

## **Why did Mishima build up his muscles? A not quite Hobbesian answer**

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*Abstract.* I consider an alternative to the explanation that it was just a macho time, a time of strong men in literature: a certain pessimistic evaluation system just leads in the direction of building up your muscles. The answer is presented by means of an imitation of the Japanese writer, as he reads in translation.

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*“I’m not a loser and I’m not a winner,  
I don’t pay the rent or turn up for dinner”*

My copy of a famous Japanese novel has a photograph of the author on the back: Yukio Mishima. He looks a slim beautiful schoolboy to me. I should say that I like this novel: it scores highly on concept, on characterization, it is well-written, it has some striking imagery. If there is a mark scheme, it is doing well. The cover blurb says he did the best in school and I suppose this is the novel of such a person! (In the West, he did not get the prize he was after, but I believe there is a prize named after him. I suppose Mishima could say, “I didn’t get a prize; I am a prize!” varying Salvador Dali.)

Anyway, there are these famous pictures of Mishima as a sword-wielding muscle-man. Why did he turn into that? That is my question. You might propose that it was a time of strong men in literature. For example, Ernest Hemingway! Mishima participated in the trends of his time, in his own way. But there is another explanation. What is it? Well, let’s add a little value

and try to present the explanation by means of imitating the iconic but troubling writer, at least as he reads in translation...

They were like two large water lily pads floating down a stream: the two umbrellas moving down the rainy street. Suddenly he stopped and she stopped and he bashed her umbrella into hers.

“WHAT?” she complained loudly.

“What’s the problem?”

“I said it was good.”

“No, there’s some problem. Last time you said no one can understand it. What’s the problem this time?”

“No problem.”

In the semi-darkness the rain was getting heavier; the streets were deserted, apart from the two fledgling literary critics. He waited for her answer, as if waiting for a single drop, one particular drop, to fall.

“So many schools! What if someone else is good as well?”

“It’s like talking to my mother! What if? What if?”

“But it’s true. You think yours is the only good school.”

“It’s the best in the country!”

“There are other countries.”

“With all this what if, I need to build up my muscles.”

“Why? I didn’t say that?” She smashed her umbrella against his. A frail leading student, he held on tight, unwilling to be moved.

“What if there’s no law? And he’s as good as me. People will gather around him, and care about his stories. So I need to build up my muscles. It’s like what that English philosopher described.”

She was in no mood for English philosophy. “Okay, build them up!” They continued on their journey, the two lily pads.

*The explanation is that a certain mentality, pushed to quite an extreme, leads in this direction, but I don’t wish to say that it is exclusive to or much more common in females, or mistaken for Mishima. The fiction may be ambiguous as to the details of the explanation, but the basic idea is that in a lawless condition preference is given to the physically stronger, for incorporating them into groups and caring about what they do. And I would not use the fiction to understand the biology of lily pads!*

## **References**

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