The Portrayal of Beauty Standards in Arthur Golden's "Memoirs of a Geisha"

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Dvopredmetni sveučilišni preddiplomski studij engleskoga jezika i književnosti i njemačkog jezika i književnosti

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Prikaz standarda ljepote u *Sjećanjima jedne gejše* Arthura Goldena

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Mentorica: izv. prof. dr. sc. Biljana Oklopčić

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Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Dr. Biljana Oklopčić, Associate Professor

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Abstract

Arthur Golden's famous novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* depicts the life of a young girl named Chiyo Sakamoto, the daughter of a poor fisherman. Afraid that he will not be able to take care of her and her sister Satsu, Chiyo's father decides to send them to Gion in hopes that they would eventually become geishas to avoid the difficulty of a poverty-stricken life. As the sisters get separated, because Satsu is not seen fit for the profession, Chiyo gradually learns how meticulous and difficult it is to become a true entertainer for customers. Everything from the appearance – how to look perfect – to the behavior – how to properly pour tea to a man or a woman, bow or walk in public – are the rites of passage that a successful geisha must know to do without any mistakes. As the term beauty plays an essential role in the profession of a geisha, the paper will firstly show the beauty standards applied to Japanese women throughout their life, from their childhood, education and marriage to being a mother and eventually a senior. After that, a detailed analysis of the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* is undertaken to show different beauty standards and how difficult it is to learn, understand, and overcome them. The conclusion provides a short summary of the most important beauty standards a geisha should abide by to be considered successful.

Key words: geisha, beauty standards, Japan, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Arthur Golden.

Introduction

The topic of this paper is the beauty standards visible in the novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden. The main character's journey of becoming a geisha and how certain beauty standards in Japan are seen as desired are elaborated upon. The paper is divided into four chapters: Beauty Standards in the Daily Life of Japanese Women, Beauty Standards in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, Jealousy of Beauty in *Memoirs of a Geisha*, and Geishas in the Eyes of the Western Countries. The first chapter gives a detailed depiction of Japanese women and how beauty standards affect them throughout their life and is divided into four subchapters: Childhood and Education, Marriage and Divorce, As a Wife and Mother, and In Old Age. The first subchapter shows how young girls are disciplined in manners and education; the second subchapter explains what is expected from a Japanese woman in a marriage and the consequences of a divorce; the third what is expected from her as a wife and mother, and lastly what role Japanese women have when they get old. The second chapter is also divided into four subchapters entitled: Physical Attractiveness, Makeup and Kimonos, Manners and Mastering the Art of Entertaining, and Virginity. In the second chapter, the traits such as physical attractiveness, makeup and kimonos, manners, the art of entertaining guests, and the role of virginity are discussed. Further analysis explains how jealousy is linked with being beautiful and what kind of image of geisha Western countries have. The third chapter thus dives deeper into how Hatsumomo, the antagonist of the story, shows her jealousy of Chiyo's success as a geisha, as Chiyo's striking grey eyes provide a threat to her from the very beginning of the novel. Finally, the fourth chapter depicts how geishas are being seen from the perspective of Western countries and what misconceptions they have when thinking about geishas.

1. Beauty Standards in the Daily Life of Japanese Women

1.1. Childhood and Education

For a Japanese girl, the life starts with the name usually given to her by her father. The name is commonly after “beautiful objects in nature, such as Plum, Snow, Sunshine, Lotos, Gold” (Mabel Bacon 7). During her childhood, a girl wears a wide range of colors, red being the most prominent one and as she progresses in her life, she is expected to be always wary of men as her position in society is key to a respectful life. She will learn:

> the lesson of cheerful obedience, of pleasing manners, and of personal cleanliness and neatness ... There is no career or vocation open to her: she must be dependent always upon either father, husband, or son, and her greatest happiness is to be gained, not by cultivation of the intellect, but by the early acquisition of the self-control. (Mabel Bacon 11)

This self control, which is expected from a young Japanese woman, consists of concealing emotions of disagreement, anger or pain. Therefore, a girl is in her youngest years taught to behave this certain way in order to come forward as polite in her society, the result being that “they are not forward nor pushing, neither ... awkwardly bashful; there is no self consciousness, neither is there any lack of savoir faire; a childlike simplicity is united with a womanly consideration for the comfort of those around them” (Mabel Bacon 11).

When it comes to the education a young Japanese girl was to gain under the old regime, she was not expected to learn all Japanese characters by heart as there was no need to do this, yet music was a subject that was entirely left to women. Other subjects included the arrangement of flowers, the ceremonial of tea, the etiquette of bowing, and how to position one's body in a certain way in certain situations. In today's Japanese education, the required studying is very time-consuming, nevertheless young women have the freedom to be more independent, though the tradition of learning to be polite and dignified remains. Furthermore, as marriage plays an important role in Japanese society, parents of a young girl worry about their daughter’s best years as well and most commonly it is that if a Japanese girl drops out, "she will be taken from school and married off" (Mabel Bacon 20).

