



Memoirs of a Geisha

Arthur Golden

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Memoirs of a Geisha Arthur Golden

A literary sensation and runaway bestseller, this brilliant debut novel presents with seamless authenticity and exquisite lyricism the true confessions of one of Japan's most celebrated geisha.

In *Memoirs of a Geisha*, we enter a world where appearances are paramount; where a girl's virginity is auctioned to the highest bidder; where women are trained to beguile the most powerful men; and where love is scorned as illusion. It is a unique and triumphant work of fiction - at once romantic, erotic, suspenseful - and completely unforgettable.

Memoirs of a Geisha Details

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From Reader Review Memoirs of a Geisha for online ebook

Jeffrey Keeten says

”Whatever our struggles and triumphs, however we may suffer them, all too soon they bleed into a wash, just like watery ink on paper. “

Geisha Mineko Iwasaki basis for Chiyo/Sayori.

Chiyo, with her sister Satsu, and her mother and father live in a shack by the sea on the coast of Japan. The shack leans, and has to be propped up to keep from total collapse. Her mother is sick and on the verge of death. Her father is a fisherman, uneducated, and generally befuddled by anything that doesn't have to do with his fishing nets. When a businessman from the village comes to them with an offer to take their girls to the city it doesn't take much to convince the father that nearly any opportunity is better than staying there in the tilted shack by the sea.

He was wrong. Or was he? Without a crystal ball or access to a series of timelines showing the variations created by changing key decisions at critical junctures how can we know?

Satsu, who is fifteen, is promptly placed with a brothel. Not exactly what her father had in mind. I'm sure he was told she would be trained for “domestic service”. Chiyo, who is nine, is deemed young enough to be trained to be a geisha. She is a lovely child with startling rare gray/blue eyes.

Those Blue Eyes are what set her apart.

The Mother of her geisha house is equally startling in appearance.

”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 lip of her lids, in which a cloudy moisture was pooled, and all around them the skin was sagging.”

Obvious a bit of a failing liver issue going on here, but wait she is really much more ugly.

”I drew my eyes downward as far as her mouth, which still hung open. The colors of her face were all mixed up: the rims of her eyelids were red like meat, and her gums and tongue were gray. And to make things more horrible, each of her lower teeth seemed to be anchored in a little pool of blood at the gums.”

Okay so Chiyo lets out a gasp. She starts out her new life in trouble.

It doesn't end there. She is quickly considered a threat to the lovely and vindictive Hatsumomo who is the only fully trained geisha working for the house. Chiyo is accused of stealing (not true). She is accused of ruining an expensive kimono with ink (true but under duress). She is caught trying to escape (she broke her arm in the process so try and give the kid a break). Well, all of this ends up costing her two years working as a housemaid when she could have been training as a geisha.

She receives an unexpected benefactress, a mortal enemy of Hatsumomo named Mameha decides to take Chiyo under her wing and insure that she has another opportunity to become a geisha.

Chiyo, tired of scrubbing floors and being the do-this and do-that girl of the household realizes her best chance at some form of freedom is to elevate herself.

The Movie based on this book was released in 2005 and directed by Rob Marshall.

At age 15 her virginity or mizuage is put up for auction. It is hard not to think of this as a barbaric custom, but for a geisha, if a bidding war erupts, she can earn enough money to pay off all the debts that have accumulated for her training. Chiyo, now called Sayuri, is fortunate to have two prominent men wanting to harvest her flower. The winner is Dr. Crab who paid a record amount for the privilege.

"Of course his name wasn't really Dr. Crab, but if you'd seen him I'm sure the same name would have occurred to you, because he had his shoulders hunched up and his elbows sticking out so much, he couldn't have done a better imitation of a crab if he'd made a study of it. He even led with one shoulder when he walked, just like a crab moving along sideways."

Not the vision that any girl would have for her first time, but ultimately it is a business transaction that frees Sayori from the bonds of debt. After the deed is done, *the eel spit in the cave*, Dr. Crab brought out a kit filled with bottles that would have made *Dexter* jealous. Each bottle has a blood sample, soaked in a cotton ball or a piece of towel of every geisha he has ever treated including the blood from his couplings for their virginity. He cuts a piece of blood soaked towel that was under Sayori and added it to the bottle with her name.

