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BREAKING THE SISYPHEAN TORTURE IN LAWRENCE KONNER & MARK ROSENTHAL'S *SCRIPT OF MONA LISA SMILE*

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Abstract

This research analyzes the Sisyphian torture and the way to break it that reflects in Lawrence Konner & Mark Rosenthal's *Script of Mona Lisa Smile*. It describes how the character breaks the torture as seen in Betty's life. There are two questions discussed in this research i.e. actions that reflect the Sisyphian torture in Betty's life and the ways Betty break the torture. This research uses feminist existentialism by Simone De Beauvoir. There are two concepts of theory i.e. immanence and transcendence that help the researcher to analyze the data. The research shows the passive attitude and Mystical type of women are the torture reflected in Betty's life. Then, Betty's life changes after she feels her married life is not as happy as she hoped and dreamed of. After that, Betty also shows the active and powerful side of women in breaking the torture in her life. She takes action to divorce her husband and then she continues her life by moving and getting higher education.

Keywords: torture, existentialism, passive, mystical type of women, active.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sisyphus was a king in Greek mythology that irritated the gods with his deception. He defied the gods and incarcerated Death in chains so that no human needed to die. Furthermore, the gods decided to curse and punish him. He was punished to roll a boulder up long just to watch it roll back down. He did it every day, every time, all his life but that thing is useless and futile work. This phenomenon has also occurred in women's life. Women do the same thing continuously. If Sisyphus is doomed to raise a boulder up a hill and then roll it back down, women are cursed to marry, take care of a family, and have children.

There are some scientific objectives of this research. The first is to analyze the immanence of women represented in Elizabeth (Betty). Then the second is to analyze the transcendence of women that shows in Betty's life. Then, the Social objective is used to evaluate the social impact of the research. Social objective is related to improving human well-being.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This research use existentialism theory. Existentialism is a term that describes an individual's awareness of life's choices and eventual definition of

one's life. Feminism is primarily concerned with women in a dominant male society. Existentialist feminists emphasize concepts such as freedom, interpersonal relationships, and the experience of living as a human body. They value women's ability to make a radical change, but it is inevitable that factors such as self-deception and anxiety caused by the possibility of change can limit it. The concept of Beauvoir's existentialism is applied to discuss how individuals carry out their roles in society. It teaches women to be aware of their existence and values that they can use to improve themselves in society.

Immanence is a term that is given to women who are passive, the women do nothing to defend themselves. Women are just subjected to all of the treatment or dictation that is directed by men. Women are Objects and Others. Males are more essential than females. Women are passive, inward, house and family guardians, but males are active, reaching out into the world and into the future. According to Beauvoir (1949):

Immanence is associated with repetition of the past and activities related to the maintenance of life and then uses "immanence" to describe the historic domain assigned to women: a closed-off realm where women are interior, passive, static, and immersed in

themselves.

Women agree with the notion that they are weak and need men's help. The objects that believe they don't need to change in order to succeed will be ineffective. Women feel that they only have to do is obeying and submit to men's treatment.

Immanence gives rise to female deception, which is called Malafide. According to Fajar (2018) Simone de Beauvoir describes three characteristics of a malafide woman: The Prostitute, women who willingly lets themselves be objectified by men, and more so that they willingly give up all rights of their bodies to be used sexually. Then, The Narcissist is a woman who becomes aware of everything to do with her appearance so that they make efforts to improve their natural appearance which in truth is their way to find approval from men.

Last, The Mystic, a woman who thinks they are better than other women because they are obedient to the norms and values that apply in society, is required to be the ideal woman. The researcher used Mystic to analyze some of the data. The application of the concept of Immanence really helps the writer in completing research on the life of Elizabeth who is willing to become the object of her husband.

Transcendence is a term used to describe women's efforts to reach their own life after being dominated by males. Women who can afford to deny the stereotype, women only require males to demonstrate their existence and transcendence. Women might demonstrate their existence by doing something or thinking in a certain way. Women who take an action to step out of their role from monotonous existences of getting married, taking care of children, and tending house, do not take education into free women which they can do activities outside. According to Beauvoir (1949):

The importance of transcendence goes beyond defining gender roles. By placing a higher value on transcendence society support actions of perpetual forward motion, unlimited growth, individual fulfillment, and the people that embody these values.

Women not only stay at home, but they also need to step out for their future such as going outside to take an education or working and making life matter. Productive women acknowledge their strengths and find ways to use the strength. The strength can use to fulfill her individual need and not depend on men.

The explanation above has a relationship with the analysis of this research. The idea of transcendence is

to take an action beyond the role. The researcher relates the ideas to the research because women finally realize what they need. It indicates that the woman in the story knows the thing that she needs to do to show her existence. The application of the concept of transcendence really helps the writer in completing research about the life of Elizabeth who is able to change herself and pursue her dreams.

