

READING FICTION FOR WHAT IT IS: IDEOLOGIES VS PLOT DEVICES IN ARTHUR GOLDEN'S *MEMOIRS OF A GEISHA*

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When Arthur Golden's novel *Memoirs of a Geisha* was published in 1997, it became an overnight success. It stayed on the New York Times bestseller list for more than a year (Smith), and had sold four million copies in English and had been translated into 32 languages by June 2001 (Sims). The novel received critical acclaim worldwide, and inspired a successful eponymous Hollywood film released in 2005, whose worldwide box office sales amounted to 161.5 million USD (*The Numbers*).

Golden's tale of Sayuri, who is sold to a geisha house at a young age, but who overcomes all obstacles, becomes a star geisha, and wins an extramarital partnership with the man she has loved since girlhood, has been applauded by readers from different parts of the world. However, the authenticity of the presentations of Japanese culture as well as geisha culture in the novel has been questioned. Scholars and journalists alike have commented that Golden has had three barriers to overcome in writing the novel. Dinitia Smith observes:

To write "Memoirs of a Geisha," the fictional reminiscences of a geisha in Kyoto during the 1930's and 40's, Arthur Golden, a 42-year-old father of two, and an American at that, had to cross three great boundaries, gender, nationality and history. (Smith)

Michiko Kakutani, writing for the 'Books of the Times' column of *The New York Times*, describes the novel as one 'disguised as a memoir, told in the voice of a geisha who grew up in pre-World War II Japan', and then poses the question: 'How does a white, Ivy League-educated male pull off this act of ventriloquism?' (Kakutani) Furthermore, at a discussion about *Memoirs of a Geisha* with Golden at the John Adams Institute, Amsterdam, Netherlands in 1999, the moderator, Anja Meuvenbelt, asserts that 'he is writing in the first person, but he is three times removed from the actual person in the book' in terms of national culture, gender, and time. She then asks Golden, half in jest and half in earnest: 'How dare you?' (The John Adams Institute [henceforth JAI], Rec., 8:17-8:25, 8:52-8:53)

This question probably lies at the very centre of all the criticism that Golden has received. If we think of the history of literature, however, Golden has not been, and will certainly not be, the only author who crosses the boundaries of culture, gender, or age in his work. This act has often been taken for granted as part of a literary licence.

Academics like Kimiko Akita (2006) have accused Golden's novel of being Orientalist. Akita finds that both the novel and the film which it has inspired depict the geisha world in an inaccurate and demeaning way. She is appalled that Western readers and viewers find Sayuri's story believable (1). Such critics often seem to overlook the fact that they are discussing a work of art, and not an ethnographical document of a culture or a subculture. Unfortunately, this phenomenon in literary criticism is not restricted to the discussions of Golden's novel, nor to the proponents of its political incorrectness. While I hold the highest esteem for the major theories in literary criticism as achievements of the human intellect, I believe that critics and

scholars need to recall that if novelists wanted to inform their readers of social norms of a certain time, or argue about certain ideologies, then they would be writing academic papers, dissertations, and polemics instead of fiction. If academics apply theories so readily and eagerly to literary works to the point that they will have been able to put forward their arguments even before reading the works they discuss, then something is surely amiss.

The present paper, then, will focus on two central arguments in the discussion of *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The first is that an author's gender, ethnicity, and cultural background should not be seen as impediments to his or her portrayals of a world in which he or she does not live on a daily basis, provided that he or she has done extensive research of that world, or has lived in it, or by any other means knows it well. The second is that although literary theories provide us with profound insights and powerful analytical tools, we should not rely on them so heavily that we disregard the organic nature of a work of literature, and treat it merely as a lifeless, mechanical structure which can readily be dismantled by the tools of literary theories.

I shall begin by examining the legitimacy of a contemporary Caucasian-American male author writing a first-person novel about the life of a Japanese female, and a geisha at that, in the 1930s and -40s.

I. *Crossing Boundaries: A Storyteller's Job*

Of the three boundaries which critics and journalists have stated that Golden has crossed, time is probably the least surprising. Playwrights and novelists have always set their stories in eras either centuries behind them or centuries ahead, and generally speaking, they have not been told that this is a problem. We would be deprived of the pleasures of seeing *Richard III* on stage and reading *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, were writers only allowed to portray their contemporaries in a setting contemporary to themselves. This border-crossing is so taken for granted that I do not deem any defense for it necessary.

