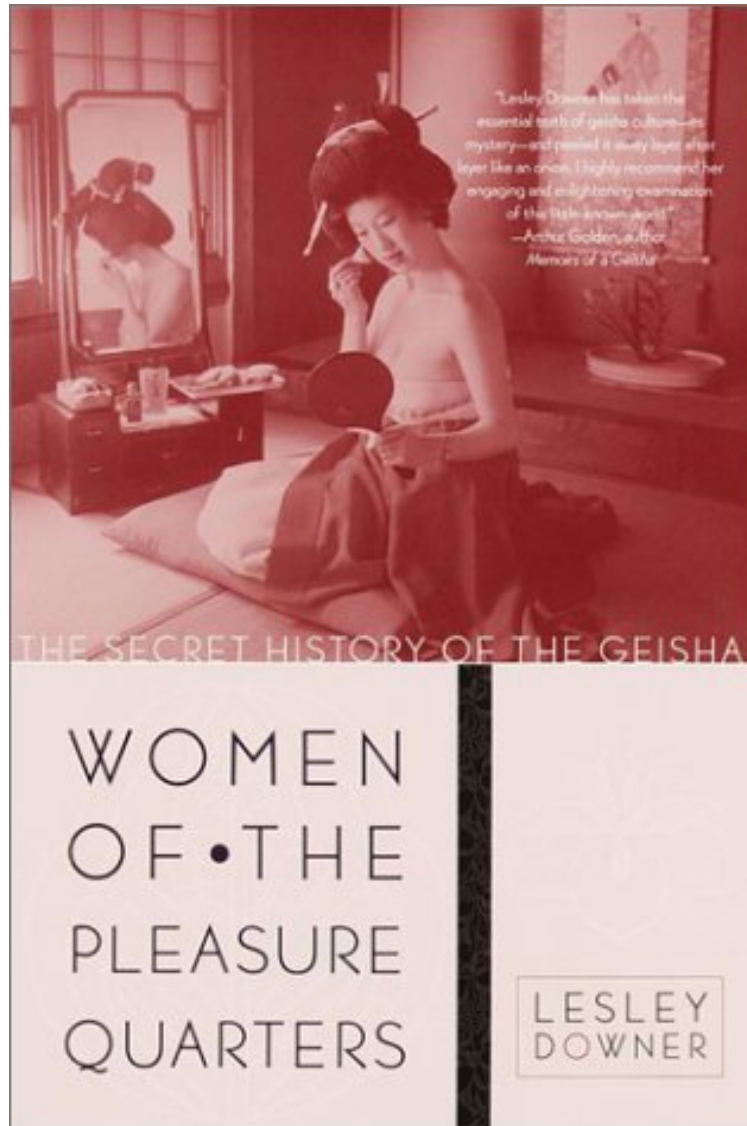


(Download pdf) Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha

Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha

Lesley Downer

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Lesley Downer : Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Women of the Pleasure Quarters: The Secret History of the Geisha:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Interesting...but seems to focus on non-geishaBy S. J. BiceI found this an interesting read, but it seems to focus alot on non-geisha or psuedo-geisha. It does talk quite a bit about prostitution, which does not really factor into high-class geisha, and never has.I think that it focuses on the author a bit

too much as well, and her problems getting into this closed world. While at points it reads as a narrative, at others it gets very dry...the author can not seem to pick a "voice" to stick with. An interesting read, but I do not think that it should be taken a holy grail of Geisha books. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. An interesting counterpoint to Dalby. By SecondCherryI enjoyed reading this book, which acts as a good counterpoint to Liza Dalby's book Geisha (which I notice Downer does not reference even once in the writing, though it must surely have been on her mind). She also, herself, comes across as a great deal more pleasant than Dalby. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. like it. By ranford2very well written and a good read