1.2. Marriage and Divorce

For a Japanese girl, marriage is allowed when she is sixteen years old. As a matter of fact, it is expected from her. "This view of marriage is imposed more heavily upon women, so much so that a woman without marital experience is considered deprived of meaning in her life, whereas men are seen as able to enjoy their lives at least through their work" (Lebra 78). The man who is ready to propose is expected to ask a wedded companion of his for help in his search for a potential wife. The marriage ceremony is simple: "[the] only act required to make the marriage legal is the withdrawal of the bride's name from the list of her father's family as registered by the government, and its entry upon the register of her husband's family" (Mabel Bacon 23), meaning that by law the woman is closer related to the family of her husband. Traditionally, it was also expected that the wife should "fill the position of *shufu*, house mistress, whereas the bridegroom is to take the position of *shujin*, the house master" (Lebra 77) and the marriage was seen as a commitment for a lifetime. It was also common for the newly married woman to leave her family home and live in her husband's and to blacken her teeth as a sign of marriage. As “upon her good behavior alone depend[ed] her chances of a happy life” (Mabel Bacon 26), a married woman was expected to be obedient and mostly submissive in her marriage. It is no surprise that a wife was seen as a kind of property to a man, about whom she mostly did not even know a lot in the beginning and who held financial power over her. Nowadays, marriages are not seen as strictly permanent promises as it is not uncommon for spouses to get divorced a few times before getting married again. A problem that a divorced Japanese woman can face is that she will mostly have no rights to stay a mother to her children as by the Japanese law they are bound to stay with the father, no matter how good or bad he may be, as it has been the "generally accepted belief that children inherit their qualities from their father rather than from the mother, [which] make[s] them his children and not hers" (Mabel Bacon 24). This leaves Japanese women with the pressure to stay in nonfunctional marriages to be able to parent their children. It is only possible for the wife to keep the children if the ex-husband decides to give the children to the mother by own free will. Therefore, it was not common in the past to file for divorce as it was considered a scandal and a disgrace ruining woman’s chances to find any new suitors. Another fact that must be said is that "most marriages were arranged by families and not based on individual choice or mutual love" (Suzuki 66), which only increased the number of unhappy wives in marriages.

1.3. As a Wife and Mother

Being a wife is for a Japanese woman not the easiest task as she enters the house of her husband's parents to whom the wife "becomes almost as their servant, and even her husband is unable to defend her from the exactions of her mother-in-law, should this new relative be inclined to make full use of the power given her by custom" (Mabel Bacon 28). A wife's duty is only to take care of the housekeeping and the well-being of her children. Therefore, it is no surprise that she will not be recognized equally beside her spouse. Furthermore, it is not expected from her to visit public gatherings with him and she should always be ready to accept him with a soft manner that has no trace of possible arguing in the tone, even if she does not agree with a current situation or topic. The wife will be respected by others if she has children, which shows that childbirth is a matter of pressure in the society. Other examples of her submissiveness include: "If the husband drops his fan or his handkerchief the wife picks it up. The husband is served first, the wife afterwards, and so on through the countless minutia of daily life" (Mabel Bacon 28). Therefore, a wife will always be seen as the less important person in the marriage who is supposed to serve her husband and be submissive. Her parents-in-law's well-being should be important to her as well. It is her duty, as she lives under their roof, to make sure that they are happy. The mother-in-law has also the power over the wife and can make the wife’s life miserable or content. After the parents-in-law, the wife's next duty is her husband. She takes care of his meals and clothes, which she helps him to put on every day before work. Respect is the key to a happy marriage, which a wife should bring, so she should be thoughtful and always obedient. Consequently, a deep connection between the spouses is difficult to built as the man works most of the time and is away and the wife is in the house, trying to be helpful in every way she can. Therefore, the life of an average Japanese wife is quite monotone as house works and duties are replaying every day. As a mother, a Japanese woman cares for her children deeply and reacts always in mild and gentle expressions and manners. So, the bond between a child and its mother is usually close in comparison to the child and the father who has almost nothing to do with the parenting. Nevertheless, the children are taught to look at the father with respect and awe. Additionally, it is considered a disgrace for the father to take care of children if they are sick. All in all, "[the] Japanese woman has [...] so little to live for beside her children, and no hopes in the future except through them" (Mabel Bacon 32).