What about crossing the gender boundary? Can a man write a first-person narrative ostensibly by a woman, and vice versa? In *How Novels Work* (2006), John Mullan points out that a male author writing a novel narrated by a woman in first person has been a custom since the dawn of the English novel:

Oddly enough, the Novel in English began this way, with men writing as women. Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* and *Roxana* (1724), are the supposed first-person accounts of female characters. Defoe chronicles the opportunities and risks of a commercial world, and women are its most prized or most despised commodities. More influentially, in *Pamela*, written in the voice of a servant girl, Richardson conflated the Novel genre with female experience. His novels record secret feelings, and suppose the language of feeling to be peculiarly feminine. Some of this might still apply. For those early pioneers, the Novel was the genre that examined private life and audaciously made heroic the private person. (Mullan 53)

One might argue that even though the first English novelists did this, it was only because they were writing at a time when most women were not educated, and that although they were representing the missing voices of women, they may not have done so convincingly. It is true that at the time, the literary world was male-dominated; that is perhaps why Emily Brontë felt

that she had to make the narrator of the outmost layer of the Russian-doll narrative structure in *Wuthering Heights* a man (Mr Lockwood). However, has anyone questioned whether Emily Brontë is convincing enough in narrating as a male character? Is it only feminist theories that have made critics question a man when he writes a first-person narrative of a woman, but not vice versa?

What is most controversial, then, is that Golden has crossed the boundary of national culture. This is nothing new in the literary world, either. Shakespeare did not only write Histories—one of which I mentioned above—which are set exclusively or mainly in England. His Tragedies, with the exceptions of *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Cymbelline*, are all set outside Britain. It is impossible to list all literary works set outside their authors' linguistic and cultural communities, as the number would indeed be astronomical. I would like to put forward the title of another bestseller which became known at approximately the same time as Golden's novel: *Girl with a Pearl Earring* (1999) by Tracy Chevalier, which had sold three million copies in 36 languages by 2008 (Gent), and like *Memoirs of a Geisha*, has also inspired a major eponymous film (2003). I am not aware of anyone accusing Chevalier of crossing the boundaries of era or culture to narrate in lieu of a Dutch maid living in 17th-century Delft.

Akita asserts that many of the inaccuracies in the film have resulted from the controversial casting of several Chinese actresses, whose makeup, deportment, and English accent did not appear Japanese (2, 9). A Japanese scholar will certainly be aware of the long-standing tradition for Japanese writers to pen stories featuring Chinese characters set in ancient China. Ryunosuke Akutagawa's 'To Shishun' ('Du Zichun'; 1920) and Atsushi Nakajima's 'Sangetsuki' ('A Tale of the Mountain Moon'; 1942) have become classics in Japanese literature, although both have borrowed characters and structures from existing Chinese tales written during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). In contrast, eminent contemporary Japanese writers have written historical novels set in China without borrowing from any existing literary sources, and their works have proven to be great successes. Yasushi Inoue's *Tonko* (*Dunhuang*; Shinchosha, 1965) has become a modern classic and has inspired a film (Daiei, 1988) with exclusively Japanese actors cast as Chinese characters, speaking only Japanese. Masamitsu Miyagitani (1945-) has written approximately thirty historical novels set in China and won at least five awards in Japan for that body of works (Shinchosha). Jiro Asada's (1951-) *Sokyu no Subaru* (*The Pleiades in the Firmament*; Kodansha, 1996-2016), a pentalogy set in the imperial court of the Qing Dynasty, has become a bestseller in Japan and was televised in 2010, scripted and directed by Chinese filmmakers with a primarily Chinese cast (DVDs Happinet 2011). Most of the works remain well-known within the Japanese archipelagos, and I am not aware of readers, viewers, or scholars questioning these Japanese writers about creating out of their imagination Chinese characters living in various Chinese dynasties.