Ewwwehhh! with a head snapping *shiver*.

The cultural obsession, every country seems to have one, with female virginity is simply pathological. Girls can't help, but be fearful of the process. Not strapped to a table by a serial killer type fear, but still there has to be that underlying hum as the man prepares to enter her. I wonder if men, especially those who avidly pursue the deflowering of maidens, are getting off on that fear? I've made myself feel a little queasy now.

Sayori is on her way to a successful career. She is in love with a man called The Chairman and wishes that he will become her danna, a patron, who can afford to keep a geisha as a mistress. There are people in the way, keeping them from being together, and so even though there were many geishas who wished for her level of success she still couldn't help feeling sad.

"And then I became aware of all the magnificent silk wrapped about my body, and had the feeling I might drown in beauty. At that moment, beauty itself struck me as a kind of painful melancholy. "

It was fascinating watching this young girl grow up in such a controlling environment; and yet, a system that can also be very deadly. One misstep, one bit of scandal, and many geishas found themselves ostracized by the community. They could very easily find themselves in a brothel. During WW2 the geisha community was disbanded, and the girls had to find work elsewhere. Sayori was fortunate. Despite all the hardships I know she was enduring, Arthur Golden chose not to dwell on them in great detail. I was surprised by this because authors usually want and need to press home those poignant moments, so that when the character emerges from the depths of despair the reader can have a heady emotional response to triumph over tragedy.

I really did feel like I was sitting down for tea with Sayori, many years later, and she, as a way of entertaining me, was telling me her life story. Golden interviewed a retired geisha by the name of Mineko Iwasaki who later sued him for using too much of her life story to produce this book. She even had light brown eyes not as striking as Sayori's blue/gray eyes, but certainly light enough to be unusual. I wonder if

Iwasaki was still the perfect geisha, keeping her story uplifting, and glossing over the aspects that could make her company uncomfortable.

Mineko Iwasaki

The book is listed in the *1,001 Books You Must Read Before You Die*. It was also made into a film, which I've been avoiding, knowing that I wanted to read the book first. I notice some reviewers take issue with Sayori. They feel she did not assert herself, and take control of her life. She does in the end, but she is patient, and waits for a moment when she can predict the outcome. I feel that she did what she needed to do to survive. Most of the time she enjoyed being a geisha. It takes a long time to learn not only the ways to entertain, but also all the rigid traditions that must be understood to be a successful geisha. As she gets older, and can clearly define the pitfalls of her actions, we see her manipulating the system in her favor.

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I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

Matthew says

This one is going to be a bit difficult for me to review. I enjoyed it, but it was kinda weird. It was interesting, but kind of slow. The historical fiction aspect is interesting, but I have seen many reviews critical of the actual truth of it all.

The pros:

- Very good storytelling - Each chapter was its own short story and I found it easy to read and stay interested.
- Characters - I was invested in the characters. In fact, I was so invested I could feel my loathing for one of the bad characters curdling in my very soul. It's usually a good sign when you want to reach into the book and smack a character.
- The setting and the history - it was fascinating to learn about Geisha culture in pre-WWII Japan and how different it is from anything in American history.

The Cons

- This one may not be fair because it is probably historically accurate, but the Geisha culture made all the male characters seem like creepers. So, even when there is one you are supposed to like or who is supposed to be a hero, you know that he is all about pre-pubescent, up-and-coming Geisha and hoping to be able to deflower as many as possible. Just skews things a bit.
- Kind of slow - even though I thought the storytelling was great, there were a few times where it started to drag and I was ready to move on to the next part of the story.
- Accuracy - Without Goodreads, I would have probably never have known this, but it seems there is some question as to the accuracy of the account in this book. Often, other, more reliable titles are suggested. But, was this supposed to be a non-fiction memoir, a story based on some facts surrounding the Geisha culture but equal parts fact and fiction, or just a completely made up story? I am not completely sure, but it should provide some interesting follow up research.

