests Mishima’s interest in the protagonist’s psychological process before, and during, the act of destruction. He is not concerned with what happens to his hero afterward. Because of this ending, Kobayashi Hideo comments that “the Golden Temple is not a novel, but lyric poetry. It would become a novel if Mizoguchi’s life after the arson were added” (“Ima” 192).

As Mizoguchi, at the end of the novel, expresses his wish to live, so Mishima himself began a new life, forming his fragile body into something beautiful: in the summer of 1955, while he was writing *Temple*, he sought to reshape his body through weight-lifting. In an essay entitled *Sun and Steel*, stating that his lack of “the muscles suitable for a dramatic death” had prevented him from dying in the war, he confesses his longing for a vision of eschatology, for what he calls the Dionysian “tragic world”<sup>6</sup> that would let him “breathe freely, that was so utterly remote from the commonplace and lacking in future—this world [he] had pursued unceasingly, ever since the war had ended, with a burning sense of frustration” (28, 62). This fascination with destruction and ultimately with self-destruction on Mishima’s part originated in the Japanese Romantic School, the so-called *Nihon Roman-ha*, which emerged in the mid-1930s simultaneously with the rise of fascism. Borrowing some of its central ideas from German Romanticism, the *Nihon Roman-ha* movement considered Japan to be a

nation inhabited by a superior race and culture, for which the divine Emperor was the uniting force. For *Nihon Roman-ha* writers, the ideal death meant dying young, at the height of one's beauty, for the Emperor. This expectation of self-destruction led these writers to a desire for the world's destruction as well: beauty and destruction were thus their ultimate values. Basing his novel on this aesthetic concept, Mishima makes Mizoguchi create a tragic world, a world lacking a future, through his destruction of the Temple; and in reality Mishima performed his own aesthetic tragedy as well. As Mizoguchi both loves and destroys the eternal beauty of the Golden Temple, the narcissistic Mishima loved his beautiful body and yet destroyed it because of its mortal mutability, for he wanted to die before the beauty of his body decayed. Through his suicide by the sword, it is generally recognized, Mishima attempted to stir up Japanese sentiment to restore the traditional role of the Emperor, yet, as Joel Black puts it, "Mishima's call for a return to Japanese imperialism was less a political or ideological [manifesto] than an aesthetic credo, based on the samurai perfection of both literary and martial arts (*bunburyodo*)" (208). Mishima's handsome muscular body finally allowed him to accomplish a dramatic death in the name of the Emperor at the age of forty-five, fifteen years after the writing of *Temple*. In this act of violence Mishima unified the concepts of beauty and destruction, or, to state it differently, he demonstrated that to him the desire for destruction was itself beautiful.

In a sense, Böll's *Billiards* starts where *Temple* ends. Whereas Mishima's story concludes at the moment of Mizoguchi's act of arson, Böll describes Robert's life after his destruction of St. Anthony's Abbey. On the day of the grandfather Heinrich's eightieth birthday, on September 6, 1958, three generations of a middle-class architectural family, the Fähmels, are reunited. To the reader or to an internal audience of intimate listeners, each family member narrates his or her painful life in the period of the Hohenzollern empire, the Third Reich, and the postwar era. Like Mishima, Böll presents a Manichean vision of the world and constructs a paradoxical psychology for his narrators, including Robert and his mother Johanna, both of whom withdraw from external life through a process described as "inner emigration" (151): Johanna chooses to live in a mental hospital, Robert in rigid daily routines. This alienation symbolizes their passive resistance to a society in which the evil of the past still enjoys power.

Just as Mizoguchi's life after the war is described as "a return to the unchanging, eternal Buddhist routine" (67), Robert's life is filled with schedules and formulas. As "an architect who's never built a house"

(149), he shuts himself up every morning from half past nine until eleven to play billiards at the Prince Heinrich Hotel. Nobody except his family is allowed to interrupt this curious preoccupation. His alienation, we learn, is deeply rooted in his school days. In the summer of 1935, Robert's schoolmate Schrella had been tortured by the policeman Nettlinger and the gym teacher Old Wobbly for swearing "never to put the Host of the Beast to [his] lips" (42)—in other words, the schoolboy was opposed to Nazism. Robert supported Schrella, and later he too swore "not to make oblation to the Host of the Beast . . . [for] revenge for Ferdi Progulske whom they executed only that morning . . . [because] Ferdi had sneaked into Old Wobbly's apartment and thrown a bomb at Wobbly's feet" (49).<sup>7</sup> As a result, the twenty-year-old Robert and Schrella have to go into exile. After two years, owing to Johanna's appeal, Robert is allowed to come back to Nazi Germany on the condition that he refrain from political activity and join the army immediately after graduation. Schrella returns only after twenty-two years, on Heinrich's birthday.

