

The Duality of Obsession and Repression in Thirst for Love

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Abstract

The duality of obsession and repression refers to the simultaneous existence and interplay of these two opposing psychological forces within an individual. Literature and psychology explore this concept to illustrate the complexities of human behaviour and emotion. In Yukio Mishima's Thirst for Love, Etsuko's character is defined by intense obsessions and repression, first with Ryosuke and later with Saburo. This all-encompassing desire for love and validation and her relentless thoughts and actions depict obsessive longing and the destructive potential of unfulfilled desires. Through Freud and Jung's psychoanalytic theories, this article explores Mishima's portrayal of the multifaceted force of obsession that dehumanises and humanises Etsuko's emotions. Etsuko's efforts to repress pain and desire that reflect her stoic demeanour and self-imposed isolation symbolise her struggle against cultural and gender expectations of post-war Japan as seen through Carl Jung's "shadow" and "persona", demonstrating how individuals suppress socially unacceptable aspects while projecting an idealised version of themselves.

Keywords: Desire, Gender, Identity, Obsession, Psychoanalytical Theory, Repression

INTRODUCTION

Yukio Mishima's *Thirst for Love* (Ai no Kawaki) 1950 explores complex themes of obsession and repression, weaving these elements into the fabric of the protagonist Etsuko's emotional and psychological state. The novel centres around Etsuko, a young widow living with her father-in-law Yakichi and his family, who becomes entangled in a destructive web of desire and denial. The duality of obsession and repression drives Etsuko's life, shaping her interactions and ultimately leading to her downfall. The novel also explores Japan's intricate psychological and cultural conflicts after the war. The story takes place after World War II and vividly depicts a society struggling to define itself in the face of fast modernity and the enduring influence of traditional beliefs. The id, ego, and superego, which make up Sigmund Freud's model of the mind, offer a robust framework for examining Etsuko's internal realm. Set in post-war Japan, the novel explores the conflict between basic instincts, societal norms, and internalised ethical principles, all of which influence Etsuko's actions and finally result in her downfall. An essential aspect in comprehending the novel is the notion of the collective unconscious, a phrase originated by Carl Jung. It pertains to the common storehouse of memories, experiences, and archetypes all individuals inherit.

Background of Yukio Mishima

Yukio Mishima was born on January 14, 1925, as Kimitake Hiraoka. As a sensitive child, he chose to withdraw from play and got engrossed in literary works by famous authors. After winning a short story competition and getting it published, he began writing enthusiastically under the pen name Yukio Mishima. Subsequently, Mishima graduated from the University of Tokyo and began working as a civil servant. He attempted to uphold his literary talent publicly and remained strict in using artifice for scholarly output. Mishima gained wide recognition as a playwright, poet, and novelist, and his first novel, *Confessions of a Mask*, was published in 1949 and was widely acclaimed.

After the world war, the US imposed Western culture, politics, and values on Japan. The influx of Western liberalism and democracy significantly dented traditional Japanese beliefs. Mishima began advocating for Japan's rich traditional cultural heritage and demanded that the emperor, nation, and language be revered, along with Japanese supernaturalism. For Mishima, the essence of Japanese culture was spirituality, which had

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significant irrational elements distinct from monotonous Western science (Kawasaka, 2018). As Japan's literary and contemporary saviour, he penned his ideas for Japan's current social, political, and cultural landscape. Mishima decried the deterioration of Japanese values of place, God, and spirituality and blamed the bourgeois complacency on artificial Western civilisation.

Concept of Obsession and Repression

Obsession is the most complex of intrapersonal behaviours. Also, it is not socially shared. Instead, it is a part of the dynamics of an individual that a knowledgeable professional can understand. Frequent assumptions are attached to obsession. This commonly includes such conceptions as repetition (e.g., of thoughts), lack of contact with reality, infinite ideation, anxiety, and the increasing/decreasing of behaviours leading to anxiety reduction. Typically, obsession is agreed to be understood as advanced worry or a kind of anxiety. Although it is a widely held concept, it does not help move the understanding of the concept forward. Unfortunately, these understandings exclude obsession because such obsessives are preoccupied with issues that have potentially catastrophic outcomes (e.g., fear of losing control) that far outweigh issues of social conformity or public safety.

In obsession narratives that, in essence, have no beginning or end except that which the story's teller arbitrarily assigns, the narrative surrounds the product in origin. It is the most obvious example of complete and utter self-fixation that externalizes the core of the obsessive world (Sandner, 2022). Obsession is defined in anecdote examples, adding to their existence's duality while differentiating them from it. Thus, obsession primarily results from a desire for immortality driven by self-obsession as a turning point and one of the few interior private worlds – a term they use from an outsider perspective to give their work the semblance of a base in reality within the literature tradition.