In fact, boundaries are not restricted to gender, national culture, or time. Among others, there are also the boundaries of social class and profession. How can Tracy Chevalier, a middle-class American writer who has long resided in England, have entered the mind of an illiterate Dutch maid living in the seventeenth century? How could Shakespeare have portrayed royalties, both English and foreign, when he himself was a commoner? Readers, playgoers, and critics have not asked those questions because they know, whether consciously or subconsciously, that to put oneself in another's shoes is simply a storyteller's job.

If commentators are asking the question how Golden could have written a novel narrated by a Japanese woman about her life in the 1930s and -40s, then this question follows: Could a

Japanese woman contemporary to Sayuri have written a similar, or better, novel? The answer, of course, is that there need be at least two prerequisites: 1) that the woman has read literature extensively and has written enough fiction to understand the craft of novel-writing; and 2) that the woman has either lived in the geisha world herself, or has done thorough research by reading written documents and conducting interviews with insiders. Of all these five traits, it should be obvious that the last two are essential to the creation of a work of fiction, whereas the first three are not. There is no guarantee that a Japanese woman who lived in 1930s and -40s Japan can write a novel about a geisha contemporary to herself. But if a writer fulfils the last two conditions, then he or she may be able to accomplish the task.

Golden certainly possessed those two prerequisites when he was writing *Memoirs of the Geisha*. He has stated that it took him six years to write the novel, and ten to become a novelist (JAI, Rec., 1:06:16-1:06:23). The introduction to a CNN interview with Golden goes even further and declares that his 'overnight success' came after fifteen years of hard work (CNN), presumably including his student years as well, which resulted in a BA degree of art history, specialising in Japanese art from Harvard College, an MA degree in Japanese history from Columbia University, and an MA in English from Boston University (Golden, inside back cover). In addition to the literary and scholarly backgrounds that he had, he conducted painstaking research during the writing of *Memoirs of a Geisha*:

I had worked very hard to create a sense of easy familiarity with Japanese culture, that I know all these things because, of course, it's not me, it's the geisha: I have to make a geisha look like a geisha, and geisha know these things. So I had to take my reference book off the shelf absolutely every sentence I wrote, to make sure it all seemed believable.

(JAI, Rec., 11:38-11:58)

Golden attended carefully not only to the cultural details of the novel, but also to macroscopic elements such as its overall structure and its point of view. He wrote two complete drafts in the third person before embarking on writing a third draft in the first person (CNN). In an interview with Charlie Rose, Golden affirms the amount of time and energy that he has devoted to mastering the craft of fiction-writing:

Charlie Rose: You also—or, as legend has it, went out and read everything you could find about writing non-fiction.

Arthur Golden: About writing fiction.

R: Fiction, I'm sorry. About writing fiction.

G: Yeah. Sure did.

R: About writing a novel.

G: Yes, I did. Yeah.

G: I read those books, and at the beginning I believed them....I read, and I have to say "rejected" most of what I read.... [Y]ou read and you take what you find valuable. But the things that taught me the most really were the books that I loved. I went and reread and reread and reread the books I admired to figure out how it was done.

(Charlie Rose, 3:13-3:27, 3:44-4:29)

According to Reiko Nagura, a family friend of his mother's generation, Golden studied the works of Dickens and Austen in the library to learn the craft of novel-writing, and also studied

the English translations of Yasunari Kawabata in order to develop a style which would seem as if it had been translated into English from Japanese (Golden, trans. Ogawa, 302, 304).

Golden's extensive research of Japanese culture as well as geisha culture is evident on almost every page of the novel; his knowledge of Japanese art is demonstrated in his descriptions of kimono patterns; the translation-like tone appears in many of the dialogues, where characters address their interlocutors in the third person to show respect towards them (e.g. 'The Chairman is too generous,' 203), as well as in dialogues where superficial formalities are exchanged at length (e.g. greetings between Mother and Mameha, 131). More importantly, it is a work of fiction in which plot and characterization are superbly crafted, which I shall discuss in another section. As argued above, a Japanese female contemporary to Sayuri would have no advantage over Golden in writing a similar novel unless she also devoted a tremendous amount of time and thought to the craft of writing and to the structural and aesthetic elements of the novel itself. To discredit a work solely on account of the author's race or gender, no matter what the author's race or gender may be, would be doing both the work and literary criticism in general a great disservice.

