

Research Article

Reversed Myth and Negative Symbols of Narcissus in Mother-Son Relationship in Hayashi Fumiko's Narcissus

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Abstract

The famous myth of Narcissus is about a mythical handsome young man who indifferently rejects the love of the nymph Echo leading to Echo's broken heart and untimely death and his being cursed to excessively adore his own handsome reflection on the pond till his death. The short story entitled *Narcissus* written by Hayashi Fumiko is intriguing because its title calls to mind the famous myth of Narcissus. However, this short story portrays the myth of Narcissus from a unique perspective. Thus, the aims of this paper are to analyse the reversed myth and negative symbols of Narcissus as reflected in the mother-son relationship in the short story. To support the analysis various psychological understandings of the myth of Narcissus are used as well as various understandings of the symbols of the flowers called Narcissus. The methods of research used are a comprehensive combination of textual-contextual methods as well as library research and qualitative research. The textual method focuses on the intrinsic aspects relevant to the focus of analysis, such as character, conflict, and setting, while the contextual method borrows the psychological concepts of the term Narcissus and the symbolic meaning of the flowers named Narcissus. The result shows that the mother-son relationship clearly portrays the reversed myth in the matter of the gender roles, the type of relationship, and the ending of the relationship. Another result shows that all the symbols related to the flowers of Narcissus turn into negative meanings in the sort of story entitled *Narcissus* by Hayashi Fumiko. In short, the short story writer turns upside down both the myth and the symbols resulting in an engaging story full of hidden meanings to be interpreted.

Keywords: Narcissus; myth; symbol; textual-contextual method

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1. Introduction

A Japanese short story entitled *Narcissus* is written in 1949 by Hayashi Fumiko "original name Miyata Fumiko, (1904-1951), Japanese novelist whose realistic stories deal with urban working-class life" (Tikkanen 2020). It is about a mother with a son who is dumped by her husband after his mistress commits suicide when his wife is infuriated to her. Living poorly before and after she is left by her poor husband, the mother, Tamae, works odd jobs to support herself and her son, Sakuo. Her

son, who turns out to be useless and has no intention to work, still lives with and depends on her. Getting old too quickly due to severe poverty, the mother, as a whore, is losing her clients. Finally the adult son moves out to a faraway city to work and the mother lives alone in her poor apartment room as she desires so far (Fumiko 1982).

Fumiko's *Narcissus*' focus on the exhausted, unkempt mother and her parasitic son who insists on pretending to be cool and indifferent opens an analysis

on the unique relationship between the mother and son. Bearing in mind the title of the short story, it sparks the idea that the mother-son relationship resembles the reversed version of the famous myth of Narcissus. Thus, the analysis will focus on the reversed myth of narcissus and the negative symbols concerning narcissus. For the previous study, no articles in English on the short story entitled *Narcissus* by Hayashi Fumiko is found on the internet.

To support analysis, several concepts and notions about Narcissus are borrowed. The first one is about the psychological interpretation on the myth of Narcissus. The psychological view based on the myth of Narcissus is as follows: “A common view of the narcissist is of someone who cannot love another and who loves and admires only himself” (Hamilton, 1993: 2). It indicates a person who is so contented with and proud of himself. A person who does not need others especially concerning their presence, love, and attention. He prefers to live alone and full of himself. Still referring to the myth, the psychological interpretation concerning the relationship between Narcissus and Echo is as follows:

In the myth, Narcissus and Echo are equally caught in a relationship which cannot tolerate change. Echo epitomises the helplessly reactive style of relating; she 'always answers back'. Narcissus is her counterpart; he is prideful. His role in the prideful-admiring relationship signifies a more mature stage of development. Narcissus, at least, has found his own voice. He does not simply echo (Hamilton, 1993: 40).

The relationship is imbalance, the female is dependent on the male while the male does not like being relied on. The female cannot exist without the male while the male does not need the female in his

existence. In this kind of relationship, one is being a burden in the development of the other one.

Psychologically, according to van Dyken, “We’re all born narcissistic” (2017: 29). Since a child, he/she enjoys and wants to be the centre of attention. This is what van Dyken calls “a basic need to belong, to not be rejected by others” (2017: 42). A person always dreams to have a fixed place in his/her world, to be accepted, admired, loved, and respected. However, not everybody fully realizes this compilation of needs because it “occurs beneath the surface of our consciousness” (van Dyken, 2017: 32). Thus, not everybody realizes that he/she basically embodies narcissistic characteristics.

