

Cultural Representation and Desire in Junichiro Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man*: Mimetic Criticism

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Abstrak – Penelitian ini menekankan pada penggambaran nilai historis budaya Jepang sebagai cerminan realitas sosial, tetapi juga sebagai strategi selektif dalam merepresentasikan tradisi budaya dan proses kehidupan individu, yang tertuang dalam novel *Diary of a Mad Old Man* karya Junichiro Tanizaki melalui pendekatan mimesis. Dengan metode deskriptif kualitatif: analisis kontekstual, data primer terdiri atas dokumentasi dari teks novel, sedangkan data sekunder berupa referensi buku dan artikel jurnal yang relevan. Temuan penelitian memperlihatkan adanya ketegangan antara unsur-unsur tradisi budaya dan hasrat individu, yaitu (1) Kabuki dan Agemaki sebagai simbol obsesi keindahan, (2) Geisha merupakan bentuk legitimasi patriarki, hasrat, dan maskulinitas, (3) Kimono merefleksikan dimensi materialitas tradisi, dan (4) Festival antarmusim menunjukkan hasil transisi budaya tradisional Jepang dan modern pasca perang. Hal ini membuktikan bahwa unsur-unsur tradisi budaya tersebut digunakan oleh pengarang dalam mengungkapkan realitas sosial budaya Jepang melalui proses pengalaman hidup tokoh-tokohnya. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini memperkaya kajian sastra dan budaya dengan menekankan pada bagaimana representasi mimetik dalam karya Tanizaki mencerminkan hubungan antara tradisi budaya, praktik material, dan hasrat individual pada masyarakat Jepang pasca perang

Kata Kunci: Budaya jepang, mimesis, Hasrat individu, realitas sosial

Abstract - This study examines the representation of Japanese cultural-historical values not only as a reflection of social reality but also as a selective strategy for interpreting cultural tradition and the aging process in Junichiro Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man* through the lens of mimetic criticism. Employing a descriptive qualitative method with contextual analysis, the primary data consist of written documents from the novel; secondary data include relevant books and journal articles. These findings expose tensions between cultural tradition and individual desire, manifested in: (1) Kabuki and Agemaki are symbol of aesthetic obsession; (2) Geisha is firmly as a legitimizing structure of patriarchy, desire, and masculinity; (3) Kimono depicts as an expression of the tradition materiality; and (4) Seasonal festivals are the representation of cultural transition between traditional Japanese values and postwar modernity. These findings show that the author uses elements of cultural tradition to express Japan's social and cultural reality through his character's life experiences. Consequently, this study offers insights into literary and cultural studies by exploring how mimetic representation relates to cultural tradition, material practices, and individual desire in Tanizaki's depiction of postwar Japanese society.

Key words: Japanese culture, mimetic, individual desire, social realities

INTRODUCTION

Junichiro Tanizaki occupies a central position in modern Japanese literature for his deep explorations of beauty, passion, and the tension between tradition and modern life. In his last work, *Diary of a Mad Old Man*, he tells a compelling story. The story centers on an elderly man whose desires become increasingly evident as his health deteriorates. The novel has often been read as an exploration of erotic transgression and psychological disorder, for example, situating desire as an intensely personal and bad impulse. Previous studies on *Diary of a Mad Old Man* have largely approached the text through psychoanalytic, erotic, and aesthetic frameworks, emphasizing fetishism, masochism, and the decadence of the aging body. These readings have contributed significantly to understanding the novel's transgressive qualities. However, they tend to confine desire to its broader socio-cultural and historical context. Recently, scholars in literary and cultural studies caution against approaches that treat



desire and affection as purely internal phenomena, emphasizing that reading practices and emotional responses are embedded in social, historical, and institutional contexts (Felski, 2015). Similarly, narrative theorists argue that emotional experiences and intentions are shaped by culturally mediated modes of understanding rather than by isolated subjectivities (Herman, 2018). From this perspective, desire must be seen not only as a singular entity but also as a cultural phenomenon embedded in a social setting. Drawing on this theoretical cluster, the present study positions desire as a culturally mediated construct emerging from the interaction between individual experience and socio-historical contexts rather than a purely internal psychological condition.

