

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Japan or “Land of the Rising Sun” has a cultural heritage that is called geisha. Geisha literally means “person of the art” (Kaminsky). They are traditional Japanese artist-entertainers (“Geisha and Maiko Girl of Japan (Kyoto)”). They are trained to be a dancer, singer, samishen player, and in other entertaining skills. At first, geisha were men, like minstrels in the medieval Europe. As the number of men taking up the job decreased, women took over (Kaminsky). Geisha is not a prostitute, what they really do is entertaining people with their skills, their witty jokes, and their beauty. They were most popular in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and are still in existence today, although the number is dwindling.

They belong to the *okiya*, the house of the geisha. The owner of the *okiya* treats geisha not as a human being but as property. All the money the geisha girls make goes to the *okiya* because they owe the food, the training fee, their kimono, and

basically everything to the owner of the okiya. In order to get their independence, they should either buy themselves out or find a *danna*, a patron who is willing to buy them out. Arthur Golden captures the life of the geisha in the 1930s in his novel *Memoirs of a Geisha*. It is a modern fairy tale about geisha. “Her story is that of a poor girl who struggles against all odds to find happiness and success in life even includes the standard types found in a typical fairy tale” (Howard). This book tells about the struggle of a girl who climbs up for her success as a geisha. The protagonist shows that all the hard work will get paid off someday. After its release in 1997, *Memoirs of a Geisha* stays in the New York Times bestseller list for two years. It has sold more than four million copies in English and has been translated into thirty-two languages around the world. In 2005, this novel was adopted into a movie under the same title, *Memoirs of a Geisha*.

Arthur Golden, the author of this novel, takes ten years to write this novel. He does an extensive research about the life of a geisha before World War II. He writes this novel based on a study and an interview with a former geisha who now lives in the USA. He writes his fiction and nicely combines it with historical events. He gives us a very detailed description about life in Gion, Kyoto at that time. He tells us a story which is totally different from his own background and his time.

Arthur Golden's brilliant debut novel, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, is a reminder of just how silly the exhortation 'write what you know!' can be. Clearly Golden, a 40-something American male, has never lived anything remotely similar to the experiences of a geisha coming of age in the '30s, the glory days of Kyoto's Gion pleasure district. Yet it is precisely this

vanished world that he re-creates with subtlety, sensuality, and supreme authority, bringing to life characters so complete and idiosyncratic — so fully sprung from the eras he has evoked — that his novel ultimately overwhelms us, as seductive and beguiling as the geisha of its title.

(“Memoirs of a Geisha”)

I will analyze the theme of the novel through the portrayal of the protagonist. Theme is “a brief “mind’s full” on any particular subject; that is, it presents and considers the subject in several of its various aspects.” “Theme, like an essay, should be a short, accurate, and forceful presentation of ideas or descriptions, well contrived as totality or unity.” (Roberts 8). A protagonist is the main character in a novel or a film. A protagonist is usually put in a position where the reader is able to empathize with them, basically the central character in a story or narrative (“What Is a Protagonist?”).

I choose to analyze the theme of the novel through the portrayal of the protagonist, which the author has created as willing to do anything to achieve her dream. She wears poisonous make up, she lets people hurt her, she goes through a very hard training, sells her virginity; and she does so to achieve her dream, which is to be together with the man that she loves.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. What is the theme of the novel?
2. How does the portrayal of the protagonist help in revealing the theme?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purposes of the study are:

1. to reveal what the theme of the novel is.
2. to show how the portrayal of the protagonist helps in revealing the theme.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

I use the library research for my thesis. First I read *Memoirs of a Geisha* as the primary text. I also read a couple of books and compile some data from the Internet so as to support my analysis of theme through the portrayal of the protagonist. Finally, I draw some conclusions from my analysis.

ORGANIZATION OF THESIS

This thesis consists of three chapters, preceded by Abstract, Table of Contents and Acknowledgments. The first chapter is Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. The second chapter is the Analysis of Theme Through the Portrayal of The Protagonist of Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The third chapter is Conclusion, followed by Bibliography and Appendix, which contains the Synopsis of the Novel and the Biography of the Author.