One of the unique characteristics of being narcissistic, according to Lowen is “Narcissists, for instance, do not suffer from a strict, severe superego” especially concerning “moral limits to sexual and other behaviour” (1997: 23). In other words, a narcissist may have a rather loose moral and sexual boundaries. Narcissists also have a tendency to “minimize their feelings, aiming to be “cool”” (Lowen, 1997: 24). However, this tendency has a psychological impacts to the narcissists themselves as detected by Lowen “The narcissistic predisposition is to depression, a sense of emptiness or no feeling” (1997: 24). This condition of numbness of feeling “enables the person to project an image of independence, courage, and strength” (Lowen, 1997: 80). However, it is not a real condition, it is just an image projected to others, a kind of self-created illusion. The narcissists’ void of feeling also has negative impacts on others as stated by Lowen “They can be ruthless, exploitative, sadistic, or destructive to another person” (1997: 57). The narcissistic person might become a psychologically cruel person to others.

Sennet (Sennett, 1977: 324) in Lasch states that since the nineteenth century “narcissism is the very opposite of

strong self-love” (Lasch, 1976: 39). Sennet’s statement is based on the tendency of the people to hide their feeling in their socialization with others. People tend to deny their real feeling to project the accepted feeling in their social life. However, Sennet’s statement is rather contradictory with most people’s thought that a narcissist is a self-love, self-admiring person. Lasch emphasizes Sennet’s statement by saying that “narcissism has more in common with self-hatred than with self-admiration” (1976: 44). According to Zajenkowski, *et al*, there are two kinds of narcissism, vulnerable and grandiose narcissism in which one of the characteristics of vulnerable narcissism is a hidden anger due to past events while the grandiose narcissism is characterized with praise-seeking (Zajenkowski, Marcin, Radosław Rogoza, Oliwia Maciantowicz, Joanna Witowska, 2021: 1)

Another concept that needs to be reviewed is about the meaning and symbol of narcissus as flowers. As a flower, “Narcissus flower belongs to the family of Amaryllidaceae. Other names for this flower are daffodil, narcissus, daffadowndilly and jonquil” (*Narcissus Flower – Meaning, Symbolism and Colors*, n.d.: par. 1). Thus, daffodils are the other well-known name for the narcissus flowers. There is a certain opinion why daffodils are the same as narcissus: “... because they commonly grow on the banks of streams and rivers where Narcissus perished” (*NARCISSUS*, n.d.: par.3). The similarity of the growing location with the narcissus flowers on the myth of Narcissus becomes the basis for equating daffodils with narcissus besides falling under the same family of flowers. Based on the origin place, daffodils or narcissus, or *suisen* (Japanese name for narcissus/daffodil): “native to Europe and Northern Africa. They came to Japan almost 700 years ago and now grow wild in certain areas. They are unusual and bloom from late December into February”

(*Hanakotoba: The Secret Meanings Behind 9 Flowers in Japan*, n.d.: par. 4). It can be said that the flowers called narcissus/*suisen* have been around for ages in Japan and as in other places they are blossoming around December to February.

Because of their blossoming period which is the end of the year to the beginning of the next year, narcissus flowers are considered as a symbol of “Rebirth and Renewal” (*The Narcissus Flower: Its Meanings & Symbolism*, n.d.: par.2). Narcissus flowers may symbolize good things or bad things. The good symbols of narcissus flowers are as follows: “Prosperity and wealth, especially in the future, Good luck and happiness” (*The Narcissus Flower: Its Meanings & Symbolism*, n.d.: par. 2), “a symbol of hope and joy” (*NARCISSUS*, n.d.: par. 4), while in the language of flowers (*Hanakotoba*), for the Japanese the daffodils/Narcissus/*Suisen* mean “respect” (*Hanakotoba: The Secret Meanings Behind 9 Flowers in Japan*, n.d.: par. 4) and “The Japanese call it a flower of mirth” (*Narcissus, Meaning & Symbolism*, n.d.: par. 1), while the colour refers to “Laughter, love, LIGHT” (*Narcissus, Meaning & Symbolism*, n.d.: par. 3).

