


Separate Ways


Higuchi Ichiyo





Higuchi Ichiyo


- First prominent woman writer of modern times. She wrote relatively little as a result of living a brief life—she died at 24—but her stories had a large impact on Japanese literature and she is still appreciated by the Japanese public today.
- Higuchi was unique among her peers in that her writing was based on Japanese rather than Western models.
- In 1893, Higuchi, her mother and her sister abandoned their middle class house and, with a grim determination to survive, moved to a poor neighborhood.
- Their new dwelling was a five-minute walk from Tokyo's ill-famed red-light district, the Yoshiwara. Her experience living in this neighborhood would provide material for several of her later stories


- 
- “Separate Ways,” by Higuchi Ichiyo, is a literary work that reflects realism, for it explores the lived experiences of a pair of friends who are struggling with poverty, Okyo (20 years) and Kichizo. (16 years)
 - This story focuses on the struggles the characters have to face based on their ascribed social class and how their position in society impacts the choices they make.


- 
- In the beginning of the short story, Kichizo visits Okyo and they converse. Okyo tells Kichizo, “He who wears another’s clothes will never get anywhere in life”.
 - This emphasizes how an individuals must work for themselves in order to succeed in life. If one were to rely on another person, he would forever remain stagnant in the position that he is in.

- 
- Furthermore, Kichizo is an umbrella factory apprentice. He is a poor orphan who was adopted by a granny Omatsu from an umbrella factory.
 - He is short and is constantly made fun of due to his stature and background with insults such as,
 - “Dwarf! Dwarf!” and “Eating fish on the anniversary of your parents’ death!”
 - “The tiny monk who’ll never grow”

- 
- The theme arrives from this piece of literature; Okyo is faced with the choice of being independent and poor or being sexually dependent and wealthy.
 - Okyo chooses easy luxury over hard work because it got too difficult to live an ordinary life.
 - She would rather be sexually exploited and dress well than work for what she has.

- 
- Kichizo's mindset is on the complete opposite spectrum, he would rather work for what he has than have it handed down to him.
 - As a result of Kichizo's economic status and orphan status, he is miserable. He is miserable because he was abandoned by his family and never received the proper love.
 - He became someone who is temperament, violent, and ready to answer people with a clenched fist.
 - If he were to be born to an upper class parents, no one would have dared to make fun of his parents and his stature.

- 
- On the other hand, Okyo is a young kimono seamstress in her early twenties. Not much is said about Okyo, but we discover that due to Okyo's marginal social status, she decides to abandon her reputation and poverty to become a mistress with a luxurious lifestyle.
 - She states, "Kichizo, I'm sick of all the washing and sewing. Anything would be better. I'm tired of these drab clothes."

- 
- Thus, these two friends go on their “separate ways.” Kichizo has accepted his fate and is content with oiling umbrellas. He states that he “was born to wear a plain kimono with workman’s sleeves...”.
 - Compared to Okyo, who would abandon her reputation in order to achieve a better lifestyle.
 - Not only did she abandon her social class, she has also abandoned her good friend.

The setting

- The setting of the novel is very important, the restoration of the Meiji era is very significant –Japan and Japanese people underwent sets of changes, sets of life improvements, it was an onset of enlightenment, new ideas, new approaches, Westernized, as well. Tremendous changes occurred, some accepted the new reality, others, rejected it.

Themes

- *The fear of abandonment*
- The theme in Higuchi Ichiyo's short story centers around the fear of abandonment. Kichizo does not want Okyo to leave. She seems to be the only one who treats him as if he is a normal human being. When he finally realizes that Okyo is leaving to be some man's mistress, he is bereft. Up to this moment, she has been his comfort and his rock amidst the insensitive taunting of his mates.

The social stigma

- Now, this leads us to another theme: the social stigma endured by those with disabilities or those whose looks differ from the norm, as demonstrated in Okyo's situation. He is tormented by his peers who taunt him for being a 'dwarf.' A lonely orphan, he has no real family and sees Okyo as his saving grace.

Friendship

- Okyo and Kichizo also have a very loving and caring friendship, but money and riches overpowers their friendship in the end