Mishima's novel, as noted, reflects dichotomized or polarized concepts; so does Böll's. By contrasting the Host of the Beast with the Host of the Lamb and using animal figures reminiscent of apocalyptic writings, Böll categorizes his characters in two groups: the victimizers Nettlinger, Old Wobbly (Vacano), and Otto, who are representatives of the Beast; and the victims Ferdi, Schrella, and Robert's wife Edith, representatives of the Lamb. Drawing upon concepts of Manichean dualism, Böll depicts, as Walter Sokel describes it, the unending struggle between "buffalo and lamb, Cain and Abel, World and Christ. [Labels] and watchwords change, but the essence remains the same" (21). In the postwar setting of 1958 most of the Lambs have been killed by the Beast, or, like Edith, died in the bombed city. Schrella, after his long exile, is now stateless and homeless. Most of those who partake of the Host of the Beast, however, continue to live, thrive, and enjoy their power in modern Germany. This prosperous group includes Nettlinger, the former Nazi chief of police, who is now a "democrat." By depicting the world as still divided between victims and victimizers, Böll shows the continuity of Germany's catastrophic history (*die deutsche Misere*) as being symptomatic of an ahistorical condition of the world, for history becomes a permanent condition in which the conflict between good and evil never ceases.

Böll asks whether individual resistance against the Beasts is nevertheless possible, and, if so, how. The answer seems to involve the acceptance of violence as a form of political expression. By naming his

main character Robert Shepherd and having him support the Lambs, Böll sets him in opposition to the Abbey, which represents "the self-betrayal of the Catholics, that is, the betrayal of the Lambs to the [Beast]" (Sokel 30). Böll here reverses the conventional polarity between good and evil, "justifying" Robert's act of bombing as resistance to the Beast who ruins the Lamb. Robert's obsession with destroying the Abbey is transformed into action just three days before the end of the war:

[Robert] had waited through five years of war for that moment. The moment when the Abbey would be his booty, lying there like a gift of God. He had wanted to erect a monument of dust and rubble for those who had not been historical monuments and whom no one had thought to spare. Edith, killed by a piece of shrapnel; Ferdi, would-be assassin condemned by process of law . . . Schrella himself, who had to live so far away from the land where Hölderlin had lived; and the many others who had gone marching off, singing ["The rotten bones shiver"]. (156)

Robert's desperate tone resembles Mizoguchi's anxiety in the moments before he sets the fire, but Mizoguchi's act of arson is accomplished for his own sake, whereas for Robert the destruction of the Abbey means the erection of "a monument of the Lambs no one had fed" (157) and embodies the completion of his active revenge for them, since "he froze his thoughts of vengeance into formulas and carried them . . . with him [during the war]" (221). Robert's deed is an act of resistance to the Third Reich as well as to the Church, which had bent before the power of evil. As Robert says to himself, "Hatred destroyed [the Abbey]" (228). His act of destruction manifests his anger toward the self-betrayal of the Church and toward an immoral regime: "The Abbot . . . did have a taste of [the Beasts'] sacrament, of respectability, orderliness and honor. They celebrated it, monks with flaming torches up. . . . A new age began, an age of sacrifice, of pain" (146). Yet Böll does not expect society to improve as a result of his protest. He criticizes the Church not only because it supported fascism, but also because "despite the lessons of the past, the Church in no way seems to have reconsidered its attitude to the morality of war" (Sokel 21);<sup>8</sup> as an institution it has not fundamentally changed. The Catholic Böll himself does not illustrate Christian forgiveness in his criticism of the Catholic establishment. He merely presents his characters' powerlessness and sufferings as they are.