The bad symbols of the narcissus flower are as follows: “Future misfortune, and also Narcissism and egotism” (*The Narcissus Flower: Its Meanings & Symbolism*, n.d.: par. 2). “The Victorians considered it an egoist’s flower” (*The Narcissus Flower: Its Meanings & Symbolism*, n.d.: par. 4). “represent vanity and unrequited love” (*NARCISSUS*, n.d.: par. 3), and “Renaissance art, including pieces by da Vinci and Raphael included the flower as a symbol of “fallen” or “wasted youth” (*Narcissus, Meaning & Symbolism*, n.d.: par. 9). Thus, the flowers of Narcissus/Daffodils/*Suisen* have both positive and negative symbols. These flowers can be said as unique flowers that have two-faceted symbol and are closely related to the myth of Narcissus. In

general, there is a message embodied in these unique flowers: “Nothing bad can last forever because spring is always just around the corner. You can recover from anything if you focus on the positive, and good things are already on their way to you” (*The Narcissus Flower: Its Meanings & Symbolism*, n.d.: par. 8). In short, these flowers ask people to be optimistic whatever has happened. By being optimistic people can reach the brighter side of life eventually.

2. Methods

In order to make a comprehensive analysis, suitable methods are needed. The first method is the library research method which is used to collect data for the concepts/notions and data for the analysis. This library method is supported by close reading method to scrutinize the data. The next method is the qualitative method to analyze the data in general, while to analyze the data in literary perspective, the contextual method is applied. Beard states: “Context refers to what goes *with* a text, rather than what is *in* it” (Beard, 2001: 6). Basically the contextual method is a method of literary analysis combining textual-intrinsic analysis with contextual-extrinsic analysis. The textual-intrinsic analysis focuses on relevant elements; namely, character, setting, and conflict as part of plot while the contextual-extrinsic analysis will be supported by concepts/notions about Narcissus as a myth and as symbols from the psychological perspective.

3. Result and Discussion

Hayashi Fumiko’s short story entitled *Narcissus* yields a new understanding of the reversed construction of the myth of Narcissus. It is reflected in the narcissistic-parasitic relationship of mother and son, in the reversed gender roles, in the hate and insult instead of love and rejection in the relationship, and in the end of the short

story which is not colored with tragic death.

The discussion on the topic of “Reversed Myth and Negative Symbol of Narcissus in Mother-Son Relationship in Hayashi Fumiko’s *Narcissus*” basically focuses on Narcissus as a myth and as flowers. The two are interrelated. However, the discussion emphasizes on the opposite side of the myth and the unwanted symbols. To analyze the topic comprehensively, the analysis is divided into several parts; namely, The Two Versions of the Myth of Narcissus, The General Reversed Narcissus Myth in the Short Story Entitled *Narcissus*, The Detailed Mother-Son Reversed Narcissistic Relationship, and The Negative Symbols of Narcissus the Flower in Mother-Son Reversed Narcissistic Relationship.

3.1 Two Versions of the Myth of Narcissus

Most people have heard about the myth of Narcissus with a variety of depth and understanding. For the sake of having similar perception, here the myth of Narcissus is reviewed briefly based on several web articles; namely, (Anon 2018), “Narcissus and Echo: The Myth and Tragedy of Relationships with Narcissists” (Lancer 2018), (Anon n.d.), (Anon n.d.), and “Narcissus” (Cartwright 2017).

Maybe not everyone knows that there are two versions of Narcissus myth: the Greek version and the Roman version of the myth. Among the two versions, the Roman version is the more popular or the version that most people know at whatever level of understanding. Here are the brief reviews of each version.