So, I am going to go with 4 stars because it was an interesting story and despite some slow spots and creepers, it was pretty entertaining. Also, questions/controversy over its accuracy might actually raise the entertainment value!

Elyse says

I read this a long time ago ---(a favorite) --- Its amazing a 'male' wrote this book. (sure 'felt' like a female speaking).

Sophia. says

So.. Memoirs of a Geisha. I'd been wanting to read that one for a very long time. I had heard so many good things about it. It's supposed to be awesome, and deep, and beautiful, right?
Wrong. It's not.

The writing was what bothered me the most. It's pretentious and superficial, and sloooooww and it goes on and on and on and on and still, very little happens. In some sort of weird combination, the writing is both superficial and cliché. It feels like Golden thought it would be a good idea to emphasize all the Japan-and-nature clichés to the point of ridiculousness : I still can't believe how many times he compares something to the nature. Ironically, it doesn't feel natural at all. It feels forced and weird and it's very annoying, as it slows down the pacing (which is already very slow) and frequently interrupts the narrator's flow of thoughts.

Examples? Yes, yes. Because I was so sick and tired of reading for the 40th time how something is LIKE a bird or a snake or whatever, I made a list. Enjoy, people.

This is how Sayuri narrates the story. Please notice and enjoy how natural this way of thinking sounds :

"I felt as a dam must feel when it's holding back an entire river."

"I felt as sore as a rock must feel when the waterfall has pounded on it all day long."

"My poor scalp felt the way clay must feel after the potter has scored it with a sharp stick."

And it goes on :

"Like water bugs kicking along the surface."

"Like the crisp skin of a grilled fish."

"Like a scrap of paper in the wind."

"Like ruts in the bark of a tree."

And on :

"Like a pig trying to survive in a slaughterhouse."

"Like a stray cat on the street without a master to feed it."

"My mind on the eve of my debut was like a garden in which the flowers have only begun to poke their faces up through the soil."

"It was like when a caterpillar turns into a butterfly."

"Out of my element as a pigeon in a nest of falcons."

"Felt as a simple smelt must feel when a silver salmon glides by."

Still not enough? I was hoping you'd say that. Here you go!(view spoiler)

(hide spoiler)]

So yeah. Just because of that, it can't get more than 2 stars for me. It just can't. It's awful to read.

And the characters. *SIGH* What can I say about them? Hatsumomo was just a big cliché, and so was Pumpkin, and so was The Chairman.

They didn't feel real. None of them did. Sayuri on top. So I'm supposed to feel something for her, right? Relate to her somehow. That was impossible. I don't know why, but somehow I was able to relate to Chiyo - but not to Sayuri. Even though they're the same person, I couldn't bring myself to care for Sayuri. As soon as she "grows up" (even though she keeps telling her story with the skills of a freakin' 4 year old) so around the time when she becomes a geisha, that is, she becomes insufferable.

And she has this sort of weird fascination for adult men, first M. Tanaka and after The Chairman, and it's just so annoying. Why does she like them? Why?

And, yeah, she was also such a victim. She never made anything to change her condition, she was just this kind of submissive woman who, well, blinks and, I dunno, bows. I know it's the way she's supposed to behave, but still, it's infuriatingly boring to read about such a character. The only thing she ever does for herself is (view spoiler) but even that is done in the purpose of eventually being with The Chairman. And who was he, that Chairman? Who was that man we hear about, again and again and again? What's he like? Have they ever had a real conversation? I don't think so. She idealizes him, she never sees him as who he really is, she just keeps ~~wetting~~ holding that stupid handkerchief every night and that annoyed me. It felt childish and weird.

The only character I liked was Mameha, and she's the angel of the story, meaning that you're just supposed to like her because she's, well, perfect, kind, loyal and beautiful, the way Agnes is in David Copperfield or Melanie in Gone With The Wind.

The informations about Geishas were nice, I suppose, but I don't know how much of it is true. The war was awfully, awfully boring, and very badly executed.