II. *Race over Truth or Truth over Race?*

In their eagerness to apply Orientalism to literary texts which incorporate East-West interactions, some critics may appear too ready to condemn a Westerner's works and defend those of a non-Westerner. Even a writer like Sheridan Prasso is not immune to this blunder. In *Asian Mytique* (2003), Prasso provides us with a collection of interviews with women from a number of Asian countries about social, historical, and sexual issues often misunderstood in the West. Among these interviews is one with Mineko Iwasaki, the main geisha informant for Golden's novel. I believe that Prasso's sincerity in presenting these Asian women as they are and help them have their voices heard in Western media is evident throughout her book, and that these women's narratives as well as Prasso's own are indeed informative and edifying. However, eager to rectify Western misconceptions of Asia, she may have at times sided with her informants against some Western sources even before her interviews began. Before her meeting with Iwasaki, she had read both *Memoirs of a Geisha* by Golden and *Geisha, a Life* (henceforth GL; British edition under the title of *Geisha of Gion*; both editions published in 2002) by Iwasaki, and yet she commits errors when she paraphrases parts of both books, favouring Iwasaki and disfavouring Golden. Prasso writes of the family of Iwasaki:

Miss Iwasaki came from a wealthy, noble family in Kyoto, unlike the poor origins of the fictional Sayuri. I knew this from reading Iwasaki's own memoirs, *Geisha, A Life* (titled *Geisha of Gion* in British publication), which she wrote as a direct rebuttal to Golden's book. (206)

I do not see from where Prasso obtained the idea that Iwasaki had come from a wealthy family. While Iwasaki states in her memoir that her families on both her father's and her mother's sides had been noble (Iwasaki, *GL*, 6-8), she makes it crystal-clear that it was because of her family's poverty that her father decided to entrust several of her elder sisters to geisha houses in Gion:

My parents already had three children at the time, two girls and a boy. The girls' names

were Yaeko and Kikuko. Yaeko was ten and Kikuko was eight. My father was in a quandary because he didn't have enough money to support his parents as well as an independent household. He was discussing his troubles with one of his business associates, a kimono fabric dealer. He talked to my father about the karyukai..

My father met with the owner of the geiko okiya, Iwasaki, of Gion Kobu, one of the best geiko houses in Japan, and one from Pontocho, another of the geiko districts in Kyoto. My father found positions for both Yaeko and Kikuko and was given contract money for their apprenticeships....

...My sisters were devastated at having to leave the safe haven of my grandparents' house. Yaeko never got over her feelings of being abandoned. She remains angry and bitter to this day.

...In the ensuing years my mother bore eight more children. In 1939, financially strapped as always, they sent another one of their daughters, my sister Kuniko, to the Iwasaki okiya as an assistant to the owner. (Iwasaki, *GL*, 10)

Iwasaki's description of her eldest sister Yaeko's feelings is especially telling. She did not want to become an apprentice geisha, and in fact later 'deserted Gion Kobu without fulfilling her obligations to Madame Oima' (Iwasaki, *GL*, 20), and yet her father could find no better option for his pre-puberty eldest daughter. Iwasaki states that more than a decade later, Madame Oima, the owner of the Iwasaki okiya, visited Iwasaki's parents to persuade them to entrust their fourteen-year-old daughter Tomiko to her geisha house as well. The request was granted. However, after seeing Mineko Iwasaki, then Masako and three years of age, Madame Oima paid repeated visits to her family requesting to have Iwasaki as her *atotori*, or heir to her house. According to Iwasaki, she herself, as a young child, asked to stay at the Iwasaki okiya for one night. Later her visits were stretched longer and longer, and even though she had overheard her parents expressing feelings of being unable to bear to let her go, she moved into the house for good at the age of five (Iwasaki, *GL*, Chs. 2-4). If Iwasaki made the decision to enter the geisha house for herself at such a tender age and if her parents did not object, then it is possible that all of them considered life in the Iwasaki okiya a better option than life at home.

