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### Yukio Mishima: Thymos Between Aesthetics and Ideological Fanaticism

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#### Abstract

This study attempts to explore the possible motivations, both obvious and problematic, behind the ritual suicide (seppuku) committed by the Japanese writer in the name of the Emperor at the Eastern Headquarters of Japan's Self-Defense Forces in 1970. History does not seem to be a coherent or intelligible process, as man's struggle for nourishment is most often replaced by thymos, the desire for others to recognize his value or the value system of the ideals or noble purposes he is ready to sacrifice for, ignoring the basic instinct of self-conservation. Yukio Mishima was extremely pessimistic about pragmatic and materialistic contemporary Japan. History brought along increasing consumerism, thus disturbing the harmony of traditional Japanese spirituality. The technological ability to improve human existence seemed to alter inevitably the moral evolution of contemporary Japanese. Against this background of ruling "costs" and "benefits", the Japanese writer seems to believe that it is only the thymotic man, the "man of anger", who can fight for the recognition and salvation of the Japanese soul (yamato damashii). Believed for centuries to be the true art of dying, Yukio Mishima's seppuku turned from a "beautiful" gesture into one of protest and accusation: the Japanese society had begun the transition from a closed society to an open one, governed by anxiety, in which individuals faced personal decisions.

#### Keywords

thymos (desire for recognition); seppuku (ritual suicide); aesthetics; ideology; bushid (the samurai code)

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