In addition to the destruction of the Abbey, Robert later urges

attacks upon all the historical monuments in postwar Germany, saying to his father and other men:

Away with it—blow it up. . . . Do it, before people come back into the city—there's no one living there now so you needn't worry, tear it all down. . . . I am leaving you in the lurch if I have to worry about every chicken-run from the time of the Romans. Walls are walls as far as I'm concerned, and believe you me there are good ones and bad ones. Away with all the rubbish. Blow it up and make some breathing space. (202)

As the Land of *Humanität* perished in the war, every monument should be torn down to protest the evil of the Third Reich. Robert's daughter Ruth remarks on his passion for destruction: "Remember how happy father was when he could still blow things up? He's only grown so serious now that there's been nothing more to blow up" (260–61). Whereas Mishima, through Mizoguchi, manifests his nostalgia for the old Japan, Böll, through Robert, advocates his desire to entirely eliminate the old structures from postwar society.

Moreover, through Robert's revengeful action, Böll attacks a value system that gives material things, represented by historical monuments, priority over human life. Robert's father Heinrich says that after the war the British commanding officer apologized to him for "having bombed the Honorius Church and destroyed the twelfth-century crucifixion group." Heinrich commends, "He didn't apologize for Edith [who was killed by shrapnel], only for a twelfth-century crucifixion panel. 'Sorry'" (164). An American officer also explains to Robert that the Allies "would have agreed to postpone the advance for two or even three days, rather than harm the Abbey" (155–56). Demonstrating his resentment against this mentality, Böll has Robert repeatedly express regret at failing to destroy the outstanding architecture of St. Severin's, which he sees himself pursuing like a hunter: "Now I am stalking the prey sticking up against the far horizon, gray, slender St. Severin's" (167). This monument recalls the famous Gothic cathedral in Böll's home town of Cologne (the novel's setting seems to be Cologne, although Böll never mentions the name of the city), a historical structure which, though damaged, escaped destruction due to its cultural value. It is curious that in spite of Mishima's and Mizoguchi's expectations, Kyoto was saved from American air raids for the same reason.<sup>9</sup> For Böll, it is preposterous that both Hitler's army and the Allies attached such importance to the preservation of historical monuments while so many of the Lambs lost their lives.

The theme of violence is renewed in *Billiards* when a second act of

protest is planned by Johanna. On the day of her husband's birthday in 1958, she comes out of the mental asylum and attends a parade, where she plans to take revenge on behalf of all the Lambs by shooting a former Nazi, either Nettlinger or Old Wobbly. However, at the last moment Johanna suddenly changes her target, shooting not at either of them but instead at a "bigger" politician, a Bonn minister, in order to accomplish the "murder of respectability" (254); her bullet misses its mark. For Johanna the leadership of modern Germany represents the persistence of the past. With Johanna's action, as Wilhelm J. Schwarz puts it, Böll "tries to indicate the continuity of German militarism as shown by the parades before World War I, before World War II, and in 1958" (119). As a "madwoman's deed, her attempted assassination does not affect the political system, but it makes her husband Heinrich realize how much he has been absorbed into society, leading a life contrary to his true self; he finally sees that his passive attitude has allowed the Beasts to grow fat. He also comes to understand his son Robert's wartime destruction of the monument, a building in which he too is involved, for fifty years ago Heinrich had made his debut as an architect by designing and erecting St. Anthony's Abbey.<sup>10</sup>

The story of the Abbey, however, does not end in rubble. Built by the twenty-nine-year-old Heinrich in 1908, and destroyed by his twenty-nine-year-old son Robert in 1945, the Abbey is partially reconstructed by Robert's twenty-two-year-old son Joseph in 1958.<sup>11</sup> (The Golden Temple was rebuilt in 1955, a year before the publication of Mishima's novel.) Like the Temple in Mishima's novel, the Abbey symbolizes the old traditions; but it also represents the military restoration of postwar Germany: "For West Germany the period 1954–1958 was the era of military restoration, the period when Germany rearmed as an integral part of the West's military defenses" (Conrad 134). To Böll, the German empire of Kaiser Wilhelm, the Weimar Republic, Hitler's Third Reich, and the postwar period of reconstruction all show the continuation of Germany's militarism and aggressive economics.