Building upon this theoretical orientation, literary scholarship increasingly recognizes that psychological experiences depicted in narrative function as interpretive tools shaped by cultural frameworks rather than as direct reflections of individual emotions. Research in literary studies displays that the psychological experiences portrayed in stories often serve as tools for understanding. These experiences are formed by theoretical and cultural contexts, not just by individual feelings (Kholifah, Rahima, Aini, & Nurjanah, 2024). In addition, characters in literary texts are often formed by cultural expectations and gender norms. This is particularly obvious when seen through the lens of mimesis (Nurrahmah, Wulanda, & Furqan, 2025). Although conducted in different cultural contexts, the findings confirm that mimetic representation can serve as a mechanism linking individual experience to broader socio-cultural realities. These perspectives collectively reinforce the argument that literary characters and their emotional lives cannot be separated from the cultural environment that shapes them.

Understanding literary emotion as culturally embedded also requires attention to the historical conditions in which texts are produced. The social and historical background of post-World War II Japan hides the connection between individual experience and cultural tradition. After the war, Japanese society swiftly modernized, challenged Western influences, and experienced changing gender roles. These alterations redesigned traditional notions of masculinity, authority, and cultural identity. Scholars studying modern Japanese culture see that literary works are closely tied to important historical events and issues related to national identity, modernity, and cultural continuity (Ivy, 2010). Within this historical context, themes of the body and sexuality become key sites through which cultural anxieties and ideological negotiation are expressed. In modern Japanese literature, debates of gender beliefs and social norms frequently appear through themes of the body and sexuality. Ideas about sexuality and individuality are vital to understanding what it means to be a person (Orbaugh, 2002). Tanizaki's story offers personal insights and reflections on broader cultural discussions occurring in Japanese society during a time of change. Recent studies in cultural and literary representation have highlighted that stories about aging and desire tend to occur within culturally influenced historical contexts, not simply psychological ones (Allison, 2014; Yano, 2013)

In this context, Erich Auerbach's notion of mimesis offers a valuable framework for understanding how literature replicates real life through everyday experience, material culture, and historical awareness. Auerbach's mimetic theory highlights the representation of everyday life as a place of historical significance (Auerbach & Said, 1953). Rather than viewing desire solely as an internal psychological phenomenon, this study argues that mimetic representation enables desire to be understood as socially mediated and culturally constructed within specific historical conditions. Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man*, the primary object of analysis in this research, portrays bodily obsession, emotional attachment, and relational dependency through recognizable social practices and cultural norms. From this perspective, mimetic desire does not merely reflect individual pathology; instead, it emerges from the interaction between personal longing and historically situated cultural meanings embedded within postwar Japanese society.

Its application to modern Japanese literature remains underexplored. Auerbach & Said (1953) claimed that literary realism does not simply copy external realism; it rebuilds social experience by placing individual lives in a culturally rooted historical setting. Recent literary theorists have confirmed the importance of Auerbach's approach by highlighting that literary realism functions as a culturally mediated symbol of life experience, rather than as a true image of reality (Damrosch, 2020; Gumbrecht, 2021). Integrating Auerbach's perspective with contextual literary theory (Felski, 2015; Herman, 2018), This mimetic desire is a process through which cultural tradition, symbolic practices, and material form shape subjective experience. This important perspective provides a useful way to rethink desire as something shaped by culture.