Prasso's error in presenting the timeline of events in *Memoirs of a Geisha* is even more intriguing. Sayuri, the narrator of the novel, makes it clear that she is almost twelve when she meets the Chairman, later her love interest, for the first time. The kindness which he demonstrates to her when he sees her crying is such that she makes up her mind to become a geisha in order to be able to find herself in his company again (Golden 106, 113-114). Prasso summarises the final romantic union of Sayuri and the Chairman in a most peculiar way:

Forty years later, The Chairman is married with children. Sayuri tells him, just before he gives her her first-ever kiss...

Every step I have taken in my life since I was a child in Gion, I have taken in the hope of bringing myself closer to you.

(203)

Again, I do not comprehend why Prasso deems this event in the novel to be happening forty years after the two characters' first meeting. The scene above quoted by Prasso takes place in late June or early July in 1949, and Sayuri will be around twenty-nine at the time. (I will spare

the reader the detailed process of my calculations, but whoever has followed the major events of Sayuri's life in the novel will be able to reach the same conclusion.) Therefore, she is finally able to confess her devotion to the Chairman seventeen years after they meet, while she is still a young woman, and gives birth to their son later when she becomes his mistress. Prasso's statement about the Chairman's marital status and his children also seems puzzling. Sayuri, as the child who is almost twelve, estimates at their first meeting that the Chairman can be no older than forty-five (Golden 114). A man of the Chairman's stature in the 1930s would certainly have had a family if he was in his late thirties or early forties. The character of the Chairman will be married when he sees Sayuri for the first time; if widowed, he will have taken another wife. There will be no reason for divorce unless the wife insists, since a wealthy and successful man like him will have much more financial, social, romantic, and sexual freedom than she and his marriage will hardly put any restrictions on him in any way. He will also have fathered children by this age, unless for health reasons, in which case he will probably have adopted at least one boy, usually from his extended family. Prasso's statement 'Forty years later, The Chairman is married with children.' suggests that his marriage and the births of his children occur after the two characters meet for the first time, and is therefore misleading. Geisha are often only half-wives. In Sayuri's own words: 'In the foolish hopes that had been so dear to me since girlhood, I'd always imagined my life would be perfect if I ever became the Chairman's mistress.' (Golden 420) Even at the age of twelve, she has learnt from the geisha world in which she is living that she will never be able to monopolise the Chairman's feelings, or to participate fully in his personal life.

In the discussion at the John Adams Institute, when Meuveubelt cites the assumption of one journalist—who had not read Golden's book—that it must be an 'exotic' (Orientalist) and anti-feminist novel, and then says, 'There must have been many misunderstandings about your novel before people read it.', Golden replies, 'All the time. All the time.' (JAI, Rec., 1:12:57-1:13:04) I firmly believe that Orientalism does exist. I have seen it at work on numerous occasions; I have memories, both personal and collective, of its iniquities, and opinions, both visceral and academic, on its perils. But to have preconceptions about a writer's work, and to dub a Caucasian writer an Orientalist simply because he or she is writing about a non-Caucasian world, certainly goes against the spirit of academia.

Because in today's world of literary criticism, scholars tend to focus so much on theories and ideologies and so little on the writing craft, some of the misconceptions of Golden's novel have been caused by critics overlooking the basic elements of fiction-writing. In the following section, I would like to demonstrate that some conscious choices which the author has made during the writing of the novel are indeed necessary fictional devices to serve Sayuri's narrative.

III. *Plot Devices: The Nuts and Bolts of Fiction-Writing*

It is a truly unfortunate phenomenon in literary criticism that students of literature worldwide are taught to contemplate on theories and ideologies, but hardly ever on how literature is made. The actual techniques of fiction- or poetry-writing are absent from the literary criticism curriculum. In fact, while prosody and versification denote poetry-writing, there is no one-word equivalent in English which describes fiction-writing.

I would like to define first what fiction-writing is from a writer's point of view: Writing fiction is sharing one's view of the world (literally, in the same way a painter does) with the readers by providing them with selected information of a narrative nature in a deliberately arranged order. In order to achieve this, the author has to make a number of decisions. It would hardly be legitimate to discuss a work of fiction without considering the choices which the writer has made in the crafting of the story.

Akita comments thus on the opening of Golden's novel:

Memoirs of a Geisha opens with a chapter titled, most disingenuously, "Translator's Notes," which consists of a soliloquy by "Jakob Haarhuis," a fictional professor of Japanese history at New York University and the fictional translator of the book.