Throughout the novel Böll portrays his characters' destructive acts as symbolic of their interior mental or psychological conditions, and of the society around them. Judith Ryan interprets Robert's action as pragmatic, saying that by destroying the Abbey he "hoped to accelerate the Allies' advance into Germany, and thus the ultimate conclusion of the war" (134), and indeed Robert's action definitely "hurried [the Allies' advance] up" (156). However, I believe that Böll's depiction of his motive goes beyond any such military purpose, to which very little

attention is given, and focuses instead on the symbolic value of the act, on what Robert describes as “the erection of a monument to the Lambs.” This focus is also neglected by Rainer Nägele, who sees Böll’s writings as displaying “emotionally colored anarchistic behavior patterns directed at vaguely defined authority relationships” (53). Böll’s description is, to the contrary, not effectively anarchistic, since politically nothing changes, but symbolic. By dramatizing apparently meaningless acts, Böll wants to present, as Lee Nahrgang puts it, “a moral argument against the social inequities which cause the suffering and violence” (112), and to induce the reader to assess whether individual acts of resistance against social evils can be personally meaningful even if politically ineffective.

Moreover, the concluding gesture of the story, in which the grandfather performs another symbolic act of “destruction,” reinforces Böll’s intention: flushing deeply and swallowing his anger when the staff at the Café Kroner bring him a huge birthday cake made by Mrs. Kroner in the shape of the Abbey, Heinrich “cut off the spire of the Abbey first, and passed the plate to Robert” (280). When he was a young man fifty-one years ago, Heinrich suddenly became famous as the winner of the competition for architectural designs for the Abbey project, but now his response to such a “reconstruction” of the Abbey is not appreciation but hostility. As with the last scene of Mishima’s novel, where Mizoguchi sits smoking a cigarette, this conclusion has caused critical disagreement. Sokel interprets the scene as “the execution of [the grandfather’s] pride which his son had performed actually” (28). Responding to Roy Pascal’s criticism of the “obtrusive symbolism” in the last scene, Judith Ryan asks, “But isn’t this, after all, the whole point? The sense of futility we feel at Heinrich’s systematic demolition of the hated model of the abbey carries over to our perception of Johanna’s futile shooting. What difference can a mere gesture possibly make?” (90). Ryan thus accepts Heinrich’s symbolic protest as serving to emphasize Böll’s meaning (“the whole point”). As the smoke of the cigarette and of the temple fire “peacefully” merge in Mishima’s novel, here the destruction of the model abbey by the father and the actual abbey by the son overlap the past with the present. For Mishima, the old Japan has easily disappeared like smoke, whereas for Böll the historical monument is something to be “consumed” like a cake, in order, as Robert states, to erect “a monument of the Lambs no one had fed” (157).

Böll presents Robert’s and Johanna’s acts of violence as inevitable (if ineffective) protests against social evils, just as Mishima depicts his

hero's resort to arson as a desperate act in a struggle against a dehumanized world.<sup>12</sup> Mishima and Böll portray the obsession with further destruction—an obsession which might initially seem wholly negative or evil, in the aftermath of a war that had already left so much in ruins—as a characteristic of personality, indeed a compulsion, that we must understand and even accept. In their view, acts of violence and arson are the manifestations of the eternal struggle between good and evil, victim and victimizer, or, in Mishima's terms, between beauty and decay, life and death.

Despite their similar themes of destruction and their Manichean view of the world, Mishima's attitude toward his hero is amoral, in the sense of focusing on the individual's aestheticized experience without concern for others, whereas Böll emphasizes his characters' active or passive resistance from a socially engaged and in this sense a moral point of view. In a word, Mishima's sole concern is aesthetics, while Böll's focus is the individual's moral responsibility in society. Creating a fictional arsonist who is preoccupied with beauty, Mishima justifies his actions and sympathizes with him. In fact, Mishima and his hero Mizoguchi often overlap in the novel. In his diary entry of June 11, 1958, in *Ratai to Isho* (Nude and Costume), Mishima comments: "I wrote *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* in order to study the motive of the crime. I wanted to show that even a trifling concept, like 'beauty,' can be the motive for such a serious crime as the burning of a national treasure. In other words, in order to live through the present age, one needs to believe in such a trifling idea and make it a motive to live. Hitler is a good example of how this idea may become a motive for suicide or death" (62, my translation). Mishima's reference to a "trifling" concept masks his sorrow for something he sees as beautiful but lost or destroyed—*kokutai*, or the institution of the divine Emperor—as increasingly became evident in his obsession with a self-destructive, "beautiful death" in the name of the Emperor.