The Roman version of the myth of Narcissus is written by Ovid, the Roman poet, in “book three of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, a Latin narrative poem in 15 parts which emerged around AD 8”. In short it talks about Narcissus, a very handsome young man, “The son of the river god Cephissus and the naiad, or

nymph, Liriope” who had enchanted many young women, including Echo, “the beautiful forest nymph”. Echo had been punished by the jealous goddess Hera, who felt tricked by Echo’s talk-activeness when she was looking for her womanizer husband, God Zeus. Because of Hera’s curse, Echo could only repeat the last part of other’s words as a reply. Because of Echo’s communication hindrance, she could not communicate with the crazily handsome Narcissus. Narcissus himself did not pay attention to Echo’s desire. Frustrated being rejected by Narcissus, Echo hid herself in a cave until her untimely death. Her condition made Nemesis, “the goddess of revenge”, angry and curse the prideful Narcissus to miserably love his own enchanting reflection on the clear and still water of a pond. The curse was so great that Narcissus was unable to turn away from staring at his own handsome reflection on the pond till his death. From the place where he had lied near the pond, there grew a beautiful flower, later called Narcissus, after his name. For Echo, “the lonely voice of Echo was heard in the mountains, repeating the last words anyone said”.

The Greek version of the myth of Narcissus is written by Conon, the Greek poet. It was not about Narcissus and Echo but about Narcissus and Ameinius/Aminias. If Echo was a young, beautiful female, Ameinius/Aminias was a young male. He was in deep love with the very handsome Narcissus. Not only being rejected by Narcissus, but he was also given a sword “to do away with himself”. While committing suicide, Ameinius/Aminias prayed to God to punish Narcissus. Artemis, the hunter goddess, cursed Narcissus to love her own handsome reflection till he died miserably.

The similarities of the two versions of the Narcissus myth are as follows: Both are centred on the mythical character, the unbelievably handsome young man called

Narcissus who is so proud of himself and always rudely and cruelly rejected his admirers. Both also ended with the miserable death of Narcissus who cannot get the object of his love, that is, the visual projection of his own image on the still pond water. The main differences are as follows. In the Greek version, the adorer is a young male while in the Roman version the adorer is a young, beautiful female. In the Greek version, the hunter goddess Artemis revenges the savage rejection by Narcissus, while in the Roman version, it is the revenge goddess Nemesis who curses Narcissus for his ruthless rejection to his admirer. The striking difference is that in the Greek version there is an atmosphere of unfulfilled homosexual desire while in the Roman version, it is a heterosexual desire that is not fulfilled. However, in both versions, all the main characters in the unrequited love end in the tragic untimely death.

3.2 The General Reversed Narcissus Myth in the Short Story Entitled *Narcissus*

The discussion concerning the reversed Narcissus myth is focused on the gender roles of the main characters, in this case the mother and her son, the relationship, and the setting. In the myth, Narcissus is a male, a young and incredibly handsome man. He is the centre of attention in the myth, the independent character. In the myth, this prideful young man is deeply loved by a young, beautiful female, named Echo. In Hayashi Fumiko’s short story entitled *Narcissus*, the narcissus role is held by a female, the mother, who is not young and not beautiful. Her name is Tamae. The role of Echo is held by a male, named Sakuo, the son of Tamae. He is not too young and not handsome. Thus, the gender roles are reversed in the short story entitled *Narcissus*.

Following the reversed myth of Narcissus, the relationship of mother and son is not a relationship embodying an

unrequited love like in the myth of Narcissus, but a relationship without love and respect coloured by reciprocal insults. However, unlike the myth of Narcissus whose main characters all face untimely tragic death, the main characters in the *Narcissus* short story are still alive till the end of the story, living the life of hopeless, helpless, loveless, and friendless. This reversed narcissistic relationship of mother and son will be discussed in detail in different section of the analysis.

The setting in Hayashi Fumiko's *Narcissus* is in contrast with the setting in the myth of Narcissus. In the myth of Narcissus, the setting of place is in the dense but beautiful, and peaceful forest while in the short story it is in a big city, the crowded busy Tokyo. If the specific place in the myth is around the pond with its still, clear water, a representation of something beautiful and serene, in the short story it is in a small, cheap, crowded room apartment, a representation of ugliness and poverty. In the myth of Narcissus, the setting of time is in the ancient time without exact date, in the short story it is around World War I. For the social setting, in the myth it represents the world of God, goddess, and nymph, an existence which is far higher above human beings, in the *Narcissus* short story it is just the exact opposite. The social world of Tamae and Sakuo is the low social class in which the mother must work odd jobs to support her life and her mature son's life who has no intention to work.