In this research, the researcher discusses the related story of Sisyphean with the phenomena of women seen in the *Mona Lisa Smile* movie script. Then, the research question was solved by using immanence and transcendence concepts of feminism existentialism theory.

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In this research, the researcher used a sociological approach because the topic of this research is related to women's lives in society. According to Daiches (1981), the sociological approach tells about the structure of society that can evaluate anything people must know and it can help the work of literature. To support this approach the writer uses the feminism theory by Simone de Beauvoir. Simone de Beauvoir is a French feminist philosopher. The theory was written in

Beauvoir's book with the title *The Second Sex*. The book shows subordinate women to men and designates them as objects.

This research uses a qualitative method to analyze the data. This method is seen to be an effective way to examine an issue and produced data by analyzing and interpreting it. Creswell (2017) said that qualitative research is the best suited to address a research problem in which you do not know the variables and need to explore.

There are some ways to collect the data. First is by reading the script of the *Mona Lisa Smile* movie. The second is by collecting and exploring the data with the researcher's opinion. The third is by identifying and classifying the data into two points that are Sisyphean torture actions that are reflected in Betty's character, then the way the Betty character breaks the torture. The last is by drawing and evaluating the conclusion through the Feminism approach, especially the immanence and transcendence concepts.

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

The researcher discusses the torture of women's lives, as well as how women can break free themselves; it can be reflected in the *Mona Lisa*

Smile movie script through Betty's life. The researcher uses a feminist point of view to analyze the data. There are two scopes that are analyzed; first, the ways of Betty's actions that show Sisyphean torture are reflected in Betty's life. Women are stereotyped in society as though their status as women is a curse that forces them to marry and have a family. Then, the second scope is how Betty breaks the Sisyphean torture in her life. Women are forced to marry and be faithful wives for their husbands due to the patriarchal system that prevails in society; this is a curse for women. To be free and retain their existence, women must take action to eliminate the torture.

4.1 Sisyphean Torture in Betty's Life.

There are two kinds of torture in Betty's life that reflects her immanence; accepting everything decided by others and by being proud to obey the social rules and tradition.

4.1.1 Accepting Everything Decided by others.

Passive means allowing or accepting everything that happens without protest. Women always follow their parents' or husbands' rules and standards. They are accustomed to simply accepting the circumstance and

not fighting back. As a result, women are considered passive. Beauvoir (1949) stated that Hegel held that the two sexes were of necessity different, the one active and the other passive, and of course the female would be the passive one. The silent and submissive actions of women make women considered passive. Then, society considered men as active. This case is seen in Betty's life where she surrenders and does nothing to defend herself. This is shown in the quotation below:

“Betty: Oh, I almost forgot. I spoke to him about reading the poem. He'd rather not. I said all right.”(p.11)

The quotation above shows Betty is passive in making decisions. The data indicate that Betty is an object of her future husband because Betty only simply accepted her future husband's decision without comment or protest. The word “he” in the quotation is referring to Betty's future husband Spencer. The phrase "I said all right" clearly indicates that she is passive in making a decision. Then, she did not fight for Spencer's choice; instead, she simply accepted it.

Women are considered passive in the way they think, make a decision, and give an opinion. Women do not fight back against the treatment they

receive, they just let it be. This is just like torture for women because it always happens, then they did not take an action against that.

4.1.2 Proud to obey the social rules and tradition

Many women believe that their position in life differs from males. They believe they are trapped by traditions or social ideals that limit their freedom. However, there are some women who do not think like that; they are proud of themselves for following the social rules. This is known as Mystical, women who consider themselves better than others because they obey the norms or values that apply in society. They believe that women are destined to marry and take care of the household. Women who did so are getting a place in society. According to Beauvoir (1949) one remarkable fact among others is that the married woman had her place in society but enjoyed no rights therein; whereas the unmarried female, honest woman or prostitute, had all the legal capacities of a man, but up to this century was more or less excluded from social life. It means that getting married and caring for a household is a method for women to gain freedom and a place in society. Married women are awarded the status in society that

causes them to feel respected and superior to unmarried women. This reflects the story where Betty feels that she was more superior to Katherine. It shows in the quotation below:

“(Betty writes an editorial that related to Katherine) I baste the chicken with one hand and outline the paper with the other. While our mothers were called to work for Lady Liberty... it is our duty, nay, obligation to reclaim our place in the home.. Bearing the children that will carry our traditions into the future. One must pause to consider why Miss Katherine Watson... instructor in the Art History department...has decided to declare war on the holy sacrament of marriage. Her subversive and political teachings encourage our Wellesley girls.. To reject the roles they were born to fill” (p.29)