Robert's burning of the Abbey, in contrast, suggests that Böll, a devout Catholic, was concerned with social structures such as family, church, and government. Robert's action serves to provoke readers to reconsider morally the society in which they live, for the destruction of a fictitious Abbey symbolizes the deprivation of humanity under the Third Reich, and also implies Böll's distrust of institutionalized Christianity. By stressing the continuing presence of the past in *Billiards*, Böll presents that past as part of an eternal pattern and implies his skepticism of the supposedly new German political system. In the Frankfurt lectures of 1963–1964, he clearly acknowledges his suspicion



of political ideology: "What is difficult for one who has experienced an empire, a republic, a dictatorship, an interregnum, and a second republic before he was thirty . . . is to believe in states" (Reid 121).

In addition to their different amoral-moral points of view, Mishima and Böll present their narrators from diametrically opposed perspectives which reflect their own recent past: the perspective of the victim versus that of the guilty. Mishima's narrator is portrayed as a victim of the war and of the Emperor, whereas Böll stresses his characters' guilt. Like his narrator, Mishima experienced his happiest period during the war, dreaming of a desired "romantic" death for the divine Emperor. "It was that rare time [1944–1945], when my personal nihilism and the nihilism of society at large about its fate perfectly corresponded," he remarked (Nathan 63). Mishima regretted deeply that he had missed the chance to die at the height of his youth, regarding his postwar days as a "leftover" life. *Temple* clearly manifests his longing for the vanished Imperial Japan, in which the Emperor was the unifying force and the center of Japanese culture.

In contrast, Böll was opposed to imperialism and made several attempts to avoid military service, though eventually he served in Hitler's army for six years, like Robert, and was taken to a prisoner-of-war camp at the end of the war. He describes his repugnance for the Nazis. "They revolted me, repelled me on every level of my existence: conscious and instinctive, aesthetic and political" (*What's* 4). As a representative of the "coming home" generation, Böll expresses continued responsibility for the sins committed in the name of the Nazis. Robert's and Johanna's "trifling" actions of revenge reflect not only their anger but also their feeling of guilt that each individual's passivity allowed the Nazis to flourish. There is no nostalgia here for the prewar or wartime era.

Though different perspectives, Mishima and Böll both legitimize violence in their novels, Mishima for his aesthetic credo, in which beauty and destruction intertwined, and Böll for his ideological belief, in which the institutions of the past deserve to be destroyed. However, as writers they succeed in containing the acts of destruction within the verbal object of the text, integrating arson into the narrative in such a way that its meaning derives from the specific context, and thus in these two novels they stop just short of a general endorsement of violence.<sup>13</sup> Neither writer issues a real call to anarchy, for both recognize that society does not change as a result of such acts. Even as Mizoguchi sets fire to the Golden Temple he realizes the "futility" of this action (258), and when Robert destroys the Abbey he knows that his deed "obviously

makes no sense whatever, either tactically or strategically" (156). The religious monuments that must be destroyed serve primarily as a central device to depict the characters' psychological states within a Manichean world view, and to express the two writers' responses to their own wartime and postwar experiences. By using the Golden Temple as a symbol of the old Japan, Mishima, through his narrator, describes his "left-over" life in a tone that betrays his nostalgic yearning for the past. Employing the Abbey as a symbol of the institutional betrayal of humanity, Böll portrays the dehumanized modern world which (he feels) has mistakenly perpetuated the past. It is curious that, though both writers seem to share the obsession with destruction—at least within the framework of fiction—the worlds in which they would prefer to live are very different indeed.

### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> All translations from Japanese criticism are my own. Japanese names throughout the article, are written in Japanese order, surname first. In the case of Hayashi Yoken, for instance, Hayashi is his family name or surname, and Yoken his given name. Japanese names have no comma between surname and the given name in the list of Works Cited.

<sup>2</sup> Mishima investigated the arsonist Hayashi Yoken thoroughly and used several of his real characteristics, such as his stuttering and his being a novice from a religious family. The term *Mizoguchi* literally means "estrangement-mouth or gap-mouth" (*mizo* means gap, gulf, ditch or gutter; *guchi* or *kuchi* means mouth). Thus the protagonist's name implies his stuttering. See also David Pollack's analysis of the names of Mishima's characters.

<sup>3</sup> Whether Böll knew Mishima's novel before writing his own remains uncertain, but seems improbable. *Kinkakuji* was translated into English in 1959, the year *Billiards* was published, and into German in 1961. The dates make influence from the German version chronologically impossible and from the English version unlikely.

