



**THE AMBIGUITY OF WOMAN TRANSCENDENCE IN
ARTHUR GOLDEN'S MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA**

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Abstract

This research analyzes Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* from feminism perspective. The research objectives are to find out and explain the process that triggers the ambiguity by Chiyo as the main female character. In doing the analysis, this research used qualitative study applying the content analysis method. The data is presented in form of quotation related to woman processes in transcendence that trigger the ambiguity found in the novel. The data analysis was conducted using the library research method to gain information. This research applied descriptive study in textual analysis to analyze the data from the novel. The finding of this research is about the ambiguity of Chiyo's transcendence. Chiyo is able to achieve her process in transcendence but some effect triggers her process becomes ambiguity. Through the process of transcendence Chiyo becomes gain her independence by opening business but she still is a mistress of her Danna. This condition makes Chiyo process of transcendence becomes ambiguity. She is still trapped in male sexual oppression though she has gained freedom for her financial and status.

Keywords: The Ambiguity, Women Transcendence.

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Hooks (2020: p. 15), feminism is started off as a movement to end sexist oppression, but it would be better defined as the movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. Women movement appears in different characteristics due to the differences of basic assumption issues of gender inequality. Women have the right and freedom to vote, go to bars and cafés without being accompanied by males, attend schools and universities, wear whatever they choose, and work wherever they want. Therefore, this freedom is not absolute for women. According to Humm (2004, p. 25) feminism is a theory about the equality between men and women in the field of politic, economic, and social. It is mentioned that feminism means a movement of women which demands equality and rights with men.

The issue of woman oppression can still be found in a case of Geisha. Being considered as a lower-class profession, Geisha often get a negative perception from others. Women who become Geisha escape from their confinement by joining the Geisha Training House and working as a Geisha to have her independence.

However, there is actually an ambiguity in this problem.

As we know that women who becomes a Geisha is women from lower class and do not have any skills. These women transcend her boundaries by having a work to support her life. They get education in special training school to acquire talents that she never has before. If women decide to work in prostitution to fulfill their economic life, society considers these women who have low jobs with low moral values. This situation triggers an ambiguity toward woman's transcendence. By attending Geisha Training School and getting education, it is supposed to have a positive impact for woman. They learn many skills, such as art, and talents and they will apply this skill to make money and support their family. Therefore, sexually, school instead of making a talented woman they still serve men. Men hire Geisha to pour tea and show her talents such as dancing and singing, and then the Geisha gets paid by the man.

For the research, the writer uses a novel by Arthur Golden titled *Memoirs of a Geisha*. Arthur Golden is

American Writer. It captures the journey of life young girl named Chiyo whose has been sold to Geisha's Training House in Kyoto. Chiyo come from a small fishing village named Yoroido. Her father sells his daughter to someone, because he was unable to work and because he needs money to fulfill family financial. Chiyo has no choice but to follow her destiny to be a Geisha, but she always shows that she deserves to be more than just a Geisha by keep struggling her better life. She has big hope that someday her life will be better and she can gain her own independence.

In this study, the researcher wants to examine and criticize the ambiguity of woman transcendence presented in *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The researcher decides to use the theory of feminism as the ground theory of the study.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.2 Feminist Existentialism Theory by Simone de Beauvoir

This research uses Simone de Beauvoir's theory. Beauvoir is a French philosopher who based her writings on being an existentialist.

She is the first woman who shows inequality between men and women in society especially in Victorian era. She is well known for her books; *The Second Sex* (1949) and *Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947).

2.2.1 Transcendence

According to Beauvoir (1949, p.154), the importance of transcendence goes beyond defining gender roles and transcending through work and creativity.

However, there are three categories of women that can never transcend. Beauvoir (1949, p.37) said that the three categories of women are prostitutes (women are who always willing to be objects for men), narcissist (women that dress nicely to please men), and mystics (woman that think they are better than other women because they obey norms and values). The tragedy of all these roles is caused by those women playing role constructed by men too deeply.

2.2.2 Immanence

Immanence is a condition in which a person who accepts what one is labeling. According to Beauvoir (1949, p.53) women who follow men order as the forms of

obedience, it has been conformity to the prevailing culture for a long time. In this case, immanence is a women's condition who accept their fate being an object from men. So, women position as subversive one has been rooted from patriarchal culture

2.2.3 Ambiguity

Ambiguity is when someone feels that an action is correct, but on the other hand, it is not valid. According to Beauvoir (1947, p.8) because the human condition is ambiguous, people are both a "subject and object." We live in the second world there are men and a woman, in it is considered that men are the leaders. Beauvoir (1947, p.9) said there are "objects and subjects" in which men and women can act as objects and subjects. Related to the issue of Geisha as woman who is object by man when they serve man in her job desk. Beauvoir suggest that the roles of wife, mother, and prostitute to show how women, instead of transcending through work and creativity, are forced into monotonous existences of having children, tending house and being the sexual receptacles of the male libido." (1996: para. 37)

III. RESEARCH METHOD

In analyzing Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the writer uses qualitative research. As Cresswell (2009, p.4) states "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. The type data in this research used text, and the writer obtains the data from some books and journals. The primary data is taken from the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*, and the secondary data are books entitle *The Second Sex*, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and journal from the internet related to the topic. The last writer will report the data in descriptive way. Descriptive method is a type of research that describes a population, situation, or phenomenon that is being studied, so that the writer collects the data and explains the data descriptively

IV. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Process of Woman Transcendence

In analyzing the novel, the writer finds two processes how women transcendence; attending school and sharpening the skills.