Recent discussions in literary studies focus on how narrative structure, physical environment, and symbolic frameworks influence our understanding of social reality. This supports the idea that literary meaning derives from cultural factors rather than from realism alone (Felski, 2015; Herman, 2018). Relating it to the novel, the cultural elements in it, such as Kabuki, Agemaki, Geisha, kimono, and seasonal festivals, should not be perceived merely as background details but as significant tools for linking personal experiences to the broader cultural context. Recent scholarship in material culture and narrative studies highlights how objects, rituals, and aesthetic

practices function as carriers of social meaning and historical consciousness within literary representation (Felski, 2020; Herman, 2018). Studies in material culture and literary representation demonstrate that objects, rituals, and aesthetic practices function as carriers of social meaning and historical consciousness within literary narratives (Entwistle, 2023; Saito, 2017). Through these cultural forms, Tanizaki's narrative constructs a mimetic relationship between personal longing and socio-cultural realities. These elements align with current approaches that view literary objects, rituals, and aesthetic practices as central to the articulation of meaning (Damrosch, 2020; Felski, 2020).

Despite extensive scholarship on Tanizaki and *Diary of a Mad Old Man*, limited attention has been paid to how cultural traditions function as mimetic mechanisms that mediate desire within postwar socio-historical conditions. Existing studies rarely examine the novel through an Auerbachian framework that integrates cultural representation, materiality, and historical context into the analysis of desire. Consequently, there remains a gap in understanding how Tanizaki transforms cultural forms into narrative devices that articulate the relationship between individual subjectivity and collective social reality. (Nurrahmah et al., 2025) adopt a mimetic and expressive approach to investigating Arafat Nur's *Percikan Darah di Bunga*, demonstrating that mimetic interpretation can reveal how literary elements function as cultural mediators connecting individual experience and collective meaning. The relevance of this perspective to the present study lies in its confirmation that mimetic analysis can operate across cultural contexts to uncover the relationship between narrative representation and cultural reality. This study, however, takes a different approach by using Auerbach's mimetic framework to analyze *Diary of a Mad Old Man*. It emphasizes desire as a culturally mediated process rather than only an individual drive. By examining how cultural traditions are selectively signified through the characters' experiences in the novel, it argues that desire functions as a mimetic process that reflects the socio-cultural realities of postwar Japan. Unlike previous studies that primarily focus on psychological or aesthetic interpretations, this research highlights cultural representation as a mediating structure that shapes subjective desire.

Therefore, this study applies Auerbach's mimetic criticism to explore how cultural traditions in *Diary of a Mad Old Man* function as mediating structures. By analyzing representations of Kabuki, Agemaki, Geisha, kimono, and seasonal festivals, this study argues that desire in the novel is a culturally constructed process rather than a purely psychological drive. The objective of this research is to examine how cultural representations operate as mimetic mechanisms that mediate individual desire within the socio-historical context of postwar Japan. This study contributes to literary and cultural studies by expanding the use of mimetic theory in modern Japanese literature and by representing how material culture and ritual practices link personal experience to socio-historical realities. The novelty of this research lies in its integration of mimetic criticism, cultural materiality, and postwar historical context to reinterpret desire in Tanizaki's work beyond the psychological framework, thereby highlighting the continued relevance of Auerbach's theory for non-Western literary studies.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach, with contextual analysis. This approach is particularly well-suited to literary and cultural studies, as it enables close attention to textual meaning, symbolic representation, and historical context (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2016). It is selected to prove in-depth interpretation of textual meaning, socio-historical and cultural representation, and mimetic processes as described in Junichiro Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man*. The data consist of primary and secondary sources. The primary data comprise textual documentation from Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man*, including narrative passages, character reflections, and descriptions of cultural practices related to desire, aging, and tradition. As well, textual analysis remains a central method in literary research, particularly for interpreting how narrative constructs cultural meaning (Herman, 2018). It is widely known in literary studies as an effective way to identify patterns of meaning, symbolic structures, and thematic relationships in texts (Felski, 2015; Herman, 2018). Secondary data contains academic books and peer-reviewed journal articles on mimetic theory, Japanese cultural studies, literary representation, and postwar Japanese society. The data collection technique uses systematic, close, intensive reading to identify the main data from the novel, noting that the data will be used to select the important data, interpreting and discussing the data to clarify the data analysis.