<sup>4</sup> Tanaka Miyoko calls Mishima's novel an "autobiography of the soul of defeated Japan" (*haisen nihon no tamashii no jiyoden*, 135). Irmela Hijjiya-Kirschnereit also points out "the author's systematic and deeply meaningful allusions to the war in the story" (111).

<sup>5</sup> In his excellent essay (74) Tsuruta Kinya comments on the unnaturalness of this ending, saying that a person who sits smoking after the completion of his work is not preoccupied with the serious problems of life/death, and agreeing with Kobayashi Hideo (n. pag.) that Mishima should have killed Mizoguchi instead of allowing him to survive.

<sup>6</sup> Mishima is influenced by Nietzsche, particularly by *The Birth of Tragedy*. See Tasaka Kou 13–38.

<sup>7</sup> Böll's autobiographical essay *Was Soll aus dem Jungen Bloß Werden*, translated as *What's to Become of the Boy?* describes a fearful experience of his youth which overlaps Ferdi's case. In 1933, as the fifteen-year-old Böll

witnessed, "seven of the seventeen accused [young members of the Red Front Fighters' League] were [without any conclusive evidence] condemned to death, on the charge of murdering two Storm Troopers . . . and a few months later they were beheaded with an ax" (25). In a 1961 interview with Horst Bienek, Böll also mentioned this historical incident as the germ of *Billiards*; see Wilhelm J. Schwartz 29.

<sup>8</sup> The Nazis concluded a concordant with the Vatican in July 1933. As Spielvogel indicates, "The concordant's recognition of the Hitler regime by the Catholic church was a tremendous boost to the prestige of the regime" (112).

<sup>9</sup> At the direct order of Secretary of War Henry Stimson on May 30, 1945, Kyoto was removed from the list of proposed atomic bomb targets because of its cultural value, although it was militarily important. See Richard Rhodes 640–41.

<sup>10</sup> Robert realizes only after the destruction of St. Anthony that the building is his father's work; Böll thus carefully avoids the notion of the Oedipus complex as Robert's motive.

<sup>11</sup> Christian Kollerer regards St. Anthony's Abbey as symbolizing the phases of German society in the twentieth century—construction, destruction, and reconstruction (48).

<sup>12</sup> Interpretation of Johanna's and Robert's actions has been controversial. In his essay "*Lob des neunzehnte Jahrhunderts.*" Georg Lukács interprets Johanna's act as "*einer der wenigen menschlich echten Bewältigungen der faschistischen Vergangenheit in Deutschland, gerade weil in diesem Bewältigungsversuch auch die Vorgeschichte und die Nachgeschichte Hitlers mitgemeint ist*" (331; "one of the few humanly genuine attempts to surmount the fascist past in Germany, since her attempt also means to deal with the pre- and post-Hitler eras"). Robert C. Conrad comments, "What justifies the violence of Ferdi, Robert and Johanna is that they work from a position of weakness, not power, that they strive to right wrong, not to do wrong—a distinction some readers will find difficult to accept" (137). Diana Stevenson justifies Johanna's action: "Once it is established that there is, in fact, a threat to the German future, Johanna's attempted murder of one of the state's most corrupt citizens became justifiable according to the moral framework operating within the novel. . . . Neither Ferdi nor she actually succeeded in killing Vacano. . . . Since Vacano is not killed, Ferdi and Johanna remain innocent of actual wrongdoing; they are responsible for intent only, and therefore we are not called upon to justify the taking of one life in order to prevent the occurrence of future evil" (112). Although Stevenson's article is impressive, I disagree with her on two points. First, Stevenson misunderstands in indicating that Johanna, like Ferdi, attempted to kill Vacano. Johanna has planned to kill Vacano or Nettlinger, but she changes her mind at the last moment, and shoots at Mr. M. instead; thus no attempt on Vacano's life occurs here. Second, Stevenson's argument that Johanna and Ferdi are innocent because their attempts are unsuccessful is not convincing: attempted murder is normally regarded as "actual wrongdoing."

<sup>13</sup> Böll nevertheless states that literature is "*Transportmittel politischer Aktion*" ("the vehicle of political actions") in *Im Gespräch* (34), and that a writer should have the liberty "to provoke, to test how far it is possible to go" (Parkes 168).

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*Author's Note:* An earlier version of this article was presented at the American Comparative Literature Association Conference, Columbia University, April 1992. My thanks to Caroline Eckhardt and Stanley Weintraub for comments and help in revision.