I think you can see it was written by an American just by the way the United States are depicted. They atomically bombarded Japan and two of greatest its cities and yet, Sayuri doesn't even blink and say "The American troops were very kind to us and gave candy to the children." Er... Really?

The plot dragged on and on, and I had to struggle to finish the book. The ending felt rushed. I hate, hate it when authors do that. He wrote a whole book about someone's life, and the final chapter is sooo rushed and it goes like "So that was forty years ago, now I'm seventy and I'm old and I'm gonna tell you what happened in my life between then and now in like, two sentences. So I married the guy I talked so much about, and then we went to live in the USA because that's like ZOMG the best country EVAR! And then he died, and.. Ah yes.. Did we have a kid? Oh, but wouldn't you like to know!.. Well you won't, cause I'm not telling you, neener- neener. Whatever I'm old, and I'm probably gonna die now LIKE A BIRD THAT FLIES AWAY", because what would be the final sentence without a nature-related comparison, huh? Right. I swear, the book probably deserves an award, for like Worst Ending Chapter Ever or something. It made no sense, it gave no real closure.

Everything in this book was just so... flat. It tried to be epic and it tried to be a classic but it failed so badly. The characters weren't well fleshed-out, it was obvious that the Good people (Sayuri, Mahema) would

triumph over the Bad (Hatsumomo), it was obvious that Sayuri would get her happy ending after all..

See, all throughout the book, I was completely disconnected, I didn't *feel* anything. I didn't smile, or laugh, I certainly didn't cry. I can't even say I'm angry or that I *hate* the book - because hatred requires that I care, and I don't. I'm just... indifferent. Bored. Unimpressed. And isn't it the worst state of mind you can possibly be in after you finish a book? Ultimately, it didn't leave a mark.

So the book as a whole was a major disappointment and I'm glad it's over. I just hope the movie might be better - I kept thinking it would be better to watch it, seeing how graphic the descriptions were (of the kimonos, for example). [Edit: So I saw the movie. Meeeh.]

But as a book, it was unconvincing and very flawed.

Ahmad Sharabiani says

93. Memoirs of A Geisha, Arthur Golden

Memoirs of a Geisha is a historical novel by American author Arthur Golden, published in 1997. The novel, told in first person perspective, tells the story of a fictional geisha working in Kyoto, Japan, before and after World War II.

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T.J. says

Damn if you aren't one of the most problematic things I've ever read, *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

Like much of non-Asian America, I was swept up in the delight of reading this book in 2000. I was fifteen and precocious, and the narrative was arresting. I couldn't put the book down. I wrote this in 2000:

"Golden has hit pay dirt with this masterpiece. An insightful, curious, and caring look into the mysterious world of geisha, Arthur Golden peels away the ignorance and labeling that westerners have covered the secretive Japanese profession. Although it sinks at times into a near melodramatic prose, the book's protagonist is interesting, insightful, and enjoyable. Her witty anecdotes and thoughtful mannerisms in speaking make *Memoirs of a Geisha* a delightful and unstoppable read."

Then I got older, went to college and graduate school, and developed a critical, thinking eye.

And I'm mad at myself.

insightful? Really? God, I was naive. This novel, while entertaining is so problematic I rarely have time to descend into my criticism. It continues the Orientalism that Edward Said loathed so very much; rather than "skillfully entering" the world of a Japanese woman, it apes her identity, and ultimately deprives her of a voice, creating a sort of Orientalist imagination for us to enjoy without ever really seeing her. The book is still engaging as a narrative, but the sappy ending, the frankly sexist portrayals at some points, and Sayuri's outright inability to identify outside of her Chairman is rather frightening. It serves to objectify fetishism at its worst. Yet I can only give you three stars, because I'm still partly under your spell, Golden. Damn.

Liz Lynch says

Like eating fancy dessert at a gourmet restaurant, *Memoirs of a Geisha* is beautiful, melts lightly off the tongue and will be forgotten shortly after it's done. The language is strikingly lovely, and Golden paints a remarkable picture of a time and place.