1.4. In Old Age

The beauty standards Japanese women face in old age are such that no woman will be ashamed of her wrinkles when a senior. The clothes she wears get more neutral though, nothing bright and colorful will be worn anymore. Besides that, "no woman cares to appear younger than her real age, or hesitates to tell with entire frankness the number of years that have passed over her head" (Mabel Bacon 37). An elderly woman will also wear her hair differently, it will become simpler. In Japan, thus "every woman looks forward to the period of old age as the time when she will attain freedom from her life-long service to those about her" (Mabel Bacon 37), meaning that she will be able to give advices to her son if she has one, have the power over her daughter-in-law and, most importantly, she will be able to talk freely and give her opinions on various topics. The ideals of manners that were expected from a woman in her earlier years diminish when she gets old so that she will be able to leave the house to enjoy herself with no strict obligations waiting for her when she returns. She does not have to fear to lose her dignity as well. Regarding her physical beauty, a Japanese woman

> loses her beauty early. At thirty-five her fresh color is usually entirely gone, her eyes have begun to sink a little in their sockets, her youthful roundness and symmetry of figure have given place to an absolute leanness, her abundant black hair has grown thin, and much care and anxiety have given her face a pathetic expression of quiet endurance. (Mabel Bacon 37)

The wrinkles showing age are respected in an old woman and old parents are never seen as a hardship, they are always treated by their sons and daughters with consideration. Another role that a grandmother is expected to do is to "further [exercise] her experiential knowledge either by instructing the junior mother or by, herself, looking after the grandchild. Again, she tries to counter recycle her experience, that is, to guide the younger woman to avoid the errors she herself has made" (Lebra 263).

2. Beauty Standards in *Memoirs of a Geisha*

2.1. Physical Attractiveness

The Japanese standards of how a woman should look in order to be perceived beautiful differ from the standards that are idolized in Western countries:

> the ideal female face must be long and narrow ... The hair should be straight and glossy black, and absolutely smooth ... The mouth of an aristocratic Japanese lady must be small, and the lips full and red... The complexion should be light,--a clear ivory-white, with little color in the cheeks ... The figure should be slender ... In walking, the step should be short and quick, with the toes turned in, and the foot lifted so slightly that either clog or sandal will scuff with every step. (Mabel Bacon 21)

Physical beauty is not the most important trait a geisha should possess, but it certainly helps her to become more popular. Chiyo Sakamoto, the protagonist of *Memoirs of a Geisha*, thus stands out because of her uncommon eye color, which she inherited from her mother: "Instead of being dark brown like everyone else's, my mother's eyes were a translucent gray, and mine are just the same" (Golden 3). Being "the center of expression for the whole face, no, for virtually the whole woman, ... eyes that are big and bright, full of expression, lively, eyes that talk, so to speak" (Levy 142-143), Chiyo's eyes are described as possessing a lot of 'water,' as water "flows from place to place quickly and always finds a crack to spill through" (Golden 3), hinting that their owner has the traits of versatility and proficiency. A moment when the importance of physical beauty is especially emphasized is when it is decided whether Chiyo and her sister Satsu are fit to become geishas. While Chiyo is being sold to an okiya, a geisha house owned by a woman who pays for a geisha's future trainings, her sister is merely sold to a brothel as she is less attractive, ordinary in comparison to her sister and has more 'wood' in her eyes – they were dark brown.

Chiyo's eyes are mentioned quite a few times in the novel as they transform her from an unnoticed gray mouse, when finally noticed, into an unusual rare beauty who makes everyone stop in their tracks in order to comment the pale color of her eyes. Mr. Tanaka calls them "extraordinary" (Golden 7), Mrs. Fidget, who examined her to see if she is fit to become a geisha, terms them "unusual" (Golden 12), Auntie, who saw her the first time in front of the okiya, exclaims: "Heavens! What startling eyes! You're a lovely girl, aren't you? Mother will be thrilled" (Golden 21). Also, Pumpkin, who never saw such an eye color in her life, comments:

"But what's the matter with your eyes?" (Golden 23) and Awajiumi, a dresser whom Chiyo meets, is fascinated by her: "Why, I thought my eyes have fooled me ... You should have told me sooner what a pretty girl you brought with you. Her eyes...they're the color of a mirror!" (Golden 36). Chiyo is aware of her physical beauty from an early age: she has "been called beautiful more often than [she] can remember" (Golden 7). Therefore, it is no surprise that she takes priority in maintaining her appearance as she feels good every time when somebody compliments her on it. Another fact Chiyo realizes is that you do not have to be pretty to become a geisha. After seeing a geisha, who was entertaining Mr. Tanaka in a teahouse, for the very first time, she says:

> "I'd never seen such elegant clothing. None of the women in Yoroido owned anything more sophisticated than a cotton robe ... But unlike her clothing, the woman herself wasn't lovely at all. Her teeth protruded so badly that her lips didn't quite cover them, and the narrowness of her head made me wonder if she'd been pressed between two boards as a baby." (Golden 15)

Nevertheless, she sees that, while everybody else is enjoying themselves, Mr. Tanaka cannot make himself look away from the geisha as his "eyes were fixed on her like a rag on a hook" (Golden 15).