The procedural data analysis follows these criteria: (1) passages that illustrate personal desires and embodied experiences; (2) depictions of cultural traditions and aesthetic forms, including Kabuki, geisha, kimono, and seasonal rituals; (3) narrative moments that reveal the interaction between individual experience and social expectations; and (4) cultural transition by reflecting historical and social realities of postwar Japan. The analytical interpretation is explained in several stages. First, the researcher/s identified passages that highlighted cultural elements and expressions of personal desire. Second, the researcher/s organized these findings into thematic categories: Kabuki and Agemaki as aesthetic symbols; the geisha as a figure associated with patriarchy and

constructions of masculinity; the kimono as a component of material culture; and seasonal festivals as embodiments of cultural temporality. Third, these themes were interpreted in relation to the social and cultural conditions of postwar Japan, including shifting gender roles, evolving notions of cultural identity, and the forces of modernization, issues widely examined in scholarship on Japanese modernity and subjectivity (Ivy, 2010; Orbaugh, 2002). The researcher presents the analysis to experts and colleagues in literary and cultural studies for discussion as a form of source triangulation. Moreover, drawing on Auerbach's concept of mimesis, the study employs mimetic analysis to explore how cultural forms connect individual experiences to broader social realities (Auerbach & Said, 1953). Here, mimetic criticism is understood not as mere imitation of external reality, but as the representation of lived experience grounded in cultural context. Cultural artifacts, rituals, and aesthetic practices are thus examined as historical and social indicators that shape the articulation of desire within narrative structures. So, the implementation of Auerbach's mimetic concepts, or other relevant mimetic references, is treated as a theoretical triangulation to verify the main data (Liang, 2019; Snyder, 2019). The next step is to draw a conclusion to help readers understand this study clearly and easily.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Findings

This study applies an Auerbachian mimetic framework to the textual data from *Diary of a Mad Old Man* to identify tensions between cultural tradition and individual desire, represented through several cultural elements. Through this framework, cultural elements are not only identified descriptively but also interpreted as mediating structures that connect individual experience with broader socio-cultural realities. The findings demonstrate that cultural forms function as mediating structures that connect personal experience with broader socio-cultural realities. These representations appear in four dominant themes: (1) Kabuki and Agemaki as mimetic expressions of aesthetic obsession, (2) Geisha functions as a cultural mechanism that legitimizes patriarchal structures, desire, and masculinity, (3) Kimono is the appearance of traditional materiality, (4) Seasonal festivals are a portrayal of cultural transition in the Japanese postwar society.

a. Kabuki and Agemaki as Mimetic Expression of Aesthetic Obsession

The mimetic expression of aesthetic obsession is symbolized in performing arts such as Kabuki and Agemaki. They represented ideals of beauty and attractiveness that function as aesthetic models influencing the protagonist's perception. This relationship is described in the following quotation:

"This evening I went to the Kabuki. All I wanted to see was Sukeroku, I had no intention of staying for the rest of the program. Kanya, as the hero, didn't interest me, but Tossho was playing Agemaki, and I knew he would make a beautiful courtesan." (Tanizaki, 1996, p. 3)

Kabuki is a traditional theatrical form known for its distinctive body language, visual spectacle, and established performance rules. This tradition emphasizes aesthetics rather than realistic representation (Leiter, 2014). The images of personal psychological fixations reflect desires formed by cultural notions of elegance and performance. In modern storytelling, traditional arts such as Kabuki shape character identity by offering expressions of socially recognizable, historically established desires (Damrosch, 2020; Felski, 2020). From a mimetic perspective, Kabuki is more than just a theatrical setting; it serves as a cultural framework for internalizing and reproducing aesthetic values. According to Auerbach's mimetic perspective, Kabuki acts as a model that influences how we see and evaluate beauty. The focus on stylization and formal expression does not aim for realism; rather, it aims to present ideal forms. Kabuki demonstrates how aesthetic norms within cultural traditions. From a mimetic perspective, this process indicates that aesthetic desire is shaped by culturally transmitted representational models rather than emerging spontaneously from emotional reactions. This suggests that our desires are shaped by representational structures rather than by spontaneous emotional reactions. The protagonist's admiration for the Kabuki actor reveals that desire arises from culturally inherited standards of beauty, rather than from purely instinctive attraction. The distilled depictions of femininity in Kabuki offer clear cultural references that influence personal perception. In Auerbach's terms, this demonstrates how everyday cultural practices serve as channels for expressing historically rooted social experiences.