If you're looking to learn something deep about the psychology of Japanese culture, or meet nuanced characters, then I'd steer you elsewhere. The story only skims the top of the more complicated aspects of a Japan in decline, focusing mostly on a genteel lifestyle that probably seems more appealing from the outside. There's a way in which the book, written by a man and a westerner, is slightly fetishistic, but less so than you might imagine.

Another reader suggested that perhaps the superficiality of the story is intentional, and that the book, in a way, resembles a geisha. Beautiful and eager to please, yet too distant to really learn much from and ultimately little more than a beautiful, well-crafted object to be appreciated. If that's the case, Arthur Golden is remarkably clever, and I applaud him. If it's not the case, the book remains very pretty and an easy read.

Henry Avila says

In a small Japanese fishing village of Yoroido, on the coast of the Sea of Japan, a child Chiyo Sakamoto, 9,

lives with an ancient father, dying mother, and older sister Satsu, in a dilapidated home, leaning over a cliff, the year 1929, things are tough and will get harder, as the Great Depression is about to commence...the impoverished family needs help and the two sisters are sold. Pretty Chiyo, with beautiful eyes, to become a geisha after a long apprenticeship and the unlucky, plain Satsu, an abused prostitute....In a house that never becomes a home, in the former royal capital of Kyoto, in the section called Gion, where most geisha live, and the tea houses to entertain rich men, there, the scared girl is under the complete control of three money-hungry women, who show no pity, Granny, (she has coins in her heart) the matriarch, and her two adopted daughters, Mother, the real boss, and Auntie, they love nicknames, both are as unfeeling as Granny. The only genuine geisha in residence, is stunning Hatsumomo, as beautiful as she is detestable, and takes an odd, instant hatred to the little girl and torments her nonstop. One day while doing an errand, the child starts crying in the streets, her miserable life has no joy, a man known as the chairman, the owner of an important electronics business, stops and comforts Chiyo, leaving her, his monogrammed handkerchief, it will be the most prized possession, the girl has, at last, someone cares... she falls in love, and this will remain forever. After an aborted escape try with her sister, she falls from the roof of a neighbor's house, injuring herself, things become even more dismal, Chiyo is demoted to a lowly maid in the house, no more school to learn her profession, to the elation of cruel Hatsumomo. Still life is cloudy, and is never foreseen, even the fortune-tellers, the geisha go to, often, can't predict accurately... the most successful, glamorous, admired geisha in Kyoto, Mameha, becomes her "Big Sister", a mentor that can help any woman rise to the top, how strange. Her name is changed later to "Sayuri", she returns to school, becomes a fine dancer and does a solo, at the annual celebrations in the local theater, her poster is painted by a famous alcoholic artist in town, the career prospers, but the chairman, that Sayuri constantly meets in the tea house parties, (where the men get drunk on Sake, listen to stories told, watch the singing, the dancing, and music played by the geisha) is rather distant, and doesn't recognize the grown-up woman ... Gruff Nobu, scarred and disabled, in a war, the chairman's best friend, and second -in -command, at the electronics firm, likes Chiyo/Sayuri, he, her love, can never interfere, too much respect for his colleague, and they are so close, it is a sad, hopeless situation for Chiyo/ Sayuri ... The years roll by, and war is on the horizon, change is coming, it always is...the now renowned geisha, awaits...The most famous, popular, geisha, Mineko Iwasaki, now retired, (one of the characters is based on her, in the novel) greatly helped Mr. Arthur Golden, in research, revealing to him, in confidence, the secrets of the mysterious life of these women, for the first time, much to her later regret...

Argona says

I became fascinated with Japanese culture when I was a teenage girl and since then I have read many Japanese-related books and articles and have watched many movies and animes that depict parts of Japanese culture but the fact remains that I am not Japanese, I have never been to Japan and I am a foreigner, captivated by this exotic and very different culture.

As a foreigner, I see many beautiful and unique aspects to Japanese culture but I also know about certain painful historical facts such as treatment of women in certain eras of Japan. My point is, I don't want to discuss accuracy of this book regarding Geisha life. I am not Japanese and I am not a historian and therefore, I am not qualified to judge. So I keep my opinion and impression Geisha to myself.