Arthur Golden, alias "Jakob Haarhuis," detaches and distances himself from the story, which allows him to engage in Orientalizing.

(5)

Similarly, Prasso reports that Iwasaki and her husband Jin both view Sayuri's relocation to New York as a flaw in the novel, quoting Jin's remark that a 'successful person in Japan' would not consider immigration into the US (209-210). Regrettably, they do not realise that both the character of Prof. Haarhuis and Sayuri's relocation are fictional devices to serve the narrative. After Golden began working on the third draft of the novel, in first person this time, he discovered that he had written himself into a conundrum. Golden explains:

...when I used the third-person narrator, the narrator could do me this enormous service of stepping away from the narrative whenever I needed him to, him-ish, you know, it, whatever, the voice, to, and explaining things for us....But if the Geisha herself is telling her own story, and she's lived in Kyoto all her life, the trouble is that she can't even know what we don't know. She won't be able to tell the story in a way we understand it.

So I decided that the trick was—I had to get around it like this: she had to, first of all, end up in the United States and spend forty years there at the end of her life. That way, she would develop her own Western sensibility. And then she had to tell the story looking back...through the filter of that Western experience, so that she could see her earlier life in a Western way. And she had to tell the story to a Westerner, not a Japanese....because if she'd told it to a Japanese, she wouldn't bother... (JAI, Rec., 29:07-30:08)

Unless one has experienced first-hand the agony of a writer facing numerous and complicated choices to propel the narrative forward, one may remain blind to the various devices which authors implant in their narratives. In this case, without a Western audience (consisting of even only one person) listening to Sayuri, and without some degree of familiarity with Western culture on her part, the author of the novel simply wouldn't have been able to sustain her long narrative (more than four hundred pages) in English about a world little known not only to non-Japanese people, but to the majority of Japanese people as well.

Sayuri has also been criticised as a character too simple and naïve. Prasso, for instance, calls Sayuri 'the fictional, underdeveloped, child-like devotee of one man' (202). However, this simplicity of Sayuri is also a plot device: unless she is slightly overly inquisitive, and consequently has the life of Gion explained to her, how would the author, in a first-person narrative, be able to do the same for the reader? This technique is not Golden's invention.

Similar devices have been employed in literary masterpieces:

It is admittedly a convention of ghost stories, including *Wuthering Heights* and of some plot-heavy novels such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, to have a baffled narrator to frame the ghastly events.
(Faulks CD 2, Track 11, 2:20-2:31)

In these ghost stories, a 'baffled narrator' serves as a proxy of the reader both to experience the 'ghastly events' and to have them explained to him or her. The narrative of *Memoirs of a Geisha* has been made so transparent by Sayuri's young and inquisitive mind that the novel can be called one where nothing is left unexplained. I would venture to say that this transparency has greatly contributed to its extreme popularity in many parts of the world.

Since indirectness is valued on many occasions in Japanese society, classical Japanese novels may build certain scenes on what is left unsaid and expect the readers to comprehend the characters and the events by reading between the lines. While the fictional world in *Memoirs of a Geisha* is set in Japan, and while its characters are undoubtedly Japanese, it would be erroneous to expect Japanese-ness in the novel's narrative style. Golden declares in no ambiguous terms that his is not a Japanese novel:

This is an unapologetically Western novel. It is not a Japanese novel....The way in which the story is told is very Western. And what's more, Sayuri's way of expressing herself is Western....My excuse is: *Of course, pff, she's lived in New York for forty years.*
(JAI, Rec., 1:22:53-1:24:26)

I have read the novel several times, and have considered it from early on an American work of fiction, marked by the candour, limpidity, optimism, and light-hearted humour in its narrative. I believe that literary licence allows such a novel to exist and flourish, just as it has allowed Japanese novels set in ancient China or English plays set in Denmark or Italy to become great successes.