Historically, Agemaki has been a symbol of beauty and elegance. This quote illustrates this point.

"Others may have acted the part better, but it's a long time since I have seen a beautiful Agemaki. Recently, I've come to feel a strange attraction toward the young Kabuki actors who plays women's role." (Tanizaki, 1996, p. 4).

The figure of Agemaki reflects an aesthetic ideal shaped by cultural imagery rather than direct interaction. Her

appearance is linked to views of femininity associated with beauty, pleasure, and sensual desire. In the story, understanding is primarily understood through descriptions and memories, which present her as a figure of beauty. This depiction aligns with cultural notions of feminine beauty, such as elegance, decoration, and restrained sensuality. Consequently, Agemaki can be seen as a representation of cultural beauty standards, suggesting that desire is influenced by inherited symbols (Gumbrecht, 2021; Herman, 2018).

b. Geisha as the Symbol of Patriarchal Legitimized System, Desire, and Masculinity

This study reveals that the Geisha figure not only represents female allure but also has a role as a symbolic structure that legitimizes desire, strengthens patriarchy, and narrates masculinity through strong cultural codes. This evidence is depicted in the novel when Satsuko would like to meet Haruhisa, as stated:

“Satsuko had telephoned a Gion teahouse to invite out a few Geisha friends she met last summer...and tonight she was taking them off to a cabaret.” (Tanizaki, 1996, p. 142)

Within Japan’s socio-cultural context, Geisha function as aesthetic performers embedded within hierarchical gender structures. The scene depicts the Geisha as an object of male desire and symbolic power within social hierarchies, mediating performances of beauty, etiquette, and aesthetic refinement within broader patriarchal norms. Such representations demonstrate how gender identities and social roles are shaped and negotiated in modern Japanese society (Ivy, 2010; Orbaugh, 2002). In these narratives, Geisha reinforce male privilege through social interactions, economic power, and cultural status. This is rooted in the existence of structural subordination, highlighting that the Okiya (geisha house) and Ochaya (tea house) systems have historically focused on women. Their economic and social existence is tied to the entertainment needs of powerful men, such as businessmen and politicians. From a mimetic perspective, the geisha institution offers a socially recognized framework that legitimates desire within patriarchal norms. In this context, masculinity is constructed not through physical dominance but through participation in a culturally sanctioned system of pleasure, economic capability, and symbolic authority. The ability to access and engage with culture signifies male status and social legitimacy, thereby reinforcing masculine identity within hierarchical gender relations. Rather than just demonstrating individual attraction, these narratives situate desire within a broader system of cultural authority and gender hierarchy.

In this context, Geisha play a key role in shaping masculinity and its commercialization. Their function extends beyond mere erotic performance; they also include cultural markers of masculine privilege such as aesthetic judgment, economic power, and symbolic authority. This connects with recent discussions of masculinity in Japanese cultural texts, which suggest that mediated forms of desire often shape male subjectivity. Here, desire is seen as a means of asserting masculine identity, even though Geisha occupy the role of aesthetic figures within patriarchal norms. This study demonstrates that Geisha are important symbols of patriarchy’s continuity, linking personal longing to powerful cultural codes. Their presence allows desire to be viewed as superior and traditional, legitimizing male authority. These depictions also highlight how masculinity is shaped through engagement in culturally accepted practices. These findings align with the literature, which shows that gender identity in narratives is often influenced by cultural expectations and social norms rather than by individual choice (Purtanto, Solikhah, & Rohmana, 2024). The protagonist’s involvement with geisha culture replicates social power dynamics, in which desire is linked to status, authority, and symbolic capital. Consequently, the geisha figure serves as a symbol of ongoing patriarchy, linking personal desire to established cultural frameworks. Recent literary and cultural criticism supports this view, highlighting that representations are shaped by inherited gender roles and social memory (Felski, 2020; Gumbrecht, 2021).

