

**Yukio Mishima,
*Ai no Kawaki/ Thirst for Love***

**Ali Volkan Erdemir
Dept. of Japanese Language and Literature,
Erciyes University**

Ai no Kawaki (1950) / *Thirst for Love* (1969) is not one of Yukio Mishima's (1925-1970) masterpieces but certainly an interesting and shocking novel full of compassion and terror. The story takes place in the hard economic conditions of the postwar years of Japan, over a period of just over a month, from September 22, to October 28, 1949, in the suburbs of Maidenmura.

After losing her husband to typhoid, the protagonist Etsuko moves into the household of her father-in-law, Yakichi Sugimoto, the former manager of Kansai Merchant Ships. She submits herself to the old man's advances there. Being aware of that the old man reads her diary, Etsuko writes a fake one in which she claims she is happy and fond of the people around. Alienated from her feelings, the only way that she feels alive is her love for the young servant Saburo. However, Saburo is indifferent to her. Basically, he is not attracted to her.

Published in 1950, *Thirst for Love* draws a picture of postwar Japan, its economic, social conditions and the status of woman in the society. Mishima uses a woman protagonist which is not very common in his novels, except for *Utage no Ato* (1960) / *After the Banquet* (1963). The female characters of Mishima are mostly obedient to men and their desires in Mishima's novels, but *Thirst for Love* is slightly different. While married, Etsuko knows her husband cheats on him but she hides her feelings. After his death, now, Etsuko is again suppressed and restricted by strict economic and social conditions. Though the reader knows her real feelings, the character Etsuko hides herself from others in the family as if she has

a mask on her face. What she needs is a pure, simple reason to live. The young servant, Saburo, in her eyes, is pure and simple. She buys a pair of socks as a present to Saburo in Hankyu Department Store in Osaka. It is known that socks, which were called as 'puttees' worn by holy people in Europe during the 5th century, symbolizes purity. In the novel, socks represent not only Etsuko's love and affection for Saburo but also Etsuko's silent cry to find something to hold on to. She is represented as a woman who has a hollow heart and soul. To fulfill this emptiness, she needs Saburo's pure love. However, Saburo throws the socks into the trash. Etsuko is furious with his rejection. What's more, she learns that the housemaid Miyo is pregnant with Saburo's baby. After that, Etsuko's passion for Saburo turns into rage. When she finally understands she cannot have him, she destroys him. In other words, she loses her hopes to find purity in life.

The destruction theme in *Thirst for Love* reminds us of Mishima's masterpiece *Kinkakuji* (1956) / *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (1959). Charmed by the beauty of the temple, the protagonist Mizoguchi, realizing that he will never possess the temple, and finally burns it.

Published in 1950, *Thirst for Love* was made into a movie with the same title in 1967, directed by Koreyoshi Kurahara. It was translated to English by Alfred A. Knopf in 1969 and the Turkish translation by the author was published in 2019.

Yukio Mishima, *Ai no Kawaki/ Thirst for Love*

Aşka Susamış

Çeviri: A. Volkan Erdemir