In the novel, physical traits are, however, linked with superstition as it is believed that they reflect an individual's personality. For example, after looking at Chiyo and Satsu's faces, noses and ears from different angles, Mrs. Fidget concludes, by additionally examining their foreheads, that Chiyo is clever and that she must be born in the fortunate year of the monkey: "You're the year of the monkey. I can tell just looking at you. What a great deal of water you have! Eight, white, the planet Saturn. And a very attractive girl you are" (Golden 13). Furthermore, after Mother, who is the head of the geisha household, says that they do not need another monkey in their okiya, Auntie replies that, despite this, Chiyo "looks to [her] like a very clever girl, and adaptable; you can see that from the shape of her ears" (Golden 25). It is visible here that valued and wanted personality traits are linked with physical attractiveness, which, in reality, cannot be more distant from the truth.

After Chiyo gets older, twelve to be exact, she realizes that men take more notice of her appearance when she is strolling. After a couple of years spent in the okiya household, nobody really paid much attention to her and she got used to staying unnoticed. Later on, she remembers how it feels to be seen as beautiful again and she "found it strange to be the object of attention after being ignored for so long" (Golden 66). *Memoirs of a Geisha* also describes in detail and with many metaphors the physical appearance of its other female characters. Consider, for example, the description of Mother

> [her] eyes were so shocking to me in their ugliness that I could do nothing but stand there staring in them. Instead of being white and clear, the whites of her eyes had a hideous yellow cast, and made me think at once of a toilet into which someone had just urinated. They were rimmed with the raw of her lids, in which a cloudy moisture was pooled; and all around them the skin was sagging. (Golden 24).

Additionally, the power and advantages physical beauty can bring to her owner are emphasized through Hatsumomo's character, or rather her appearance. She is the epitome of evil disguised in beauty. Tolerated by everyone because of the success her beauty and talent bring, she gets away with slapping the maids in her okiya and making everyone's daily life even more difficult than it already is. Well-aware of her beauty – "You're thinking you'll never be so beautiful. Well, it's perfectly true!" (Golden 38), she lives in the beginning of the novel like a goddess, with everybody dancing around her little finger: "when she came home too drunk to unbutton her socks, someone had to unbutton them for her; and if she felt hungry, she certainly wasn't going to stroll into the kitchen to prepare something by herself" (Golden 41). Her beauty is also described when she was absentmindedly chewing one of her fingernails: "I couldn't help noticing how extraordinary Hatsumomo's beauty was. She may have been as cruel as a spider, but she was more lovely chewing on her fingernail than most geisha looked posing for a photograph" (Golden 45), and often commented on: in contrast to other geishas who seem uncomfortable in their kimono's, she "[wears] her kimono as if it were her skin" (Golden 45).

If Hatsumomo embodies the definition of dazzling physical beauty, her complete opposite is Nobu, whose skin "even from a distance ... looked like a melted candle. At some time in his life he had suffered terrible burns" (Golden 120). With his rather unpleasing appearance – he also misses one arm, his personality turns out to be of a kind and loyal man who helps Chiyo find a refuge from the war. This shows that *Memoirs of a Geisha* puts emphasis on how physical beauty is deceptive and that even "a tree may look as beautiful as ever; but when you notice the insects infesting it, and the tips of the branches that are brown from the disease, even the trunk seems to lose some of its magnificence" (Golden 324). This perfectly describes Hatsumomo, who eventually shows her true self, her unbearable personality that outshines her immense beauty.

2.2. Makeup and Kimonos

Looking like artistic masterpieces, with their makeup and lavishing kimonos, it is no surprise that geishas attract attention because of their transformation. Chiyo witnesses the transformation of a geisha and experiences it later in life herself, only to realize that it is just a mask women put on themselves in order to please every wish of their male customers. Through the process of becoming a geisha, the geisha can, nevertheless, also distance herself from reality:

> Her coiffure was “pyramidal,” her face was painted “as white as snow,” her lips were tinted vermilion, and even her toenails were stained pink. Her expression – “half contemptuous and half timid” – was frozen and immobile. The effect of this overwhelming display of artifice was to set her apart from everybody else: her attendants, the spectators, indeed from the rest of humankind. (Kawaguchi 67-68)

In the novel, Golden depicts in detail Hatsumomo applying her makeup and the young girl commenting how, even though geishas look so magnificent, they are just ordinary women without the magic touch of makeup and the fancy dressing up: “when a geisha wakes up in the morning she is just like any other woman. Her face may be greasy from sleep, and her breath unpleasant. It may be true that she wears a startling hairstyle even as she struggles to open her eyes; but in every other respect she's a woman like any other, and not a geisha at all” (Golden 37). Geishas use various shapes of brushes to paint their faces, one pigment stick being "about the size of a baby's finger, but hard and smooth as stone, so that it left no trace of color on skin" (Golden 37) and another, looking like a burned twig at one end, is used for drawing eyebrows with charcoal that leaves a light shade of gray. The process of painting geisha’s face white is also elaborately explained: she