Obsession discussed in the novel arises mainly from longing for different experiences, from unresolved psychic crises or from sexual traumas that, from being repeated continuously and unrelentingly in the imagination of the obsessed subject, come to exert a paralyzing fascination for him. The concepts of repetition and impossibility appear constantly in every attempt at conceptualizing psychic mechanisms. Certainly, these phenomena arise from different psychic presuppositions that are often opposed, which happens in the novel. By adopting a psychoanalytical point of view, there are different elements of Freudian psychic functioning which can contribute to a more complete definition of obsession.

On the other hand, the term "repression" can be defined according to two slightly different points. It is both the unconscious process that inhibits or restricts the expression of mind behaviour and the mental mechanism that inhibits unacceptable desires, actions, or thoughts and prevents their access to consciousness. In other words, repression involves the mind of the individual consciously avoiding instinctive tendencies, wishes, and feelings, which could be the source of excessive anxiety, and by doing so, it prevents them from reaching consciousness.

To repress is to restrain and exclude oneself from expressing or even being aware of one's needs, desires, fears, and impulses. Repression is one of the 'defence mechanisms' in Freudian psychology, with some parallels in the cognitive mechanisms of memory and consciousness. The mechanisms of 'repression' serve as resistances to awareness and ways of holding back recollection of events or occurrences "to protect the ego from being overwhelmed by traumatic events and unbearable effects and percepts". It can be classified into three types: primary repression acts before the mental image has occurred to render it indistinct and so unknown; first repression "of an impression that already existed in the memory, before it has been submitted to any preconscious modification"; and second repression "applies only to the return of repressed thoughts in the shape of 'toxicities' (Boag, 2020).

Interplay Between Obsession and Repression

Obsession and repression are not strictly two sides of the same coin nor mirror images of each other. Obsession, craving, and addiction operate by a logic of repetition; all obsessively desired objects are alike. Conversely, suppression, forgetfulness, and censorship revolve around a principle of difference—the desired

object must be singular, identifiable, and even punctual. The obsessive cannot go unnoticed: it draws attention and bedevils the conscience. The repressed, however, evades scrutiny and inattention: it would seem to have no consciousness.

In *Thirst for Love*, these themes are manifested in two dimensions. The object encircled by obsession is clearly defined and accessible; the mirror image, being submarginal and aphasia, cannot be grasped entirely. However, the two are alike and equally possessional: there is a creed. Etsuko's obsession is most evident in her fixation on Saburo, a young gardener employed by her father-in-law. Her attraction to Saburo becomes an all-consuming passion, representing her desperate need for love and connection after the death of her husband. However, this obsession is not rooted in genuine affection for Saburo; instead, it expresses Etsuko's inner turmoil and emotional void. Mishima illustrates how Etsuko's obsession is a means of escaping her repressive environment and repressed emotions. This fixation, however, is deeply unhealthy, as it distorts her perception and pushes her toward irrational actions.

On the other hand, repression is a significant theme that manifests both externally and internally. Etsuko lives in a rigid, patriarchal household where emotions are stifled, and social norms dictate behaviour. She represses her true feelings, particularly her anger and sorrow, to maintain the facade of a dutiful daughter-in-law. This repression extends to her sexuality, as her desire for Saburo is something she cannot openly express or even fully acknowledge to herself. Mishima uses Etsuko's repression to illustrate the suffocating effects of societal expectations and how they can warp an individual's psyche.

Freud's Structural Model of the Psyche in *Thirst for Love*

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis has left a deep and long-standing impact on scientific discourses on human beings and provided an alternative approach to understanding the inner sufferings and behaviours of the human mind. His psychoanalysis aimed at revealing the hidden consciousness of humanity through three structures of the psyche, namely the id, ego, and superego. The id is the most primal and impulsive level that demands the fulfilment of a person's immediate instinctual urges. The ego is the realistic dimension of the mind that copes with the physical external world, incorporating and balancing the desires of both the id and superego. The superego, internalising society's ideals and values, facilitates a person's moral and ethical ideologies. The reformations from the above components alone are not the driving factors behind obtaining the utmost self-awareness. Instead, achieving the proposed status starts with regression and follows a sequence of evolving, unveiling, and reinforcing personality development. With this process, Freud has also given specific allowances to the importance of the human mind's pre-conscious and non-conscious activities (Mutyarani et al., 2024).