It appears that this story is based on the life of a certain geisha, but the author clearly states that both the story and characters are fictional and I am going to stick with that.

I admit that I was disappointed when I realized that this turned out to be fiction, only and only because I had been told otherwise by author himself while reading the preface. I mean, what's with the contradiction? I

couldn't understand the pretense. Why pretend this is a real story when it's a beautiful fiction? What's wrong with fiction? I admit, as I reached the end of the book, I came to realize why the author tried to portray this story as a real life story when writing the introduction but I will write about that later.

I liked the writing style. Some people may find it pretentious but I understood that this is an attempt to write as close as possible to Japanese style of writing and story-telling and to seem poetic. The writing also helped me to see the world through Chiyo's eyes and better understand her mind. I should mention that Chiyo and Sayuri are the same person.

Some people may say, parts of the story drag on and on and yet nothing important happens. I quickly get bored but I couldn't put this book down once I had started reading and I had already seen the movie years ago. This is not a perfect book but it is an amazing one. Little Chiyo simply captivated me with her story.

I wanted her to survive, to fight and to find happiness. There isn't a single character in this story that I actually hate. They are all different human-beings with flaws of their own that struggle to survive and get by their hard lives. Some choose to do so by crushing others and some choose to do so by fighting their way through and lending a helping hand when they can.

I might have had a few explosions regarding treatment of women and the way chiyo's mind operates if I didn't know Japanese culture at the time of this story well enough. I have Japanese friends, so I know what I am talking about it.

Chiyo is quite young when she falls in love with a man much older than her, too young in my opinion to fall in love but I understood her feelings. The moment she meets the love of her life, Chairman, is a turning point in her story and happens to be my most favorite part.

Yes, she focuses her entire life on reaching this man. As a woman, I would have liked her to have bigger goals and dreams of her own and for example, seek freedom or independence but when I think about her situation, her education and upbringing, I get her.

Chiyo is a slave, being trained for the sole purpose of pleasing men. Men that mean nothing to her and are like alien beings. Up to this point, not a single person has shown her any kindness without ill intentions and when she is about to lose her faith in humanity, a man appears out of nowhere and shows her true kindness. Finally, a man means something to her. One of these men that she is supposed to serve has a face and value to her. I am not surprised she made it her life-purpose to reach him. I would have liked her to interact more with him during the course of the story but it wasn't really necessary. Chairman was the man SHE wanted and SHE desired for herself. Considering her life, that was a big goal. And I didn't really need to know more about Chairman. He was the symbol of true kindness. Her dedication to reach him was moving and touched me very deeply.

As I said before, during parts of this story, nothing important really happens, but I was eager to learn more about Geisha life. The author is obviously well-informed and has done his research. The story was interesting enough. All characters seemed real and relatable. I even liked Hatsumomo! And even though I wanted Chiyo to reach the love of her life and therefore happiness more than anything, I liked Nobu a lot too. He was a great man but it's not like we can change our emotions or how we feel about different people and their behaviors whenever we want to. I could feel Sayuri's misery and fear as she had to make decisions that would ultimately hurt people dear to her, from Pumpkin to Nobu. Sayuri is simply human. She too acts selfish and neglects her friends. I don't blame her but I wish she had acted differently at certain times, at least regarding poor Pumpkin.

I also clearly felt the touch of war and the darkness that spreads over hearts and souls at such a time. The fear, pain and misery as everything changes and there is no longer any certainty to the future.

I was touched by the relationship between Chairman and Nobu, even though it was only behind the scene and between the lines. Once you think about it, it was a very deep and touching bond. Although poor Sayuri had to suffer because of this very bond, I understood why Chairman had to act the way he did.

The only part of the book that made me laugh and shake my head at the author, the AMERICAN author, was the part regarding American soldiers throwing candy at children. It was mentioned abruptly and I found it very funny. Two nuclear bombs and this is what Sayuri comments about. Yes, I am sure American soldiers weren't as scary as they were supposed to be but they were still invaders. It takes time for certain wounds to heal. It's not about American soldiers. It's about war, invasion and loss!

