

## The Interplay of Emotional Healing and Interpersonal Relationships in *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop: A Novel*: A Synthesis with Fritz Heider's Psychological Theories

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### Abstract

The research article explores the themes of emotional healing and personal growth in Satoshi Yagisawa's *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop: A Novel*, analysing the protagonist Takako's journey through the lens of Fritz Heider's psychological theories, specifically Attribution Theory and Balance Theory. The novel portrays Takako's transformation from a state of emotional numbness following a heartbreak to a renewed sense of self through her immersion in literature and interpersonal connections. Heider's theories provide a framework to understand her shifting attributions of blame, her quest for emotional equilibrium, and the restorative power of relationships. The article highlights how the novel aligns with Heider's emphasis on perception, internal versus external attributions, and the balance sought in human relationships. By synthesizing literary analysis with psychological theory, the study emphasizes the redemptive power of books and the importance of community in fostering emotional resilience.

**Keywords:** Emotional Healing, Interpersonal Relationships, Attribution Theory, Balance Theory, Literature and Psychology, Personal Growth

### Introduction

Satoshi Yagisawa (1977) is a prolific Japanese writer who penned his first novel *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop: A Novel (Morisaki Shoten No Hibi)*, which was published in 2009 and earned him the Chiyoda Literature Prize. The book was adapted into a film in 2010. In 2024, he released a sequel titled *More Days at the Morisaki Bookstore*. Yagisawa often visited the Kanda Babelsberg bookstore and enjoyed coffee, experiences that likely inspired his debut novel. The Chiyoda Literature Prize, awarded by Tokyo's Chiyoda Ward, honours exceptional literary works. His writing delves into themes of love, human connections, and the profound role books and bookstores play in bringing people together.

Satoshi Yagisawa's *Days at the Morisaki Bookshop: A Novel* is a poignant narrative that probes deep into the quiet yet profound journey of emotional recovery and self-discovery. The novel follows Takako, a young woman who, after a devastating betrayal by her boyfriend, retreats into isolation until her estranged uncle offers her refuge in his second-hand bookstore. The Morisaki Bookshop becomes a sanctuary where Takako's healing unfolds through literature and human connections. This article examines Takako's emotional and psychological development through the theoretical framework of Fritz Heider, a foundational figure in social psychology. Heider's Attribution Theory and Balance Theory offer valuable insights into Takako's shifting perceptions of her circumstances, her relationships, and her eventual emotional maturation. By intertwining literary analysis with psychological theory, the study illuminates the novel's deeper exploration of how individuals navigate pain, reinterpret their experiences, and restore emotional harmony.

### **Attribution Theory**

The novel begins with Takako's life unravelling after her boyfriend, Hideaki, reveals his engagement to another woman. The betrayal leaves her emotionally shattered, and she withdraws from her job and social life, embodying a state of disillusionment and self-blame. Heider's Attribution Theory posits that individuals interpret events by attributing causes either to internal factors (e.g., personal flaws) or external factors (e.g., situational forces). Initially, Takako internalizes her heartbreak, attributing the betrayal to her own inadequacies. She confesses, "I was slow, there was something off about him" (DMB 03), reflecting a tendency to blame herself, a common response in the wake of emotional trauma. This internal attribution exacerbates her sense of helplessness, as seen in her inability to articulate her pain. She says, "Someone help me, I thought to myself. I was serious. But I couldn't raise my voice. I couldn't do anything but cry" (DMB04).

Heider's theory suggests that such attributions shape emotional responses and behaviours. Takako's self-perception as a victim traps her in a cycle of emotional stagnation. However, her uncle Satoru's invitation to stay at the Morisaki Bookshop introduces an external locus of change. Reluctantly accepting his offer, Takako steps into a new environment where her attributions gradually shift from internal to external, marking the first step in her healing journey.

As Takako immerses herself in books, her attributions evolve. She comes to realize that people are multidimensional and that her recovery lies within her own actions rather than external circumstances. This epiphany empowers her to take control of her emotions, redefining her breakup as a learning experience rather than a life-ruining event. A poignant moment encapsulates this shift when Satoru advises her. He says:

When you fall in love, I want you to fall in love all the way. Even if it ends in heartache, please don't live a lonely life without love. I've been worried that because of what happened you'll give up on falling in love. Love is wonderful. Those memories of people you love, they never disappear. They go on warming your heart as long as you live. When you get old like me, you'll understand. How about it—can you promise me? (DMB 65)

The counsel emphasizes Takako's transition from avoidance to acceptance, reflecting Heider's emphasis on internal attribution and self-agency.