Given these premises, repression, the primary defence mechanism proposed by Freud, is disclosed as what makes other phenomena mysteriously obscure, such as parapraxis, dreams, and specific symptoms. The control of the libido and the Vedic sexual impulses are suggested to be the essential emotional conflicts dominant in mental life, thus leading to the formulation of the Oedipus complex in return. However, regarding the collective unconscious and synchronicity, David Anthony calls the progressive insights of what developed into the relationship between the conscious and non-conscious activities of the mind, as well as regularities, needing to deserve a solid appreciation within the continuous advancement of psychoanalysis (Akhtar, 2020).

Id: Etsuko's Repressed Desires

Etsuko's id is most explicitly expressed in terms of her very intense, much-repressed sexual and emotional needs. Following the death of her husband, Etsuko was filled with a robust and unassuaged longing for love and affection. She focused this longing on Saburo, a youthful servant employed by her father-in-law. "Love is a thirst that can never be quenched" (Mishima 167). This expression encapsulates the unfulfilled yearning and insatiable nature of love that Etsuko possessed for Saburo. It suggests that love is an eternal longing that can never be fully satisfied, always leaving us desiring more. Her obsession with Saburo may express the id's desire to satisfy it. However, Etsuko's wishes are mostly repressed; they are thresholded by the role expectation of a widow and the self-internalized values. This results in increased frustration to the point where it devours her.

Etsuko's id has no freedom of expression; therefore, this situation intensifies her inner conflict further. The psychological unravelling throughout this novel stems from the unchecked desire of her id for Saburo, driven by instinct and need.

The initial is the same, but since I've changed him to a woman, nobody will know. The name S comes up too much, but I don't have to worry about that. After all, there's no proof. To me this is a false diary, though no human being can be honest as to become completely false. (Mishima 17)

The manifestation of these obsessions, unrequited love and unconscious desires manifests Etsuko's actions and relationships, revealing her deep-seated psychological conflicts and hidden longings. Her obsessive love for Saburo can be seen as projecting her unconscious desires. This relationship is fraught with power dynamics and unexpressed emotions, highlighting the complexities of Etsuko's life. Freud's concept of the unconscious is crucial in interpreting these hidden desires. According to Freud, the unconscious mind is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges, and memories outside of conscious awareness. Etsuko's intense and often contradictory feelings towards Saburo reflect the tumultuous nature of her unconscious desires.

The Ego: Etsuko's Battle for Control

One acts as a mediator between the id's requests and the realities of constriction to Etsuko's character. Etsuko is very conscious of the inappropriateness of her feelings relative to Saburo, and her ego tries to restrict the injunctions of these desires by the demand for social conformity and the pretence of respectability. Throughout the novel, Etsuko's ego wrestles to find some balance between the inner self and the outward reality of her situation. It is seen that she rationalises much of what she feels and does to try to maintain a firm rein in her emotions. This is evident in her attempts at distancing herself from Saburo while her obsession with him grows more robust. Thus, her ego, though trying hard to keep the primitive desires of her id in check, gets swamped by the latter's intensity, leading to a breakdown of the balance she struggles to maintain.

To Etsuko, the nightcap had a strange significance. When he crawled into bed with it on his head, she knew she was not needed that evening; when he didn't wear it, she was wanted (Mishima 183).

Etsuko's repressed sexual desires for the young gardener Saburo and the sexual obsession of Yakichi with her led to her inner turmoil and frustration. Etsuko's ego also tries intervening in her complicated relationship with her father-in-law, Yakichi, and the maid, Miyo. All her behaviour towards them is tinged with a sense of trying to maintain a demeanour of composure and duty amid rising turmoil in her mind. The ego's inability to mediate sufficiently between the id and the superego results in Etsuko's final psychological breakdown.

The Superego: Etsuko's Moral Judgments and Guilt

The superego in Etsuko's psyche is composed of internalised moral standards of her society, mainly the expectations attached to a woman and a widow in post-war Japan. Her superego is powerful inside her, passing judgment on all her thoughts and actions through reproaches laden with guilt. Thus, Etsuko's superego condemns her for these illicit desires, contradicting the internalised moral code. The sense of duty further strengthens guilt and shame due to her departed husband, family, and the social norms of her period. This inner conflict thus creates an acute mental tension in Etsuko, fluctuating between moments of desperate longing and self-loathing.