At the end, this is not a fairy-tale. I am a fan of fairy tales and I firmly believe in happy endings. Ironic, since in real life, I am very realistic and even cynical. But when I open a book, I want happy endings. Somewhere along the way, I had started to dream of a fairy-tale style happy ending for little Chiyo and reading the last pages of the book left me a little sad. That's why as I mentioned above, it was after finishing the book that I understood why the author has tried to sell this story as a real one. All throughout the book, the story tries to remain realistic (Which is why sometimes nothing really happens) and it's important to remember this, when reading the bittersweet ending. Otherwise, the ending might feel a little unsatisfactory and even rushed. But the truth is, the bittersweet ending was still a happy ending, just a realistic one. Still, I wasn't 100% happy with it. I agree that the author could have done better just by adding 50 pages or so.

In conclusion, this is the beautiful story of a little innocent girl as she fights her way through life and hardships in an unfair society and struggles to reach her loved one and have a reason to simply wake up every day and live. This is not a fairy tale but it does contain certain elements of those tales therefore this book is not for everyone, but I really enjoyed it and find it very memorable and special.

Khadidja says

Very interesting, entertaining, and quick to read! Chiyo/Sayuri and her sister Satsu were sold into slavery at the age of 9 by their father, Sayuri tells of her traumatic arrival at the Nitta okiya (a geisha house), where she endures harsh treatment from everyone, In spite of the problems she had to face, Sayuri became the beautiful geisha accomplished in the art of entertaining men.

“He was like a song I'd heard once in fragments but had been singing in my mind ever since.”

“Can't you see? Every step I have taken, since I was that child on the bridge, has been to bring myself closer to you.”

Fabian says

Well, I finally got around to this one. And I think I understand its fan base and subsequent literary worth; it was the "Gone Girl" of the 90's. (Only in popularity.) This time, the fairy tale (with "Girl" it seems as if we're more comfortable with the cautionary tale in the 10's) has a Cinderella and many suitors after her. It is absolutely immersive... a page turner that has as many colors as a used-up coloring book. I see the geisha in that light: like La Marilyn, the geisha are symbol of tragedy and misplaced youth and beauty.

The plot is orchestrated in that well-intentioned Great Novel tradition. A Great Expectations-meets-Great Gatsby novelty item that's as pure as winter's snow, that shimmers & attracts the senses like a ruby from some volcano deep in the Pacific. Metaphors and similes are very effectively used here, & their dual purpose is clear: it tells the life story in a very non-nebulous manner, in clear, concise, not-to-be-misconstrued mode; and the words seem authentic enough to evoke an actual geisha-- it is her telling you her memoirs, sitting there with you, drinking tea.

Also, Hastumomo, in the role of ugly stepsister, is an adversary from hell. Grrreat character! Too bad she leaves the narrative at too-crucial a juncture (the anticlimax meaning, then, the immediate displacement of anything that did not fit into the societal standards from the board... Lame!). She is a worthy nemesis to our heroine--as voracious for fresh meat as a Great White. The feud between them two is the centerpiece of this Fanny Hill-like tale, this enormously feminist (?) text. For in Gion, Japan, the geisha are treated like a lot of women have been, like objects, pawns, or even disembodied ideas.

Arah-Lynda says

A beautiful, poignant story that is so incredibly, lyrically captivating you are seduced from the very first word. An absolute work of art, each page overflows with beautiful, sensual, evocative images.

Such is the skill and authority of Golden's writing, I feel as though I have spent hours, being entertained by the most gifted of all Geisha. Utterly Satisfying. I want to read it again for the very first time!

Juushika says

Memoirs of a Geisha is an American novel, and as such the attempt at West does East, especially on the complex and delicate subject of the geisha, is compelling, interesting, but also heavy-handed and ultimately ineffective (even more so in the case of the film). It is a wonderful introduction to geisha, Japanese culture, and the East for the uninitiated Western reader, and I can see why the book is popular, but I found it disappointing. For the reader already familiar with the culture, western influences are all too clear and the book comes off as a bit clunky and imperfect. I also had some problems with the general perception of the characters by readers versus the way the characters were actually portrayed in the book--Memoirs is far from the good-willed fairy tale that people assume it is. By all means, read it, but leave it open for critique and

remember that a more authentic representation of eastern culture, especially in the details, will come from the east itself.