4.1.1. Training Program

School is the place where we can get an education and also socialize with other people. Chiyo attends Geisha's training school to get knowledge of art and to socialize with another Geisha. By socializing, Chiyo can learn knowledge that she did not have before because the Mameha will share the knowledge she already has.

In Geishas training school the apprentice Geishas should have several lessons from the early morning. After that, they should constantly do something, just like the maids do. Geisha go to bed late at night. The bedroom for the apprentice Geishas is the same room with the maids. They sleep together in one room. Geisha only get three to four hours of sleep a night. Geisha apprentices need to work hard and understand the lessons of Geisha school. As such, Geisha's life is tough. Geisha have to work hard and get all the jobs done, can be seen in the quotation below:

What make a Geisha's training so difficult isn't simply the arts she must learn, but how hectic her life becomes. After spending all morning in lessons, she is still expected to work during the afternoon and

evening very much as she always has. And still, she sleeps no more than three to five hours every night. (p. 110)

In the quotation above it can see how Chiyo through hard life that she can face it. Chiyo should obey very strict rules. Starting from the beginning, when the girls enter the Geisha school, the girls are trained to be disciplined persons. The girls are not allowed to come late to the class. If it happens to the apprentice Geishas or the girls, they will not join the class. Those rules show that the Geisha training is meant to discipline the Geishas to be well-behaved. Whenever apprentice Geisha's become Geisha, they are also busy every day. They have to attend some parties in some places. In the morning, Geishas also have a lesson in the Geisha school. After that, they prepare themselves for some parties. The maids and the Geisha dresser help the Geishas prepare all the Geisha need, such as makeup properties, kimono, and hairdo.

4.1.2. Having Art Skills

In Geisha's training school, there is a part of training become a professional Geisha. Mameha might be the central figure for the Maiko.

Mameha taught her junior many things concerning satisfying their guests, including the proper way to entertain their guests and what the Maiko should have and should not do toward their guests. Even the small thing personally that a young Geisha should have learned such as adjusting their makeup and dress, and also what the young Geisha should have and should not have done.

Work as a Geisha is not easy, before they come into the position she has been through hard process every day. Geisha is described as an interesting person and a beautiful woman. The Geisha is always performed in beautiful and luxurious kimonos. Geisha's kimonos are usually made from silk, full color with an attractive motive on that silk. Wearing a kimono is one of the ways a Geisha attracts her guests. Thus, another way for Geisha to attract her guest it is by art.

Aside from art and kimono, a Geisha also goes through some steps to be a professional one. The first is by being a maid. Being maid is not easy; she goes in the morning and comes home at night to be a maid and attend training to become a

Geisha called Maiko. The second is being Maiko. Being Maiko, Geisha must learn many knowledge of art; pour tea, dance, singing, and learn how to look beautiful by dressing up. The Geisha struggle does not stop there, and she has to go through the Mizuage event, where someone can be called a professional Geisha at this event. According to Beauvoir (1949: 510) the more necessary it is for her to work, the more advantageous it is for her to appear prosperous; smart appearance is a weapon, a flag, a defence, a letter of recommendation. It is through quotation bellow:

My advice to you is: work very hard, and never leave okiya without permission. Do as you're told, don't be too much trouble, and you might begin learning the arts of a Geisha two or three months from now. I didn't bring you here to be a maid, after that you first official debut as a maiko (Geisha apprentice). ... You entertainmen at many tea houses in Gion with typical capabilities owned by Geisha: dancing, picking the shamisen. ... Before you becomes a professional Geisha is mizuage ceremony. Mizuage ceremony is a ceremony

that marks whether a maiko to be ready to become a professional Geisha by holding a virginity auction. (1997: p. 31-180)

The quotation above shows how powerful that Chiyo has. She gets all the power from art, talents, and how beautiful kimono that she wears to attract a man. She became a Geisha who allowed attending Mizuage event, getting big profit, and becoming Professional Geisha to get big profit.