3.3 The Detailed Mother-Son Reversed Narcissistic Relationship

In this section the focus is to analyse the relationship of the mother, Tamae, and her adult son, Sakuo, which has a reversed narcissistic nature. In the myth, one of the main characteristics of the relationship is an imbalance one, the female (Echo) is dependent on the male (Narcissus) in which the female is deeply infatuated with the male. To analyse comprehensively the

reversed narcissistic relationship, the discussion will focus on the character of the mother and son, before discussing their reversed narcissistic relationship

The mother, Tamae, is not young anymore. When the story begins, she is already forty-three years old. Her past life is not pleasant at all. Her present appearance is as follows: "Old age was sneaking up on her. Tamae somehow regretted her age; she was forty-three. She felt as if she had just aged idly ... rough, lusterless hair ... Her hairline has become markedly thin ... Her lean face with pointy cheekbones seemed somewhat younger ... wrinkled eyelids ... rough and hardened lips ..." (Fumiko, 1982: 50-51). Tamae looks older than her age due to a hard life for years. Her appearance indicates living in poverty leading to her unkempt condition. She does not have enough money to take care of herself. She is bitter with her present condition.

At a young age, around nineteen years old, Tamae elopes with Ibe Naoki to Tokyo, and soon she has a baby boy, called Sakuo. They live in poverty since Ibe's earning is barely enough to support the life of the three of them (Fumiko, 1982: 53). In this poor condition, Ibe, the husband has a love affair with Tazuko, Tamae's school friend who lives temporarily with them on her preparation to enter a music school. Feeling cheated by the love affair, the strong-willed Tamae is so infuriated with her friend resulting in her leaving Tamae's house secretly. However, Tamae's reaction when she soon finds out her friend's new place is so fierce: "she stormed into the house and pulled Tazuko around the hair" (Fumiko, 1982: 54). One unpleasant event leads to another more unpleasant event. The timid Tazuko, unable to bear Tamae's brutal reaction, "commit suicide with gas in the house ... had a rubber gas pipe in her mouth" (Fumiko, 1982: 54). For Tamae, the death of her rival does not end her problem. Her husband, Ibe, suddenly leaves Tamae and

their son without a word and the rumour says that he goes to Kuala Lumpur (Fumiko, 1982: 54). Fumiko is now alone with her young son in poverty.

The hard life makes Tamae full of hate, she hates her husband, she hates her husband's mistress (Fumiko, 1982: 54) and among those all, she hates her own life. Unable to get a decent job to support her life with a son, Tamae takes unconventional jobs. The first indecent job that Tamae takes involves her living "from man to man ... frequently slept elsewhere" (Fumiko, 1982: 54) often leaving her teenage son alone at night. As a whore, her way of life produces certain unexpected influence on her growing son, but this will be discussed in detail when talking about Sakuo, the son. Another unconventional job taken by Tamae is as follows: "head maid in a love hotel in Ikebukuro ... She approached black marketeers who came to the hotel and started to deal in foreign drugs. She gradually saved some money ..." (Fumiko, 1982: 54). She is involved as a drug dealer. Thus, Tamae's morality and obedience to law are loose and this is in line with one of the psychological interpretations of Narcissus in the myth as will be explained later.

Sakuo, the son of Tamae, is twenty-two years old when the story starts. His appearance at the present moment is as follows: "Sakuo had deliberately long sideburns, a haircut like a Spanish matador's. Soft hair grew under his nose in such a way that it was hard to say he was completely grown" (Fumiko, 1982: 49-50). His appearance indicates the hidden intention to look macho, but the soft moustache betrays this intention. The constructed fierce look is futile. Sakuo tries to cover his weak personality by adorning his face with symbols of maleness such as whiskers, manly hair style, and moustache. However, as a camouflage, these manly signs are not successful to give him the fierce look that he desires.

If the strong-willed Tamae does odd jobs to support both her life and her son, the matter is different for Sakuo, the son. In his age of 22 years old, he never has any intention to work to support himself and to ease his mother's burden. He also still lives with her mother in her small, poor apartment. His mother tries several times to ask her acquaintances to give her son a job, but mostly they feel disappointed with Sakuo and refuse to help again, as can be seen from Mr. Kamiyama's comments: "Come to ask for a job and smoke a cigarette looking cocky like that—that's enough to spoil everything" (Fumiko, 1982: 49) and "shocked by his unparalleled indelicacy" (Fumiko, 1982: 57). Sakuo himself has no intention to get a job, as can be seen when Mr. Tsuda's asks him to take the test for the job, Sakuo takes the test without any seriousness or spirit and it seems that he does not care a little bit about the test (Fumiko, 1982: 50). Moreover, he blames his mother for his present condition, accusing her mother's way of raising him up that makes him like he is now (Fumiko, 1982: 57).