> moistened one of her flat makeup brushes in a dish of water and rubbed it in the makeup until she had a chalky white paste. She used this to paint her face and neck, but left her eyes bare, as well as the area around her lips and nose. If you've ever seen a child cut holes in paper to make a mask, this is how Hatsumomo looked, until she dampened some smaller brushes and used them to fill in the cutouts. (Golden 38)

The colors of tints, which are applied to cheeks, are in various shades as well: Hatsumomo, for example, matches them throughout the novel with the kimono she wears. The painting of the neck is an important task for a geisha as well. As she cannot reach the back of her neck alone, she needs help. The reason why geishas do that is to please their customers: "Japanese men, as a

rule, feel about a woman's neck and throat the same way that men in the West might feel about a woman's legs" (Golden 38). The goal of applying makeup is to ultimately look as artificial as possible, something yet unseen and astonishing: a geisha goes "to the trouble of drawing attention to the artificiality of her make-up by leaving portions of the nape of her neck, which the collar of her kimono exposed to view, untouched by cosmetics, creating a sharp contrast between the eerie whiteness of the painted skin and the glow of the natural skin" (Kawaguchi 69). When it comes to lips, the rogue is dipped with a small brush and then applied to the lower lip as the upper one is left white – for the illusion: "if a geisha were to paint the entire surface of her lips, her mouth would end up looking like two big slices of tuna" (Golden 40). Many geishas thus preferred a shape that resembled a pout.

Geishas did not wash their hair every day as it was difficult to make the glamorous and time consuming hairstyles, so it was common for them to visit the hairdresser's only once a week. Unfortunately, because of that, the smell of dirty hair was nothing unfamiliar and the perfumes sprayed on them were not very efficient either. Moreover, a wooden stand that has a padded cradle for the neck was the pillow geishas slept on not to ruin the hairstyles they have. In addition, a geisha "wears at least five different [hair] styles, each one signifying a different stage in her apprenticeship" (Layton). After an apprentice becomes a geisha, she wears the so called "split peach" hairstyle when the hair is swept back in an orb from one's temples (Golden 96). The following quote depicts how painful it is to make this kind of hairstyle:

> he sat me on the mats to one side and tore a wooden comb through my hair until the muscles of my neck were so sore from pulling against him. At length he satisfied himself that the knots were gone, and then combed camellia oil into my hair, which gave it a lovely sheen. I was starting to think the worst was over; but then he took out a bar of way- And I must tell you that even with camellia oil as a lubricant and a hot iron to keep the wax soft, hair and wax were never meant to go together. (Golden 101)

After the waxing, the forelock is put backwards so it rests at the top of the head. From the back, it looks like a peach split in two, thereby the name "split peach." Later in the novel, a man tells Chiyo that this hairstyle makes men feel a particular way as young geishas usually wear a red cleft at the center of the back of their head. This indicates that "ultimately, the appearance ... and work of a geisha is about pleasing men" (Layton). The finishing touches are the ornaments that are put in the hair, for example pins with pearls, tortoiseshells or flowers.

The kimonos are described as colorful garments with unique symbols and pictures of nature. The difference between a prostitute and a geisha is also elaborated as each obi is tied differently – geishas tie it in the back. Consider, for example, the first kimono Chiyo wears: "[she] changed me into a dark blue silk covered with a design of tiny carriage wheels in shades of brilliant yellow and red" (Golden 97), or the kimono Mameha, the famous geisha in the novel, has on: "a simple black robe bearing a crest-but its pattern of green and gold grasses sweeping around the hem was so rich-looking" (Golden 73).

The elaborate and time-consuming steps a geisha takes to beautify herself can thus be compared to those taken by an actress when preparing for stage: a geisha "emerges and dons her costume and makeup on stage, becoming the performer in front of the eyes of the audience. Some young women are gambling with the virtues of the moral performance to this extent and saying: Accept me as I am in all my sincerity of self as self and yet in all my guises" (Rosenberger 213).

2.3. Manners and Mastering the Art of Entertaining

"The well-trained geisha also embodied genuine artistic accomplishment and social sophistication" (Johnston 37-38). The art of graceful behavior is not the easiest accomplishment to achieve as it takes years of training and includes dancing, music, tea ceremony, and language lessons. Therefore, a geisha holds with right the title geisha, which literally means "'arts' or 'skills' (gei) and 'person' (sha)" (Johnston 38).