The quotation above shows that Betty is a mystical type of woman. It shows that she is happy for obeying the tradition. In this sentence *it is our duty, nay, obligation to reclaim our place in the home*, she considered that the woman's place was in a private place. She is a firm believer in the woman being at home, taking care of the household, and eventually taking care of their children, who will also carry on the tradition later. Then, in this sentence, *one must pause to consider why Miss Katherine Watson has*

decided to declare war on the holy sacrament of marriage show how Betty compares herself to Katherine where she thinks she is better than Katherine. When it comes to the standing of women in society, Katherine and Betty have opposing viewpoints. This leads Betty to criticize Katherine and conclude that what she is doing is against women's nature.

Women have thoughts where they feel free when they follow social provisions for their status as women. It gives them the impression that their presence is valued by society and their status as a wife elevates them. According to Beauvoir (1949) the mystic will torture her flesh to have the right to claim it; reducing it to abjection, she exalts it as the instrument of salvation. Women with this perspective are unaware that having their freedom constrained or controlled by society is torturous for them.

4.2 The ways Betty breaks the Sisyphean torture in life.

Therefore, Betty has a desire to stay out of the torture. Some changes are made to show the process of her transcendence; by being active in getting an education, and by stepping out of the tradition and social rules.

4.2.1 Being Active in getting Education

Women began to be concerned about their lives and began to look to public spaces, such as education, to show their existence. According to Beauvoir (1949) when she is productive and active, she regains her transcendence; in her projects, she concretely affirms her status as a subject. It means that when women take an action in their lives, being an active person shows they are women's transcendence. They take action again to liberate them from the torment they endured. It can be seen through Betty's actions. It can be shown in the quotation below:

“Betty: Miss Watson, can you help me get in touch with your friend...in Greenwich Village?

...

Katherine Watson: Greenwich Village?

Betty: Yeah. For a while.

Then, who knows?

Betty: Maybe law school.

Yale, even.

Katherine Watson: Well...

“(p.45)

The quotation above is showing Betty is active by showing her enthusiasm for continuing higher education. In this sentence *can you help me get in touch with your friend...in Greenwich Village?* This shows that Betty takes an action out of her torture. She takes action to move out of the unhappy marriage life that she has. Her action is

not only out of her hometown, she also tries to continue her education at university. In this sentence *Maybe law school. Yale, even.* Indicate her action to getting higher education. These data show how brave women were in breaking free from their unhappy marriages or torments to achieve their own happiness and freedom. They make use of their intellect by continuing their education. So that women's existence is no longer the object of men.

4.2.2 Step Out of The Tradition and Social Rules

The debate over women's roles in society has raged on until now. Women have long been regarded as weak and linked with the private area. Even women are still fighting for equality. According to Beauvoir (1949) today the combat takes a different shape; instead of wishing to put a man in prison, woman endeavors to escape from one; she no longer seeks to drag him into the realms of immanence but to emerge, herself, into the light of transcendence. It means women are no longer trying to find ways to make men feel how unfair it is to be a woman. However, the woman is now more concerned with herself and how she can free herself from the tormentor shackles she has been enduring. This

can be seen through the power that Betty shows in the way she behaves toward her mother. It shows in the quotation below:

“Betty: She's smiling. Is she happy? (She shows the Mona Lisa picture to her mother)

Betty's mother: The important thing is not to tell anyone.

Betty: She looks happy. So, what does it matter?

Betty's mother: Don't wash your dirty laundry in public.

Betty: Let me tell you something. Not everything is as it seems.” (p.42)

The quotation above shows Betty's power in the way she thinks. It shows that Betty urges her mother that her life is unhappy and that she wishes to be free of the relationship. In this sentence, *the important thing is not to tell anyone to* indicate how Betty's mother really cares about how society views her family. This shows how society regulations to women's roles. From society's perspective getting a divorce is bad for women. That is why Betty's mother wants Betty not to show her problem to others. In this sentence *Let me tell you something. Not everything is as it* shows Betty's power in her critical perspectives on her life. The knowledge that women have is a power for women to break the torture. The knowledge that women

have can reflect in the way they behave and think. Society's view of the role of women has an impact on women's thoughts and attitudes.

V. CONCLUSION

The discussion about women's roles will never be complete. The role of women in public has always been a source of argument. Society has established guidelines for how women should dress, behave, and present themselves. Women are always associated with domestic roles in society: taking care of the household, and taking care of the children. Even women seem to be prepared to be wives and households. The education they receive only supports them to become ideal wives for men. These things are should be broken by women. It is like torture for women where their activities are limited by their gender. They are not fully able to enter public spaces like men. Women should be active to take action, to step out of the torture.

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