The relationship with Chieko also exposes her superego, as Etsuko suppresses her jealousy and resentment to fulfil her moral obligation of caring for her stepdaughter. Such suppression, however, leads to passive aggression and internalised bitterness, which unsettles her psyche even further. The most crucial divisions of the mind distributed by Freud are the id, the ego, and the superego. The id operates based on the pleasure principle, and the ego acts primarily by the reality principle. Finally, the superego represents a person's emotional right or morally good aspect. For instance, Etsuko's "id" might be seaweed, a mere relic of the ocean floor awaiting its return. Etsuko desires to have sex with Saburo but, at the same time, cannot let the maid Miyo go. The situation in which she behaves shows "get whatever I want instinct" on impulse, so "desiring and dying" is "the exertion of "instinct. Both feelings seem to drive Etsuko into a situation she does

not even recognise and can be attributed to being the "presence and the support of a woman." A man is expected to work hard and strive to earn. In contrast, a woman is expected to marry and protect herself. So, she behaves according to the man's desire, but she relates to Miyo and gains a particular relationship with the world, a sense of self. Therefore, Etsuko and Miyo are seen as elements that form Etsuko's identity.

Psychologists often contemplate the subject of defence mechanisms. At the same time, psychoanalysis, in particular, refers to various attitudes and patterns of behaviour that are adopted to lessen the anxiety prompted by desires that are unacceptable within the ego. Defence mechanisms regularly lead to the repression of guilty memories and desires to remain unconscious and sometimes become the source of such behavioural traits that are seemingly odd (Vaillant, 2020). Most of the defence mechanisms that function to repress Etsuko from the grasp of her actual responsibilities and desires occur primarily in unconscious behaviours due to psychic suppressions. These defence mechanisms that occupy the more significant part of this unhappiness are formed of such causes as this unbalanced mental condition. Desiring the specific roles she has played in a society of interpersonal relations is one step to the coherence of her ego, and efforts will also lead to a nationwide psyche of all humans.

Jungian Concepts in *Thirst for Love*

Yukio Mishima's novel *Thirst for Love* delves into the deep psychological distress experienced by its protagonist, Etsuko, emphasising themes of love, repression, and longing. Mishima, known for exploring existential and philosophical concepts, constructs a storyline that is well-suited for analysis using Carl Jung's psychological theories. Jung's theories on archetypes, the collective unconscious, and the individuation process provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the characters' motivations and the symbolic essence of their interactions.

Jungian archetypes are universal symbols within the collective unconscious that shape human behaviour and thought. Several archetypes are prominently featured in the novel, reflecting the characters' internal struggles:

1. **The Anima and Animus:** The anima and animus represent the feminine and masculine aspects within the psyche, respectively. The protagonist, Etsuko, embodies the anima in a complex way. Her repressed desires and emotional turmoil illustrate a distorted relationship with her anima. Etsuko's obsessive love for Saburo can be seen as a projection of her unacknowledged anima, leading to a destructive fixation. Saburo, in turn, represents the animus archetype, though he remains unconscious mainly of his psychological depths, serving as a blank canvas for Etsuko's projections.

2. **The Shadow:** The shadow represents the darker, unconscious aspects of the psyche that individuals often reject or ignore. Etsuko's shadow manifests in her resentment and jealousy towards those around her, particularly Saburo and the maid Miyo. Her inability to integrate her shadow leads to increasingly destructive behaviour, culminating in the novel's tragic conclusion.

3. **The Persona:** The mask individuals wear to navigate social interactions. Etsuko's persona is that of a dutiful widow bound by societal expectations. However, beneath this facade, she harbours deep-seated desires and resentments, which she struggles to reconcile with her outward appearance. The tension between her persona and true self creates a psychological conflict that drives much of the novel's plot.

Jung's concept of individuation entails integrating various facets of the psyche to attain a harmonious and utterly actualised sense of self. Etsuko's quest for love in the novel can be interpreted as an unsuccessful endeavour to achieve individuation. Her failure to directly address and incorporate her hidden, innermost aspects, such as her dark side, feminine side, and other subconscious factors, leads to a fractured sense of self, incapable of harmonising her aspirations with the actual world. Etsuko's preoccupation with Saburo symbolises her quest for completeness. However, instead of resulting in self-discovery, this preoccupation causes her to become even further from achieving individuality. Her all-consuming infatuation is not a means of self-discovery but a detrimental power that engulfs her. Mishima employs Etsuko's tragic demise to exemplify the perils of neglecting the individuation process.

The Collective Unconscious and Post-War Japan

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious refers to the shared reservoir of experiences and archetypes that all humans inherit. In *Thirst for Love*, the collective unconscious can be seen in how post-war Japan's societal norms and cultural heritage shape the characters. The repression of individual desires for the sake of social conformity reflects the tension between the collective unconscious and the individual's quest for self-fulfilment. Mishima portrays a society in transition, where traditional values clash with modern desires. The characters in the novel are caught between these opposing forces, resulting in a psychological dissonance that mirrors the collective experience of the time. Etsuko's internal struggle can be seen as a reflection of the broader societal struggle to reconcile the past with the present.