When it comes to mastering the art of music, every geisha usually learns to play the *shamisen*, which many people "call ... a Japanese guitar, but actually it's a good deal smaller than a guitar, with a thin wooden neck that has three large tuning pegs at the end" (Golden 33). When customers come to tea houses, one geisha usually plays it while another sings. Besides the *shamisen*, Chiyo learns to play a small drum, *tsutsumi*, and a flute called *fue*. Eventually, a geisha will specialize in one of those instruments, but it is essential for them to learn all of them. Singing is, as already mentioned, important as well as geishas often sing at parties because the dances they learn are made for particular songs. The songs are usually famous ballads. When Chiyo tries to describe their sounds, she says the following:

> while [she finds] most of them enchanting foreigners often seem to think they sound more like cats wailing in a temple yard than music. It is true that traditional Japanese

> singing involves a good deal of warbling and is often sung so fat back in the throat that the sound comes out from the nose rather than the mouth. (Golden 89)

Another art a geisha has to master is the tea ceremony – when a geisha or two serve tea to the customer in a traditional Japanese manner while using beautiful cups. The tea ceremony is described as meditation as a geisha has to do every single step with care and meticulousness. There is the art of dancing as well. A geisha who specializes in dancing is usually one who is rather attractive as every dance move" [is] the art of placement – [to know] exactly where to put every element in a composition in order to produce a beautiful effect" (Kawaguchi 70). The most successful geishas are specialized dancers, consequently, they have the opportunity to get a more financially stable *danna* who will secure their living. As Mabel Bacon asserts: "The Japanese dances are charmingly graceful and modest; the swaying of the body and limbs ... the variety of themes and costumes of the different dances, all go to make an entertainment by geishas one of the pleasantest of Japanese enjoyments" (78).

Another important art a geisha has to learn is how to move her body when she walks down the street and how to speak in front of other geishas and customers. In the novel, Chiyo learns from Mameha, who serves as her older sister and thus teaches her the proper way of behaving, how to properly walk when they greet other geishas on the street: "'Slowing the feet is a way of showing respect,' she said. 'The more you slow up, the greater the respect. You might stop altogether to bow to one of your teachers, but for anyone else, don't slow more than you need to, for heaven's sake.'" (Golden 97). Mameha also shows how versatile and socially smart a geisha must be to entertain the man she is talking to. As each customer has a different personality, a geisha would entertain them in different ways:

> If he was old and lecherous, she might say to him, "Warm? Perhaps it's just the effect on you of being around so many lovely women!" Or if he was an arrogant young businessman who didn't seem to know his place, she might take him off his guards by saying," Here you are sitting with a half-dozen of the best geisha in Gion, and all you can think to talk about is the weather." (Golden 174)

As Chiyo, who is later renamed Sayuri because it is tradition that the older sister gives her apprentice another name, follows Mameha on parties, she learns by observation how to talk with men and entertain them with her talents or feminine appearance, for example how to pour sake to a man: "the trick was to act like I was merely pulling it out of the way, while at the same time drawing it a few finger widths above my wrist to give a view of my forearm" (Golden 104). When working, a geisha is "the illusion of female perfection" (Layton) as her goal is to make everyone in the room feel happy and welcome. She has to be patient and ready to politely get out

from inappropriate situations, which for example happened to Sayuri after a drunk customer offered her sake, a Japanese alcoholic drink, that she is forbidden to accept:

> I wasn't supposed to drink sake, because an apprentice geisha-particularly one still in her novitiate-should appear childlike. But I couldn't very well disobey him ... I gave him a smile and had just began to raise the cup slowly to my lips-not knowing what else I could do- when, thank heavens, Mameha rescued me. (Golden 108)

Other activities/arts a geisha is supposed to master include walking a man to the toilet and back or keeping him company while he is at a geisha party. Besides that, even if a geisha does not have any idea what the customer is talking about or is not interested in the topic, it is her duty to continue listening to the speaker to make him feel appreciated. During a night filled with alcohol, food, small tricks and performances the geishas present, a geisha's goal is to leave the male audience in satisfied moods. No wonder that geishas are sometimes seen as the "old stereotype of Japanese women as [being] ready to be manipulated as plaything or displayed as decoration" (Shibusawa 274).

2.4. Virginity

As every other geisha before her, Chiyo goes through the process of *mizuage*, which is a term for a ceremony in which a geisha-to-be has her first sexual encounter. The importance of staying a virgin is emphasized in the novel after Chiyo becomes more popular in her career, because Mother, the head of the okiya, sells it at the highest price she gets. It is portrayed as a financial arrangement, which would benefit the okiya, so no emotional choices could be made to whom an apprentice wants to sell it. In Chiyo's/Sayuri's case, her *mizuage* patron is Dr. Crab, a wealthy doctor, who pays the highest amount to take her virginity. When an apprentice is available for *mizuage*, she gives boxes, called *ekubo*, to men who would like to pay for her virginity. It is important to note that a patron is not willing to pay for the *mizuage* if the girl was touched in any intimate way, consequently, a doctor has to verify that the apprentice is indeed intact. It is shocking to see how Chiyo's Mother sees it as just another paperwork that will ensure her financial stability: "You're a very expensive commodity, little girl. I underestimated you. I'm lucky nothing has happened. But you may be very sure I'm going to watch you more closely in the future. What a man wants from you, a man will pay dearly to get" (Golden 166). This also shows that different gender expectations are attached to virginity as virginity is "usually understood as lost oridentified through male presence" (Suzuki 53), as it is a term connected with