A lot of my critique stems from the fact that this movie has attained such wide-spread fame and been made into a movie, to be sure. I feel like it is being perpetuated as something it is not. Even the introduction to the book (a faux translator's note) perpetuates the myth that Memoirs is an accurate, beautiful, in-depth reflection of the life of a geisha, when in truth it is no more than historical fiction and is written by an outsider. Golden has done his research and is well-educated on his subjects, and I have no problem with people reading from, taking interest in, and even learning from this book; I do, however, think it is important that readers don't conflate the American novel with Japanese reality. They aren't the same thing, no matter how much research Golden did, and if we take the book as an accurate representation we're actually underestimating and undervaluing geisha, Japan, and Japanese culture.

Because Golden attempts to write from within the geisha culture, as a Japanese woman, he must do more than report the "facts" of that life--he must also pretend to be a part of it. Pretend he does, acting out a role as if he has studied inflection, script, and motivation. He certainly knows what makes writing "Japanese" but his attempt to mimic it is not entirely successful. The emphasis on elements, the independent sentences, the visual details are too prevalent and too obvious, as if Golden is trying to call our attention to them and thus to the Japanese style of the text. He does manage to draw attention, but to me, at least, what I came away with was the sense that Golden was an American trying really hard to sound Japanese--that is, the effect betrayed the attempt and the obvious attempt ruined the sincerity of the novel, for me. I felt like I was being smacked over the head with beauty! wood! water! kimono! haiku! and I felt insulted and disappointed.

The problems that I saw in the text were certainly secondary to the purpose of the text: to entertain, to introduce Western readers to Japanese culture, and to sell books (and eventually a film). They may not be obvious to all readers and they aren't so sever that the book isn't worth reading. I just think readers need to keep in mind that what Golden writes is fiction. Historical fiction, yes, but still fiction, therefore we should look for a true representation of Japanese culture within Japanese culture itself and take Memoirs with a grain of salt.

I also had problems with the rushed end of the book, the belief that Sayuri is a honest, good, modest, generous person when she really acts for herself and at harm to others throughout much of the book, the perpetuation of Hatsumomo as unjustified and cruel when she has all the reason in the world, and in general the public belief that Memoirs is some sort of fairy tale when in fact it is heavy-handed, biased, and takes a biased or unrelatistic view toward situations, characters, and love. However, all of those complains are secondary, in my view, to the major complain above, and should be come obvious to the reader.

Memoirs goes quickly, is compelling, and makes a good read, and I don't want to sound too unreasonably harsh on it. However, I believe the book has a lot of faults that aren't widely acknowledged and I think we as readers need to keep them in mind. This is an imperfect Western book, and while it may be a fun or good book it is not Japanese, authentic, or entirely well done.

Ana says

I can finally cross Memoirs of a Geisha off my list. I had my doubts about this book, but I'm happy to say I was wrong.

Shelby *trains flying monkeys* says

I read this book back when it first came out. I never wrote a review of it because when I first joined GR I didn't really know what it was all about. It took a bit before it sunk in for me.

Now GR members get spammed at times. The newest form of spam is review bumping. I didn't even know that existed because..well I'm a slow learner. I kept noticing the same person's reviews on my thread. Several times a day. All day. For weeks. Someone finally pointed out to me that they are bumping their reviews. Then I saw several status updates from people posting about how it was driving them bonkers.

Now my friend Kat decided to take a stand..she made a awesome little badge to show we are all fabulous..not just the top reviewers, and my friend Kelly has a great idea..we are gonna spread some love. Everyone on GR is Goodreads Fabulous.

Here's my friend Argona's review for this book. Her's is much better than anything I could have written..Go show her some love.

Argona..you are Goodreads Famous baby!