c. Kimono: The Representation of Traditional Materiality

Beyond performative cultural representations such as Kabuki and Geisha, material objects also function as important mediators of desire within narrative. Tanizaki Junichiro argues that the kimono symbolizes the continuity of tradition in *The Diary of a Mad Old Man*. In the novel, the kimono functions as a physical object that connects bodily experience, cultural identity, and historical continuity. This idea emerges in a brief conversation between the main characters, as:

“But as she talked, I felt a chilly draft up the sleeves of my white cotton night kimono,” and *“Are you hurt?”*
Miss Sasaki asked me, brushing off the skirts of my light cotton kimono.” (Tanizaki, 1996, p. 94)

In this regard, the kimono is defined as a material locus of cultural memory that mediates between the body, tradition, and desire. Its presence in the narrative signifies more than personal taste; it represents identity, continuity, and a performative sense of belonging within a cultural framework. From a mimetic perspective, material objects function as historical markers that anchor individual experiences within a collective cultural

framework. The presence of the kimono reflects the continuity between personal identity and inherited traditions, demonstrating how cultural materiality shapes emotional and psychological experiences.

Building on the kimono's role as a material mediator between body, tradition, and desire, its broader cultural significance can be better understood within a social system that shapes identity and historical continuity. This study argues that the kimono, traditional Japanese clothing, reflects material culture within the social system. It demonstrates efforts to preserve connections with cultural heritage that unite values, historical memory, and social identity (Entwistle, 2023; Saito, 2017). This attachment goes beyond nostalgia. It involves tradition and representational practices. The kimono expresses desire through its material and sensory qualities. It highlights texture, shape, and formalized encounters. The kimono serves as a visual symbol of desire and a reflection of a profound Japanese perspective on society. This finding aligns with recent narrative theory, which shows how desire in literature often emerges through material objects that shape emotion and meaning (Felski, 2020; Herman, 2018). The main character's awareness of the kimono's texture and physical presence highlights the connection between aging, vulnerability, and cultural belonging. It demonstrates that desire stems not only from what we see, but also from how we touch and interact with cultural objects. The kimono serves as a medium through which people can experience and express cultural continuity in their daily lives.

d. The Swift of Culture Through Seasonal Festivals

In addition to aesthetic, gendered, and material mediations, desire in narrative is also situated within temporal cultural structures represented through seasonal festivals. Tanizaki's narrative in *Diary of a Mad Old Man* uses seasonal festivals to mark the passage of time. These markers reflect the ongoing change and continuity of Japanese cultural life cycles. The novel highlights the Autumn and Winter festivals that took place in Japanese society during the postwar period, as stated:

*“Listen, Tokusuke! It's already autumn. There's a cricket!” Then she would imitate its cry with some nonsense syllables, “Isn't that the way it goes? When you hear that, it's Autumn (Tanizaki, 1996, p. 79)
“But it's almost well, and this is already the tenth of November, winter comes early in Kyoto, you know.”
(Tanizaki, 1996, p. 132)*

These festivals are recurring community events that demonstrate shared memories and rituals. They place individual experiences within a cyclical timeframe, reflecting a continuing cultural awareness within Japanese society. The narratives connect personal experiences to cultural cycles, demonstrating how individual feelings relate to shared historical memories. From a mimetic perspective, these temporal markers connect individual perception with collective cultural memory, illustrating how personal experience is situated within historically grounded social structures. At the same time, the depiction of seasonal changes reflects broader social and cultural shifts in postwar Japan. These festivals highlight cultural practices that balance traditional rituals with changing social realities. These practices became more prominent in the social fabric during the postwar period. These changes signal a cultural shift from traditional to modern Japan. The fusion of traditional seasonal awareness and current social conditions demonstrates the balancing of continuity and change. In a literary context, these festivals serve as storytelling tools that reveal social change and shifting identities (Ivy, 2010; Saito, 2017). This view suggests that seasonal festivals represent both continuity and change in Japanese cultural practices. Autumn and winter festivals act as narrative tools that connect personal experiences to a shared timeline. In this novel, Tanizaki depicts cultural continuity by combining historical change with individual perspectives. Thus, seasonal festivals serve as indicators of historical change, connecting personal timelines with social evolution.