a desirable woman, but not with a man. So, as the paid *mizuage* repays all the debts Chiyo had made during her geisha training, because Mother adopted her, nothing of the money is left for Chiyo. *Memoirs of a Geisha* depicts not only how innocent Chiyo still is as she does not know how the process should look like, but it also shows how uneducated young apprentices were at the time. After mizuage, the apprentice starts to wear her hairstyle in a different way – a red silk band in the center of her pincushion. Furthermore, Chiyo starts to see the change around her after her *mizuage*: "Before my *mizuage*, I don't think it made any difference to Mother that Hatsumomo was causing trouble for me in Gion. But now that I had a high price tag on me, she put a stop to Hatsumomo's troublemaking" (Golden 172). The importance of virginity is also depicted at the very beginning of the novel, after both Chiyo and her sister Satsu are examined by Mrs. Fidget, them being just nine and twelve at the time: "The girls are healthy," she said to Mr. Tanaka when he came back into the room," and very suitable. Both of them are intact" (Golden 13). Even though geishas are supposed to hide their feelings and not express them, Chiyo finds it difficult to live such a lifestyle as she wants more from life than what she already has: "I thought we all wanted kindness. Perhaps what you mean is that you want something more than kindness. And that is something you're in no position to ask" (Golden 177). A virginal geisha thus becomes an object of pleasure for men, as the most generous one gets what he wants:

> "Virgin" became a coveted, empowering identity, because it presented the young woman in question as pure and virtuous, in both a physical as well as a spiritual sense. At the same time, the term was also restrictive, because it objectified female sexuality and enforced sexual innocence. (Suzuki 52)

3. The Jealousy of Beauty in *Memoirs of a Geisha*

The motif of jealousy dominates the novel till Hatsumomo leaves the okiya as she tries with all tools she has to make Chiyo suffer and fail as a geisha. On the outside, Hatsumomo is the epitome of beauty, whereas on the inside she is a vengeful and ruthless woman. As she dislikes Chiyo, she uses every opportunity to abuse her verbally and physically. Ironically enough, the young girl always gets the short end of the stick, getting scolded by Mother, as Hatsumomo is the main earner in the household and thus has power over her. Furthermore, Hatsumomo is opposed to Chiyo touching her makeup because she relies too much on the deception that makeup creates. Being self-centered, she does not allow any room for sisterhood, but emphasizes the competition between geishas. She makes up lies in front of male customers to embarrass Sayuri and hinder her from further success as she knows well enough that bad reputation means no hope of becoming a successful geisha for her. At the beginning of the novel, when Chiyo sees her for the first time, Hatsumomo does not utter a word of welcoming greeting: "'Mr. Bekku, could you take out the garbage later? I'd like to be on my way.' There was no garbage in the entryway; she was talking about me" (Golden 21). By finding out more about Hatsumomo's past, it is visible that this kind of behavior stems from her childhood as she, as well as every other girl that came to the okiya, was sold there with her sister Hatsuoki:

> Hatsumomo never liked young Hatsuoki, and when they both became apprentice geisha, she couldn't bear having her as a rival. So she began to spread rumors around Gion that Hatsuoki had been caught in a public alleyway one night doing something improper with a young policeman. (Golden 76)

This ruined Hatsuoki's reputation, which is as important as everything else in a geisha's job. Even though Chiyo is just a kid, Hatsumomo is determined to give her no chance of success later in life, making her give Mameha's ruined kimono back to her maid after she opens the door. Later on, she lies to Mother that Chiyo was the one who put ink on it: "Oh I tried to stop Chiyo before she put ink on it, but it was too late. She must have thought it was mine! I don't know why she's hated me so from the moment she came here" (Golden 46). Even though nobody believes her story and knows she is lying, Mother and Auntie tolerate her as she brings the most of the income into the geisha house. Another example of Hatusmomo's jealousy is when she is more than pleased to see Chiyo showing her affections to Nobu. As his face is scarred, Hatsumomo calls him Mr. Lizard and sees the two of them as a hilarious display: "Whenever he laughed, for

example, I flicked my eyes towards him as though I couldn't resist. Hatsumomo was delighted and watched us so openly that she didn't even seem aware of all the men's eyes upon her" (Golden 137-138). In addition, even though Hatsumomo is being viewed extremely attractive by every man who meets her, she is so used to it that she does not really feel the need to try hard at parties anymore, her life is more centered around seeing Chiyo, who is seemingly fascinated by him, talking with the scarred Nobu.