Sakuo is a young man who does not want to take the responsibility for his own life. He also does not want to live independently by supporting himself financially. He is like a parasite. As a dependent person without a little bit of will to work, Sakuo relies on women to support his life. The first woman is his mother. Even when he is old enough to take of himself, he never tries to stand on his own feet. This condition finally makes his mother, Tamae, feel fed-up with him always being around her even sleeping in the same bed in her small, crowded, poor room. In her disgust and desperation of her son's attitude, Tamae finally casts her son out:

"Mama's no longer so strong, though you may think I'm dependable. Wouldn't you rather leave me and rent a room at Mr.

Sakurai's or somewhere? Mama's really tired. You and mama were born to meet as enemies; it was fated from a former life. Don't you want to liberate me now that you're a grown man?" (Fumiko, 1982: 51).

Basically a dependable person, Sakuo is not willing to move out from his mother's rented room "I don't want to leave" (Fumiko, 1982: 52). When his mother keeps insisting on asking him to move away from her apartment by giving more reasons (Fumiko, 1982: 52), Sakuo half pleading, half threatening while feeling sorry for himself, says:

"All right. Then I have no choice but to go to Eiko's; is that okay?" Hearing him mention Eiko, Tamae answered, "Yeah. You have no other way? Then do it. When your mother can't feed you, you'll have Eiko feed you? How come you can't work like a grown-up instead of always depending on a woman?" (Fumiko, 1982:53).

Eiko is Sakuo's lover who is much older than him, almost the same age as Tamae and Tamae disagrees so much their relationship. From Sakuo's words it can be said that he never plans to find a job to support himself, instead like a parasite he plans to depend on another woman to support him.

The bickering relationship between mother and son abates temporary when finally, Sakuo, the son, is willing to go to another city to take the promised work. The farewell moment lasts nicely enough. The mother spends the parting moment with her son by walking together along the busy street of Tokyo. The mother encourages the reluctant son to keep his plan to go to Bihoro to start working: "Going to Bihoro is like going to die—" "Not at all. It may even be better than living in Tokyo" ... "Do you feel like going?" Sakuo didn't answer. He watched

the ceiling in silence (Fumiko, 1982: 58-59). From the quotation as a lazy, parasitic person, Sakuo is not enthusiastic to separate from his mother to work on another city.

The mother-son relationship portrays specifically the reversed narcissistic relationship. Not only does the mother represent the dominant Narcissus and the son represent the dependent Echo, but some aspects of their relationship also show different but unique characteristics of the unhealthy narcissistic relationship. Instead of the obsessive love of Echo (female mythic figure) to the indifferent Narcissus (male mythic figure), the mother-daughter relationship represents the offensive dislike and underestimation of the dependent son representing Echo to the exhausted but independent mother representing Narcissus. However, if Echo insists on following Narcissus out of love, the son keeps on depending on the mother out of laziness and parasitic tendency. Narcissus drives away Echo because he does not need love from others, however the mother drives away the son from her small, poor apartment because the grown-up son has burdened her so long. If Echo hides in the cave until her untimely death due to unrequited love, the son finally leaves her mother's room to go to another place to work although unwillingly with almost no enthusiasm.

3.4 The Negative Symbols of Narcissus the Flower in Mother-Son Reversed Narcissistic Relationship

The Narcissus flower contains both positive and negative symbols. In the short story entitled *Narcissus* by Hayashi Fumiko, the positive symbols of the flower Narcissus turn into negatives ones while the negative symbols keep being negative. This session will discuss one by one those symbols of Narcissus the flower in the *Narcissus* the short story.