According to Carl Jung's hypothesis, the collective unconscious is a deeper layer of the psyche beyond our unconscious. While our individual experiences influence our unconscious, the collective unconscious is shared by all human beings. The collective unconscious is inhabited by archetypes, universal symbols and patterns that appear in myths, dreams, and cultural customs. These archetypes significantly impact behaviour, ideas, and emotions, frequently functioning at a subconscious level. Mishima adeptly delves into the shared unconscious of post-war Japan, brilliantly capturing the worries, wants, and conflicts that profoundly influenced the national psyche during this turbulent era.

The cultural shifts are explored through the experiences of its characters, with a particular focus on the protagonist, Etsuko. Etsuko's internal conflict might be viewed as a small representation of the more significant conflict inside Japanese society. She personifies the conflict between traditional and modern values and the struggle between suppressed yearnings and societal norms. This tension is not solely individual; instead, it manifests the shared subconscious of post-war Japan.

Etsuko's existence is primarily influenced by the archetypes of repression and obligation, which are significant aspects of the collective unconscious in post-war Japan. Etsuko is deeply entrenched in the typical societal expectation that women are obedient and willing to make sacrifices. These cultural archetypes strongly impact her actions and decisions, even as she resists them. Etsuko's failure to escape these tropes mirrors the more comprehensive social failure to embrace modernity and autonomy wholeheartedly. In the post-war Japanese context, Jung's concept of the shadow, which refers to the unconscious component of the psyche containing repressed urges and unacceptable elements of the self, is highly applicable to the shade cast by national defeat. The people in the narrative are greatly affected by the lingering impact of Japan's loss in the war. Etsuko's shadow, which encompasses her suppressed wants and concealed resentments, might be regarded as an extension of the collective shadow of the nation. While Japan is dealing with defeat and guilt, Etsuko struggles with internal darkness, which she cannot fully recognise or incorporate.

The persona, a significant notion in Jungian psychology, refers to the facade that individuals adopt to project a specific image of themselves to the outside world. In the novel, Etsuko serves as both an individual facade and a representation of the more comprehensive societal mask that Japan embraced during the post-war period. Etsuko's efforts to uphold an appearance of decorum and authority reflect Japan's endeavours to project a fresh, contemporary image to the global community while grappling with lingering historical dilemmas. The juxtaposition of Etsuko's outward appearance and her authentic self mirrors the internal conflict within Japan as it attempted to establish its identity throughout the post-war era.

CONCLUSION AND FINDINGS

By considering the psychoanalytic theories of Freud and Jung, this study discovered that duality in obsession and repression constituted the overriding theme of Yukio Mishima's novel *Thirst for Love* (1950). Both obsession and repression are closely connected. In connection to obsession, the way a character represses their libidinal drives internally often results in a frantic outburst of obsession. People unconsciously keep themselves from attaining what they want by repressing; when the drive appears too much, the individual explodes with obsession. Sexual obsession and repression are central to the narrative of this book and the flaws and degeneration of its characters, especially the protagonist, Etsuko. These poles of neuroses result in mental misery and, consequently, physical and emotional illness.

Thirst for Love can be seen as an inner struggle between obsession and repression. As the novel depicts the multifaceted, complex psychological struggle of its protagonist, Etsuko, it makes us wonder about the many dualities portrayed. This duality is studied through the lens of psychoanalysts Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. While some may argue that Freud dwells more on the issue of repression and that Jung views things from the perspective of obsession, and even though there are parts within both their theories on which that statement holds, it seems fitting to argue the case that Freud does dwell within the world of obsession. At the same time, Jung leans more towards the analytic study of repression, even within the process of transference and counter-transference via the Jungian self. The study also noticed this reversal within Etsuko as she struggles to control forces which are obsessive to the point of coming to the fore should a psyche-specific traumatic incident create a union between those forces of repression and obsession within her unconscious.

Therefore, rather than arguing that one man dwells within the halls of obsession and the other within the halls of repression, it seems more befitting to state that the two men exist at two opposite ends of the same spectrum. However, the objects of their "obsessive attention" may reside on one side; there exists within them, essentially, that which resides on the opposite end of this spectrum. Thus, Psychoanalysis and literary interpretations were confronted and merged in this analysis to prove that part of Mishima's work revolves around the mind and its dysfunctions, as well as treatments and treatments received by the author. The distortion of the Other and, therefore, of the Self is so heightened that only the character's death could relieve it.

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