After Chiyo becomes a geisha and is in the search for a potential *danna*, Hatsumomo does her best to follow her and Mameha in every teahouse they enter in order to tell lies to the customers and embarrass and damage Chiyo's reputation. After they go to the Komoriya Teahouse, Hatsumomo tells a story she made up, about Chiyo's accident when the wind blew up her kimono. Unexpectedly, Chiyo gives a clever answer after Hatsumomo comments how she does not have any hair as she is just fourteen: "'Fourteen?' she said. How perfect! And of course, you don't have any hair.' 'Oh, but I do. A good deal of it!' And I reached up and patted one hand against the hair of my head" (Golden 110). This only intensifies Hatsumomo's jealousy and anger as she comprehends Chiyo's "unclever" answer as a confirmation of her suspicion that Chiyo is a bigger rival than she initially perceived.

Hatsumomo's downfall eventually occurs after she shows her true self to a customer as she is being destroyed by her own ineptitude to silence her competitive nature: "Hatsumomo had bitten him; not enough to make him bleed, but certainly enough to give [Shojiro] a shock. She was standing with her eyes squinted in anger and her teeth exposed; and then she drew back her hand and slapped him" (Golden 199). When she slaps Shojiro, a Kabuki actor, at the tea house, Hatsumomo does something a geisha is not allowed to show – her true feelings. Showing her anger freely ejects her not only from the tea house but fromthe okiya as well. The reason of Hatsumomo's behavior shows yet again the importance of performance in a geisha's life, as inappropriate acting is strictly forbidden to them. Geishas' reputation relies on the public image of impeccable beauty and proper manners, so anything that would break this kind of fantasy is very risky for them. When Hatsumomo is thrown out of the okiya, she becomes as helpless as Sayuri was when she was a child.

4. Geishas in the Eyes of Western Countries

Western countries usually get a different kind of picture in their minds when they imagine a geisha and what her job involves. The most prominent myth westerners have is that geishas are prostitutes. This myth was perpetuated by American soldiers who visited Japanese brothels during the war and were entertained by prostitutes mostly dressed as geishas: "[They] chose ... to appear in more delicate, figured silk crêpe kimonos in order to look younger, or they adopted the chic style of fashionable geishas, or they dressed formally in kimonos dyed a single color and marked with a family crest" (Kawaguchi 34). The fact that they called themselves "geisha girls" helped with the misunderstanding. Furthermore, their hairstyles as well as the makeup were minimized, with no white foundation whatsoever. As a geisha's primary job was to entertain her customers, anything inappropriate was against the law to protect "the *orian* who were licensed high-class courtesans or prostitutes of that time" (Adalid). Yet, as many rich Japanese men liked better the idea of having a geisha as a mistress, the institution of *danna* started to develop. Geishas were further supposed to be always agreeable, friendly, and attentive to their customers, which helped spread the myth of geishas' submissiveness in the presence of men. As "geishas remain in the paradoxical position of being working women whose purported selling points consist of those qualities which belonged to an old-fashioned western model of the ideal wife – attentiveness, patience and loyalty, mixed with plenty of sex appeal" (Kawaguchi 257), Western countries comprehend geishas as the stereotype of how every woman in Japan behaves. Another myth westerners have of geishas is about their obedience. In the past that was true, but nowadays, as women have the freedom of choice, it is not prominent.

Conclusion

The novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* discusses, among other things, the beauty standards that were expected from Japanese women. With the main character Chiyo Sakamoto going through the process of becoming a geisha, it is depicted how difficult it is to reach the ideals of beauty that the Japanese society has laid down for women. Physical beauty alone is not the most important asset – though it surely helps in the profession of a geisha as it shows Hatsumomo's case; the manners that young girls have to perfect are essential as well. Learning the art of entertaining guests requires meticulous work on tea ceremonies, playing various instruments, singing, and dancing. The process of applying makeup and putting on kimonos also helps in achieving the artificial beauty ideal a geisha strives to. Virginity, too, plays a big role in geisha's education and its selling to the highest bidder brings a great income to the okiya in which the geisha resides. Besides that, the novel addresses the motif of jealousy among geishas, mostly through the character of Hatsumomo who, when the emotions become too much for her to bear, lashes it out in the most unpleasant situation possible, showing that even her physical attractiveness and talent as a geisha cannot help to hide her true self.

In conclusion, the novel shows how beauty standards reshape the minds of young women, as they are being pressured from their earliest age to follow certain rules brought up by society. Being considered beautiful as a geisha means being something that is not real and from this world. In other words, it is artificial beauty that exists only to please the eye of the viewer.

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