2. Discussion

The Auerbachian perspective suggests that desire in Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man* emerges from everyday cultural practices and inherited aesthetic values. The depiction of everyday life illustrates how literary works connect with personal feelings within a recognizable social environment (Auerbach & Said, 1953; Gumbrecht, 2021). In this way, Tanizaki's story demonstrates that desire develops through lived experiences that shape cultural forms. Unlike the findings section, which presents textual evidence, this discussion interprets those findings within the broader theoretical frameworks of mimetic representation and socio-cultural. A key point in this study is that aesthetic desire emerges from culturally inherited representational models. The depiction of Kabuki and Agemaki suggests that the protagonist's view of beauty is shaped by symbolic traditions rather than spontaneous emotional reactions. This finding aligns with modern theories that argue that aesthetic experience is influenced by cultural ties and socially recognizable forms (Felski, 2015; Gumbrecht, 2021). In this context, Kabuki acts as a mimetic aesthetic structure that shapes personal perception, transforming cultural performances into references for individual longing. Thus, Kabuki serves as a vessel for aesthetic standards that shape the main characters' views and enrich everyday imagination in the performing arts.

In contrast, Agemaki demonstrates how culture shapes desire. In this scene, the main character imagines her appearance, focusing on her posture, clothing, and how she presents herself. These elements create an aesthetic image. Recurrent memories of her physical form often stem from direct interactions. This situation demonstrates that desire operates through memory and physical representation. The depiction of Geisha further supports the idea that desire operates within established cultural systems. This aligns with broader literary studies, which argue that emotional and psychological experiences in stories are shaped by symbolic and theoretical meanings, rather than simply representing internal feelings (Kholifah et al., 2024). Rather than focusing solely on erotic attraction, the narratives situate desire within systems of gender and power. In this context, masculinity is shaped through engagement in culturally accepted practices. This finding connects with research on Japanese gender relations, which shows how masculinity is often expressed through social behavior, status, and symbolic authority within established cultural hierarchies (Frühstück, 2022; Ivy, 2010). This finding also indicates that masculinity in the narrative is constructed not through physical dominance but through participation in a culturally sanctioned system of aesthetic refinement, social status, and symbolic authority, reinforcing the mimetic relationship between gender and cultural power.

The institution of Geisha operates within a network of cultural traditions that validate desire, reinforce male dominance, and stabilize masculine identity through aesthetic interactions embodied in ritual. Tanizaki's mimetic approach situates desire within everyday cultural practices and social traditions. This representation of Geisha demonstrates how shared cultural norms influence personal longing. In the Japanese cultural landscape, Geisha serve as a framework for gender-based performance in which grace, discipline, and sensual suggestion help assert male status and social hierarchy (Dalby, 2008; Frühstück, 2022). The patriarchal system has made Geisha a symbol of economic dependence and social control. This patriarchal structure has historically subordinated women's work and social status to men, suggesting that men hold a higher status than women. Geisha not only represent glamour but also reflect the patriarchal order. This depiction of Geisha within the patriarchal system suggests that masculinity has access to cultural resources and institutional benefits.