Narcissus the flowers are often said to symbolize "rebirth and renewal" due to

their flowering season from the end of the year to the beginning of the next year. However, this positive symbol is not reflected in *Narcissus* the short story. After the coming separation due to the son's finally moving to another town to work, nothing good is waited for the mother, Tamae, or the son, Sakuo. The mother will live her life as usual, except without Sakuo burdening her, as can be seen from her own word in response to Sakuo's comment "You're right. No more hope, nothing promising can be expected" (Fumiko, 1982: 60). Still living in the same room, which is small, crowded, and in a poor condition, the mother will do odd jobs to support her life. Sakuo, although he finally moves to another city trying to live on his own feet, he is so pessimistic with his job and his future at Bihoro "Going to Bihoro is like going to die" (Fumiko, 1982: 60).

For the similar positive symbols, namely, "future prosperity and wealth" as well as "good luck and happiness", the mother and son do not seem to be able to experience them. There are no signs of being able to enjoy a life without financial problems for the mother, Tamae, and son, Sakuo, as have been briefly mentioned before. It is impossible for either mother or son to have bright, prosperous future since both have no good and prospective jobs at present that might lead them to enjoy easy and affluent life in the future. The mother will try to continue her present odd jobs except that "I'll age more and more. It won't be like before" (Fumiko, 1982: 60) while the son will do meager job "a job in a mine office" (Fumiko, 1982: 58). In other words, both mother and son will lead a hopeless life for the rest of their life.

As for the symbol of "hope and joy" the short story entitled *Narcissus* clearly shows that from the beginning to the end both the mother and the son never have any good expectation or coming pleasure in their lives. The mother's life goes from bad to worse. Eloping with a poor man, she lives poorly and finds out

that her husband has a mistress and after the tragic death of the mistress her husband, Ibe, prefers to leave her and their son "Ibe quit his job at once, left for Amoy like a whiff of wind, went from Amoy to Malaya, and then on to Kuala Lumpur, rumour had it" (Fumiko, 1982: 54), Bitterly working hard and doing odd jobs to support her life and her son, Tamae, the mother, has no time, energy, and passion to pay attention to herself. Considered as a hindrance to get a better life and another husband, the son never gets attention and love from the mother leading to his feeling bitter about his life and wanting to hurt her mother's feeling as a revenge. This can be seen from his cynical comments at his mother's action of polishing her nails "What dirty hands—you're aging" (Fumiko, 1982: 52). Living such a life, it can be easily stated that both mother and son will never experience "hope and joy" in their lives.

The flowers named *Narcissus* is said to symbolize "respect", however the short story entitled *Narcissus* clearly shows that there is no respect in the mother-son relationship. Instead of respect, their relationship is full of regrets, insults, anger, and reciprocal condescending. The mother, Tamae, feels regretful that she does not give her child to other family so that she can have a better life and a chance to get another husband while she is still young "if she had boldly given him away to someone then, she wouldn't be in this much trouble, now" (Fumiko, 1982: 50). The son, Sakuo, feels ashamed with her mother's odd jobs, among them is becoming a whore, without thinking that it is also to feed him. His feeling of being neglected by his mother leads this weak-willed son to hurt and insult her mother whenever there is a chance to do so "I don't think of you anymore than I do of the dirt in my nails—I just borrowed your stomach ..." (Fumiko, 1982: 52).

The next good symbols for the flowers called *Narcissus* are "mirth" and

“laughter, love, light”. These symbols indicate cheerfulness, happiness, blissfulness, and caring. These symbols are not reflected in the short story entitled *Narcissus*. Not even a spark of happiness appears in the life of the mother and the son. The mother regrets all the things that she has experienced; namely, her husband, the mistress, her job, even her own son. She rates her own son very low, not only his ability, his will, but also his appearance “Wearing a dusty, worm-eaten beret, he looked meager to her though he was her own son” (Fumiko, 1982: 60). Her son also never looks happy, he is full of sinister and bitterness, towards his mother appearance, his mother’s attitude to him, and towards anything that happens to him, such as when he is asked by his mother whether he has no intention to look for a job “I don’t feel like it. Everything revolts me. It’s irksome even to keep on living like this” (Fumiko, 1982: 55).