### **Balance Theory**

Heider's Balance Theory, which posits that individuals seek harmony in their relationships, is evident in Takako's evolving connections. Initially, her relationship with Satoru is distant and marked by scepticism which is evident through his words, "To be honest, I wasn't really that fond of Uncle Satoru. He was so unconventional that he was hard to figure out" (DMB 06). However, as she reconnects with herself amid the comforting bookshelves, Takako is struck by Satoru's resilience and dedication to the bookstore. His unwavering commitment, despite personal challenges, offers her a model for emotional depth and perseverance: "I worked diligently and spent my free time reading lots of books"(DMB 63).

The bookstore, with its towering stacks of books and musty scent, initially overwhelms Takako. Yet, as she begins to engage with the literature around her, her

perspective starts to transform. A pivotal moment occurs when she picks up a book by Saisei Murō and finds herself unexpectedly engrossed. The protagonist states, “I didn’t know how to describe it. It hit home” (DMB 34). Through reading, Takako encounters narratives that mirror her own experiences, helping her process her emotions. This phase of her journey aligns with Heider’s idea that reinterpretation of events can lead to emotional growth.

As Takako immerses herself in books, her attributions evolve. She begins to recognize that her suffering is not solely her fault but part of a broader human experience. This realization empowers her to take control of her emotional responses, moving from passive victimhood to active engagement with her healing. Her uncle’s eccentric yet compassionate demeanour further facilitates this shift. Satoru’s nonjudgmental support, exemplified by his advice to take it easy, get all the rest you need, provides a safe space for Takako to rebuild her sense of self.

Heider’s Balance Theory, suggests that individuals seek harmony in their relationships, which is evident in Takako’s evolving connections. Initially, her relationship with Satoru is distant and marked by scepticism. However, their shared passion for books creates a common ground, restoring emotional equilibrium. Satoru’s confession that Takako’s presence has been a source of salvation for him highlights the mutual healing that occurs as their bond deepens.

The bookstore itself becomes a metaphor for belonging and self-acceptance, as Satoru reflects:

This is it. Our little, rundown Morisaki Bookshop. I had so many aspirations. I flew all over the world only to end up back at the place I’d known every bit of since I was a child. Hilarious, isn’t it? After all that time, I came back here. That’s when I finally realized it wasn’t just a question of where I was. It was about something inside me. No matter where I went, no matter who I was with, if I could be honest with myself, then that was where I belonged. By the time I realized that, half my life was over. So I went back to my favourite harbour and I decided to drop anchor. For me, this is a sacred place. It’s where I feel most at ease. (DMB 50–51)

The revelation features the novel’s theme of emotional equilibrium, as Takako and Satoru’s shared passion for books restores balance to their relationship. The theme of balance

is further explored in the latter half of the novel with the return of Satoru's estranged wife, Momoko. Her reappearance forces Satoru and Takako to confront unresolved emotions, mirroring Takako's earlier confrontation with her ex-boyfriend. Takako's role in facilitating Satoru and Momoko's reconciliation demonstrates her emotional growth and understanding of the complexities of love and forgiveness. Heider's theory underscores that emotional maturity involves acknowledging and addressing imbalances in relationships, a lesson Takako embodies as she helps her uncle and aunt reconnect.

*Days at the Morisaki Bookshop: A Novel* masterfully intertwines the themes of emotional healing and interpersonal relationships, offering a narrative that resonates with Fritz Heider's psychological theories. Takako's journey from self-blame to self-awareness illustrates the principles of Attribution Theory, while her restored relationships reflect the tenets of Balance Theory. The novel underscores the transformative power of literature and human connections in navigating life's challenges. By aligning Yagisawa's storytelling with Heider's frameworks, this analysis highlights the universal human quest for emotional equilibrium and the redemptive potential of community. The Morisaki Bookshop serves as both a literal and metaphorical space where brokenness is mended, and new beginnings are forged—a testament to the enduring interplay between perception, relationships, and healing.

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