

Memoirs of a geisha critical essay

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I. Title: Memoirs of a Geisha (1997) II. Author: Arthur Golden (1957-) III.

Setting: a. Where: Gion, Kyoto, Japan b. When: Early 1900's (1930's, World

War II) IV. Character and Characterization: c. Principal Characters i. Sayuri Nitta (Chiyo Sakamoto) Sayuri is the main character of the book. As a child, she always thought well of others. She has determination and does not give up easily. Her gray eyes are what make her stand out the most. ii. Mameha Mameha was a well-known geisha in Gion. She was Sayuri's older sister (not by blood) and mentor. She taught Sayuri what she needed to do for her to become a successful geisha.

She is very determined and would do anything to achieve her goal. iii. Hatsumomo Hatsumomo was a geisha of the Nitta Okiya, the same okiya that Sayuri came from. She boasts of herself and thinks that no one is better than her. She despised Sayuri and saw her as competition, which led to her numerous attempts to destroy Sayuri's life. iv. Chairman The Chairman was the reason why Sayuri had a purpose to live, which was the result of his act of kindness to Sayuri when she was a child. He is a person who thinks of other's feelings. As a geisha, Sayuri wanted nothing more than for the Chairman to take notice of her. . Nobu Nobu was the Chairman's right-hand man, the Chairman owed him a lot. He is patient and kind. Nobu's appearance is peculiar because of his skin which was damaged by a bomb. He fancies Sayuri and waited most of his life to become Sayuri's danna. d. Secondary Characters i. Pumpkin Pumpkin was Sayuri's friend when they were young. Their friendship was destroyed by Hatsumomo, who was Pumpkin's older sister. She was sweet and very helpful at first, but was

influenced by Hatsumomo. Pumpkin also became a geisha from the Nitta Okiya, but she was not as famous as Sayuri. ii. Auntie

Auntie was the first person to show kindness to Sayuri when she arrived at the Nitta Okiya. She wanted Sayuri to become successful and to not end up like her. When Sayuri became a geisha, she continuously helped her through what she needed to do. iii. Mr. Tanaka Sayuri, as a child, idolized Mr. Tanaka and thought that no other man is higher than him. Mr. Tanaka was the person who offered Sayuri's father to sell Sayuri and her sister Setsu. He was the reason why Sayuri ended up in Gion. iv. Mother Mother was the sister of Auntie and the owner of the Nitta Okiya. She was very fond of money and would do anything to become richer.

She later adopted Sayuri as her daughter and as the successor of the Nitta Okiya. v. Dr. Crab Dr. Crab was one of the men who were attracted to Sayuri when she became a geisha. Dr. Crab is a kind of person who would let nothing to stand in his way. He is known for spending a lot of money in the pursuit of mizuage. V. Subject Matter: a historical fiction about the life of a geisha in Japan before World War II VI. Thesis/Main Idea: The story revolves around a girl whose life was transformed from rags to riches when her father sold her until she became a well-known geisha in Kyoto.

VII. The Part I Like The Best. Why? I was thrilled the most when I was reading the part where the Chairman met Sayuri in the Ichiriki Teahouse after the incident with the Minister on the island of Amami. I was so consumed by the book since I badly wanted to know what the Chairman would say to Sayuri. Shock and disbelief came over me when the Chairman admitted that he

knew Sayuri was the child he saw crying near the Shirakawa Stream. VIII. The Part I Like The Least. Why? I did not like the part where the war was going on and Gion closed down.

I felt as if the part was not that significant to the main topic of the story and that the story would just have the same effect to the readers without it. As a reader, I thought that this was the duller part of the story. IX. Vocabulary Improvement: 1. Geisha-(n.) a Japanese women educated to accompany men as a hostess, performing different skills such as dancing and playing instruments * Most Americans confuse geishas as prostitutes because of the pretend geishas who called themselves geisha girls and sold their bodies to American soldiers in Japan during the World War II. . Okiya-(n.) the lodging house in which a geisha lives until she has paid all her debts from the okiya for sending her to school * Mameha was a geisha who was allowed to live in her own house since she was able to pay off all her debts from the okiya she was from. 3. Danna-(n.) a geisha's patron, a wealthy man who supports the geisha's needs in exchange for spending time with him privately * Nobu spent almost his entire life waiting to become Sayuri's danna which unfortunately never happened. 4. Shamisen-(n. a three-string musical instrument that is played using a plectrum * Many geishas, if not all, were taught how to play the Japanese instrument called shamisen, which they used in performances. 5. Mizuage-(n.) the coming of age ceremony of an apprentice geisha, usually associated with the geisha's loss of virginity; a large sum of money is to be paid to the geisha in return for her mizuage * According to Mineko Iwasaki, the geisha Arthur Golden interviewed for his book, a geisha's mizuage was never won by means of bidding.

X. Brief Summary: Chiyo Sakamoto, a girl from a little fishing village called Yoroido, was 9 years old when her father sold her and her sister Satsu to a man named Mr. Tanaka. They were brought to Kyoto where Chiyo and her sister were separated; Chiyo stayed in Gion in the Nitta Okiya as a maid, whereas her sister was brought to Miyagawa-cho where she worked as a prostitute. Chiyo started going to school to become a geisha, but when she learned about her sister's location, she went to look for her.

When they met, they decided that they would runaway a few days after, Chiyo tried to runaway but failed, which caused her her schooling priviledges. As Chiyo continued to live as a maid, knowing that she won't see her sister again, she felt as if she has no purpose in life; then he met the Chairman who treated her kindly, which gave her hope for a better future. After this incident, she wanted to become a geisha hoping that she would please the Chairman someday.

Mameha, a well-known geisha in the Gion district, became her mentor and trained her to become a successful geisha; she then changed her name to Sayuri Nitta, of the Nitta Okiya. Though she had numerous admirers, she wanted no one but the Chairman to take notice of her; she strived hard to for this and in the end, she eventually learned that the Chairman acknowledged her way back then from the very first time they met.