Besides the good symbols, *Narcissus* the flowers also have bad symbols. *Narcissus* is considered to symbolize “future misfortune”. This bad symbol is appropriate to the mother, Tamae, and son, Sakuo, in the short story entitled *Narcissus*. Taking into consideration the present condition of the mother in which she is getting older, unkempt, poor, doing odd jobs with no prospect of good proper job, it can be predicted that in the future her life will be getting more and more miserable “I’ll age more and more. It won’t be like before. I may suffer from occasional fits of asthma during the long winter and then die suddenly” (Fumiko, 1982: 60). As for the son, as a weak-willed and parasitic person who prefers to be dependent on women to support his life, the compulsion of working in another city due to the refusals of his mother and his older girlfriend to fully take care of him lead to a prediction that he will not succeed in his work or worse he will live miserably and in bad health due to his weak chest. His rather unhealthy condition

can be seen from his mother’s words “It’s going to get colder from now on. I wonder if it’s hard for someone who has a poor chest” (Fumiko, 1982: 58).

“Egotism” is another bad symbol for the flowers named *Narcissus*. This “egotism” is somehow reflected in the life of the mother, Tamae, and the son, Sakuo, in the short story entitled *Narcissus*. Each tries to focus on her/his own life. The mother, somewhat selfishly, thinks that her life will be better if she does not take care of her son herself (Fumiko, 1982: 50). The son, also somewhat selfishly, does not want to work (Fumiko, 1982: 55) even though he knows that they live poorly and his mother is getting old. Thus, “egotism” really represents the character of the mother and the son as well as their relationship.

The short story entitled *Narcissus* also reflects the bad symbol of the flowers called *Narcissus*, that is, “vanity and unrequited love”. The mother’s love to her husband indicated by their elopement when they were still young, is immediately betrayed by her husband, by having a mistress and leaving her totally after the death of the mistress due to her rage. The mother is also too proud to acknowledge that she is deeply hurt by hiding her emotional wound in the form of fury and resentment, as can be seen in her rage to Tazuko, her friend who becomes her husband’s mistress “she stormed into the house and pulled Tazuko around by the hair ... Tazuko committed suicide with gas in the house” (Fumiko, 1982: 55). The son covers his insecure feeling by acting indifferently and cocky. This can be seen in his attitude when looking for a job (Fumiko, 1982: 57) and when he talks to his mother “Tamae began to boil inside at his spiteful way of talking, despite the fact that he was her own son” (Fumiko, 1982: 49).

The flowers named *Narcissus* also embodied bad symbol of “fallen” or “wasted youth”. This bad symbol can be

seen clearly in the two main characters, the mother and the son, in the short story entitled *Narcissus*. The mother's life reflects the "fallen" woman. She repeatedly makes one mistake to another one. Started with her decision to elope with the young man she just knows for a short time, she commits another mistake of being too blinded by her fury and jealousy in her action to her husband's mistress who is her friend, leading to the mistress' committing suicide (Fumiko, 1982: 55). She inevitably represents the "fallen" woman when she becomes a prostitute, spending the nights with different men when her son was still young to support her life and her son's life as can be seen from her son's memory "Sakuo always cursed his mother who frequently slept elsewhere" (Fumiko, 1982: 54). At present Tamae feels worried that Tomita, someone's husband who has become her lover for some time, has been bored with her because he suddenly cannot be reached (Fumiko, 1982: 56-57). The son clearly represents "wasted youth". He spends his young age by being idle and doing useless activities, instead of looking for a job to help his mother who is growing older. He is just loitering around, smoking cigarettes, asking money to be wasted "barely graduating from middle school, he lived lazily ... whenever she saved enough money to give a sigh of relief, Sakuo spent it all" (Fumiko, 1982: 54).

4. Conclusion

The short story entitled *Narcissus* by Hayashi Fumiko presents two important points, namely the reversed myth and the negative symbols. The famous myth of Narcissus is creatively turned upside down in terms of the gender roles, the type of the relationship, and the ending of the relationship. The mother represents the dominant Narcissus while the son represents the subordinate Echo. The love relationship in the myth is replaced by a relationship deeply coloured with hate,

anger, and disrespect. Although the short story does not end with the tragic and untimely death of its important characters as in the famous myth, the togetherness of mother and son ends since, a long time ago, emotionally and physically due to the lazy, parasitic son being pushed to finally take a job in another town. As for the symbols, although the flowers named Narcissus embody good and bad symbols, in the short story the good symbols are not fulfilled at all while the bad symbols are fully reflected. Thus, although the short story is named after the famous myth of Narcissus, the contents have been creatively turned upside down creating a story with its own enchantment.

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