Tanizaki's depiction of Geisha culture does not idealize tradition. Instead, he reveals how patriarchal authority is embedded in aesthetic pleasure and ritual interactions. As a result, desire emerges as a socially acceptable performance that transforms male dominance into cultural change (Auerbach & Said, 1953; Felski, 2020). The image of the Geisha connects consent to desire, material culture, and postwar masculinity. In this narrative, masculine identity is formed not through overt violence but through participation in cultural systems of pleasure and status. This study demonstrates that the kimono is not simply a decorative element; it is an object associated with physical sensation and emotional openness. In the story, the kimono serves as a tangible link to cultural memory, connecting the aging body, inherited traditions, and personal desires. Material culture plays a key role in shaping desire, particularly through the representation of the kimono. The story's emphasis on touch and bodily awareness suggests that cultural objects act as extensions of identity and memory. This idea aligns with the view in material culture studies that sees objects as carriers of social significance and historical connections (Entwistle, 2023; Saito, 2017). Auerbach's concept views the kimono as a tool that connects personal experience with a shared cultural history. This concept transforms the kimono's physical form into a means of expressing cultural ideas. Thus, the kimono is not simply a symbol of tradition; it also actively participates in postwar Japanese society. Within the postwar Japanese social hierarchy, the Autumn and Winter rituals demonstrate a continuing connection to seasonal awareness, even amid the country's rapid modernization.

In addition to the matters, the way seasonal awareness is portrayed highlights the temporal aspect of mimetic expression. The changing seasons in the narrative place individual perceptions within the cycle of cultural time. This temporal positioning strengthens the connection between personal experience and collective memory. These time markers point to broader social and cultural changes in postwar Japan. Through these markers, Tanizaki demonstrates how cultural continuity changes over time and is shaped by shifting traditions and personal perspectives. In the novel, seasonal celebrations serve as a means of reflecting the experiences of postwar Japanese society. These celebrations help maintain a balance between continuity and the changing nature of rituals in everyday life. Combining these insights suggests that Tanizaki's storytelling creates desire through various elements, such as aesthetic depictions, gender roles, physical objects, and ceremonial time. This complex mediation demonstrates that personal feelings are connected to cultural frameworks. Importantly, Tanizaki's narrative does not merely reproduce cultural traditions but also reveals tension within them. The depiction of patriarchal authority, aging vulnerability, and shifting social norms suggests that literature can function as a reflective space that negotiates and subtly questions cultural expectations. In this sense, mimetic representation operates not only as imitation but also as a form of cultural critique and resistance toward established social structures. An Auerbachian approach to mimesis can provide a deeper understanding of how social and cultural traditions emerge in literature as critical reflections of society and reality.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Junichiro Tanizaki's *Diary of a Mad Old Man* emerges through interactions between cultural form, material objects, and cultural rituals in postwar Japanese society. Using Auerbach's mimetic critique, the novel can be viewed as a recreation of real experiences. In this view, personal feelings appear from interactions with cultural forms, not simply as psychological issues. This study reveals that Kabuki and Agemaki characters influence notions of beauty. Another aspect that should be highlighted is that the portrayal of Geisha represents established patriarchal power and constructions of masculinity. The kimono serves as a tangible link between personal experience and cultural heritage. Awareness of the seasons helps individuals orient their insights within shared temporal patterns. These cultural elements demonstrate how desire develops through social and cultural interactions, rather than as isolated individual reasons. By highlighting the connection between personal longing and shared cultural memory, this research contributes to broader discussions in literary and cultural studies about the interplay among individual identity, material culture, and historical context. These ritual moments connect personal feelings to communal timeframes, strengthening the connection between personal experience and social systems.

Rather than merely presenting narrative details, these findings indicate that mimetic representation is a socio-cultural mediation process in which subjective experience is constructed through historically embedded cultural processes. This study argues that Tanizaki's storytelling transforms cultural customs into personal lived experiences. It highlights the clash between tradition and modernity in postwar Japan. Conceptually, this study extends Auerbach's mimetic theory to a non-Western literary context by demonstrating that everyday cultural practices, material objects, and ritual traditions function as mediating structures that shape identity formation in societies undergoing historical transformation. This contribution reinforces Auerbach's framework's relevance beyond Western realism and highlights its applicability to modern Japanese literature.

For literary and cultural scholarship, the study provides a framework for understanding how cultural materiality and social memory interact with subjective experience, offering journal readers a perspective on the relationship between literature, identity, and socio-historical change. However, this analysis focuses on only one literary work and primarily examines cultural representations within a specific socio-historical context. Future research could expand this framework by comparing Tanizaki's other works or by exploring perspectives from material culture studies, gender studies, or cultural anthropology.

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