4.2 The Event that Trigger Ambiguity in Woman Transcendence

Women who generally have exceeded their limits are called women with transcendence. Still, we live in a second world where there is both an object and a subject. Every boundary that we define is not necessarily an object, and we can even become a subject in that condition. Therefore, in this research, the writer will explain the factors that triggers ambiguity in process of transcendence

4.2.1. Join Mizuage's event

In Geisha tradition, success is characterized by two things: come

into categories Mizuage's event auction and having a Danna. Danna is an informal term for a man that protects a Geisha. It is similar with husband, but without bounding by marriage or just to be mistress. A Geisha who has undergone Mizuage ceremony will have the opportunity to have a Danna too. Mizuage is the event that Geisha will sell her virginity; Geisha's virginity was in auction for the first time to men bidding the highest. Only certain kinds of men spent his money and time chasing after Mizuage because of the high price. Usually, Geisha expected the price of Mizuage to go as high as it could. Can be seen in the quotation below:

There must have been a very great deal of blood, because the air had an unpleasant metallic smell. I kept reminding myself how much the Doctor had paid for their privilege; and I remember hoping at one point that he was enjoying myself more than I was. I felt no more pleasure there than if someone had rubbed a file over and over against the inside of my thigh until I bled. (1997: p. 219)

The quotation above shows how dreadful the Mizuage process for

Chiyo. It is her first time to have a sexual activity with man and she cannot deny her feeling that she does not like the customer. Chiyo has no power to refuse as she remembers how much her customer has paid for her Mizuage. After doing Mizuage ceremony, Chiyo is officially admitted as a professional Geisha who is free to entertain the guest without Mameha guidance and has her own right to have a Danna. The sentence “I kept reminding myself how much the Doctor had paid for their privilege; and I remember hoping at one point that he was enjoying myself more than I was” shows that Chiyo as a woman feels her heart is broken when she is not doing her first sexual experience with the man she loves.

4.2.2. Move to New York

In struggling for independent life, women can do many things to reveal their capability. Women are not weak and foolish. They can break the stereotype if they have the opportunity from the society to do it. As represented in this novel, the last most important struggle of Chiyo's independence is her moving to New York. She has left her work as a Geisha who were entertaining and

accompanying men or attending a party.

Chiyo arranges a plan to gain her independence. She knows that if she continues staying in the Okiya, she will still be Geisha who serve man. Chiyo asks Mameha whose hire Danna for her. A Danna ceremony is held to mark their love relationship. Chiyo asks Mameha to let her go from the Okiya and lives with the Danna in a luxurious house that has been purchased for her in New York. Mameha does not allow her at first. Still, Chiyo asks Danna to pay certain of money each month to get the permission to go out from Okiya. This can be seen in the quotation below:

But Mameha was unwilling to have me leave Okiya; she would have earned no revenues from my relationship with the Danna if I had ceased to be a member of the Geisha's family, you see. This is why in the end, the Danna agreed to pay Okiya a very considerable sum each month on the condition that Mameha permit me to end my career. (p. 331)

From the quotation above, it can be concluded that Chiyo's dreams come true. The sentence “Danna agreed to

pay Okiya a very considerable sum each month on the condition that Mameha permit me to end my career” shows that Chiyo gains her independence out from the Okiya as well as obtains her love for the Danna. Time flies, Chiyo starts to think about her future. Even though she gets money from Danna and lives in a luxurious mansion, she still wants to have her own business. She decides to open a house tea and to manage her business. This step marks a crucial action of woman oppression as a Geisha before being an independent woman with freedom. This important step can be seen in the quotation below:

I moved to New York City to set up my own very small teahouse for Japanese businessmen and politicians traveling through the United States. My little teahouse, on the second floor of an old club off Fifth Avenue, was modestly successful from the very beginning; a number of Geisha have come from Gion to work with me there, and even Mameha sometimes visits. (p. 336)

The quotation above shows how Chiyo's life has been completed with happiness as the refund of her miseries and torments experienced

since she was a kid, which finally brought her at the end to the joy of life by gaining her independence. The sentence “I moved to New York City to set up my own very small teahouse for Japanese” shows that she successfully becomes an entrepreneur woman in New York. Furthermore, Chiyo does not lose her identity as Japanese woman. In fact, Chiyo's success is not a pure freedom for her. Even though, she has a perfect life with Danna, but she still be a mistress for him, it can be seen in the quotation below:

Danna wanted me out of Okiya to keep me out, but he certainly wasn't going to marry me; he was already married. (p.332)

Even though women have worked and exceeded their limits, they cannot be separated from their monotonous existence. They will become the sexual receptacles of the male libido. Men also never take entirely subject positions and make women as object, because women will continue to have transcendence even in oppression. And pure freedom will never belong to a man or a woman. In conclusion, women

can and have the ability to go beyond their limits as objects. Still, these women will not always be objects as well. Because we live in the second world, there are women and men, so we cannot deny being an object or subject and the pure freedom we cannot have.

V. CONCLUSION

Geisha remained to be the representation as the sex commodity. It could be proven that through the process of Mizuage in which their most valuable worth, virginity was sold to men could afford to buy. By learning the facts about Geisha through their physical appearances, besides their remarkable art skills were potentially sold at an amazing

high price, only very wealthy men could afford to buy them.

Chiyo as the main female character in the novel represents women in general who can gain their independence and have a smart and brave attitude to take the important decisions in their life. She can solve her problems by showing her struggles and abilities in gaining independence. At the end of the story, she finally turns out to be an independent woman by deciding to leave the Okiya and move to New York and open a Japanese tea house business there. It shows her desire as a smart and independent woman even though she is not pure her freedom.

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