Prasso's comment on the unlikeliness of one woman devoting herself to one single man all her life also demonstrates a lack of understanding of how fiction works. In truth, one of the basic rules of characterisation in storytelling is that the protagonist must have a strong motive, and we journey alongside her as the story develops, reaches its climax, and concludes. Robert McKee, in his highly acclaimed handbook on screenwriting, *Story*, gives a simple and clear description of what a story, in essence, is:

...in truth there's only one story. In essence we have told one another the same tale, one way or another, since the dawn of humanity, and that story could be usefully called *the Quest*. All stories take the form of a Quest.

For better or worse, an event throws a character's life out of balance, arousing in him the conscious and/or unconscious desire for that which he feels will restore balance, launching him on a Quest for his Object of Desire against forces of antagonism (inner, personal, extra-personal). He may or may not achieve it. This is story in a nutshell.

(196-197)

If we reconsider the storyline of Golden's novel, we will discover that it perfectly fits McKee's description. Sayuri's life is thrown out of balance when she is sold into quasi-slavery at a geisha house, and when she is finally given a glimpse of human kindness, she directs all her

thoughts to her benefactor, her Object of Desire, and embarks on a Quest, which is to become a top geisha so that she will see him again.

Sayuri is almost like a typical Hollywood protagonist in that she is active, strong, motivated, single-minded, and resilient. In fact, Golden's novel may share other characteristics with Hollywood formulae of storytelling. Christopher Vogler, a Hollywood development executive, wrote a seven-page memo on the basic elements of storytelling when he was working as a consultant for Walt Disney Pictures. Drawing on the Hero's Journey, a narrative pattern identified by Joseph Campbell in myths, folk tales, and religious rituals, the memo became so popular that Vogler expanded it into a full-length book, *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure for Writers*, which has remained one of the most important handbooks on the craft of storytelling in English. I do not wish to demonstrate that Vogler's guidelines fit Golden's novel like the glass slipper on Cinderella's foot, but I would like to make some comparisons.

What Vogler terms the Ordinary World and the Special World may be interpreted in Golden's novel as Yoroido, Sayuri's hometown, and Kyoto, or more specifically, Gion. The Call to Adventure occurs when Tanaka Ichiro sees the young Sayuri (her name still being Chiyo) and begins making plans for her and her sister. Sayuri's subconscious Refusal of the Call is presented in her childish belief that Tanaka wants to adopt her and her sister. Sayuri Crosses the Threshold when she is sent to Kyoto with her sister, although not of her own will. She finds her Allies, namely the Chairman and Mameha, meets her Shadow or antagonist, Hatsumomo, her Threshold Guardian, Mother, and goes through a series of ordeals before she reaps her Reward: to become a top geisha. She continues to suffer on the Road Back, when during WWII she has to do menial work like the majority of Japanese people at the time. Her Resurrection occurs when she finally wins the patronage of the Chairman. She Returns with the Elixir when she bears their son and moves to New York, while continuing her relationship with the Chairman until his death. Pumpkin, and perhaps Tanaka also, prove to be Shapeshifters, appearing as Sayuri's Allies initially, but turning out to be her Enemies in the end. One might argue that there is a Trickster side to Sayuri herself, as she can always describe otherwise sombre characters and events in a cheery, humorous way.

I am not attempting to suggest that Golden had read Vogler's ideas and applied them to his own fiction-writing, but the structure of his novel coinciding largely with Volger's formula may well have been one reason for the success that his novel has enjoyed.

Golden expresses his thoughts on the difference between fiction and non-fiction as follows:

I've since come to think that the difference between non-fiction and fiction—the principal difference—is that non-fiction seeks to make you understand things; fiction, I think, seeks to make you experience them.
(*Charlie Rose*, 8:14-8:23)

In his afterword to the Japanese translation of his novel, Golden asserts that he would like his readers to have entered another world and have had access to different times, different places, and the minds of different people (Golden, trans. Ogawa, Vol. II, 297). I hope to have demonstrated in the preceding pages that as Golden states, fiction is written to appeal to the readers' emotions and provide them with quasi-virtual experiences of an imaginary world. To drive the narrative forward, the author necessarily has to employ fictional devices, which may

cause misunderstandings on the critics' or readers' part. However, fictional works are not written as academic or ethnographical documents, and ideologies or literary theories should not be too readily applied to them without any consideration of their literary or aesthetic merit. Fiction should be read for what it is.

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