

Sophomore Heather Nellis reviews *Memoirs of a Geisha*

Memoirs of a Geisha by Arthur Golden

First, to clarify, a geisha is NOT a prostitute. A geisha is trained as an entertainer; she dances, sings, plays instruments, is well-versed in the art of serving tea (and yes, Japanese tea service IS an art) as well as poetry. She does not perform sexual favors or any other "duties" of a prostitute. There. I've cleared that up.

That said, *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Arthur Golden is a stunning book. It's poignant and sad and exotic and racy all at the same time. This book appealed to me because, like many of us, I am sometimes bored with the same stories, told over and over, with different characters and different settings. This book was like nothing I had ever read before.

The story follows the life journey of Sayuri, a young girl from a seaside village in Japan who is kidnapped/ rescued by a man who sends her to the geisha district, Gion in Kyoto. Gion is a secretive place, populated by timeless beauties viciously competing for men's favor, where virginity is auctioned to the highest bidder and where trust between women is non-existent. Sayuri learns the tricks of the geisha trade in the Nitta *okiya* (geisha house) from her mistress, called Mother, and the three other women who live in the *okiya*. Her haunting beauty and wit soon make her the most sought after geisha in Gion, eclipsing even her famous "big sister" Mameha. Sayuri entertains many men, but she cannot forget a certain gentleman called the Chairman who bewitches her as a girl upon her arrival in Gion, before she even became a geisha. The plot thickens when Sayuri is expected to pick up a *danna*, a benefactor, (their relationship similar to that of a man and his mistress). A man is chosen, but Sayuri wants no one but the Chairman. The story continues on through World War II, poverty, the collapse of the great geisha district of Gion and its gradual rebirth. There is a sadness that permeates throughout the entire story; a sort of mourning the loss of innocence and even mourning the loss of the art of being a geisha.

~ Heather Nellis, '07



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16 Closed	17 8 am- mid	18 8 am- mid	19 8 am- mid	20 8 am- mid	21 8 am - 5:30 pm	22 10 am - 5:30 pm
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