From critically acclaimed author and Japanese scholar Lesley Downer, an enchanting portrait of the mysterious world of the geisha. Ever since Westerners arrived in Japan, they have been intrigued by Japanese womanhood and, above all, by geisha. This fascination has spawned a wealth of extraordinary fictional creations, from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* to Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha*. The reality of the geisha's existence, though, whether today or in history, has rarely been addressed. Contrary to popular opinion, geisha are not prostitutes but, literally, "arts people." Their accomplishments include singing, dancing, playing a musical instruments; but above all, they are masters of the art of conversation, soothing the worries and stroking the egos of the wealthy businessmen who can afford their attentions. It is this which imbues the geisha with such power and which makes absolute secrecy such a crucial aspect of their work. As denizens of a world defined by silence and mystery, geisha are notoriously difficult to meet and even to find. Lesley Downer, an award-winning writer, Japanese scholar, and consummate storyteller, gained more access into this world than almost any other Westerner ever has and spent several months living among them. In *Women of the Pleasure Quarters*, she weaves together intimate portraits of modern geisha with the romantic legends and colorful historical tales of geisha of the past. From Sada Yakko, who dined with American presidents and had her portrait painted by Picasso, to Koito, a modern-day geisha who maintains her own website, geisha throughout history step out of the pages of *Women of the Pleasure Quarters* to become living, breathing creatures. Looking into such traditions as *mizuage*, the ritual deflowering which was once a rite of passage for all geisha, and providing colorful depictions of the geisha's dress, training, and homes, Downer, with grace, elegance, and respect, transforms their reality in a captivating narrative that both informs and entertains. At once a symbol of a bygone age and an institution more quintessentially Japanese than any other, geisha are a society at a crossroads, struggling to reinvent their place in the new millennium while honoring the traditions of the past. Both instructive and evocative, *Women of the Pleasure Quarters* is an enthralling portrait of a world unlike any other.

From Publishers Weekly Inspired by Arthur Golden's massively popular *Memoirs of a Geisha* to "meet the real geisha" in the last stronghold of geisha training in Japan, Downer skillfully intertwines her profiles of Kyoto personalities and tea-house customs with a fluidly written geisha history that's unabashedly aimed at a Western audience. Author of *On the Narrow Road* and *The Brothers: The Hidden World of Japan's Richest Family*, Downer was no stranger to the country. However, she found the entrance to the "geisha world" heavily guarded. She writes: "I was always an outsider, I could never step through the looking glass." But small successes (finding the right cakes to present to "the mama," a very powerful geisha) and patience eventually won Downer a place at events that are "utterly closed to outsiders." These included an invitation to a young girl's *misedashi* ("store opening"), the "rite of passage" from trainee to geisha. We also learn, for example, of the distinction that has developed between a prostitute and a geisha (which translates as "arts person"), who undergoes intense and lengthy apprenticeships in dance and music. Written in dynamic, highly readable prose, the book is supported by exhaustive research and a lengthy bibliography. Readers who were as smitten with Golden's geisha as Downer was will find this good companion reading. Photos. Copyright 2001 Cahners Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal A British journalist with a passion for Japan, Downer documented the travels of 17th-century Japanese poet Basho in *On the Narrow Road to the Deep North* (1989), delved into Japan's rich and famous with *The Brothers: The Hidden World of Japan's Richest Family* (LJ 6/1/95), and now uncovers the history, society, and subversive culture of the geisha through her diligent research and translations. She leads the reader through 400 years of history, much of which was previously unknown to the outside world, revealing that the first geishas were male and describing the rituals and delicate arts practiced by the select few. In addition, she explores why women may find themselves drawn to this way of life today. Downer sees this culture as declining but not dying. The embodiment of love and passion has, for hundreds of years, been the domain of the geisha, and to a people for whom these emotions have rarely been a part of everyday life, the geisha will remain a living symbol of romance. Yet while Downer has done a more-than-adequate job of researching and relating this information, plowing through her book can be a chore. Surprisingly, she has made somewhat sordid situations rather pedantic, and it is disappointing that she is not more perceptive on the absence of much change in the role of women over the geisha's history. Suitable for academic and public libraries. Kay Meredith Dusheck, Univ. of Iowa, Iowa City Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Booklist Since the 1997 publication of Arthur Golden's novel, *Memoirs of a Geisha*, the geisha of Japan have captivated world readers. Downer's fascinating book is a combination of the history of the geisha and a study of the contemporary world of the geisha. When journalist Downer began her research in

Japan, people were reluctant to talk to her because they feared misinterpretation and were also mindful of the secretive nature at the heart of the profession. But when she finally broke through the cultural barrier, she found a wealth of information. She learned the history of the geisha: how they developed from courtesans to become the top entertainers in their day. She was allowed into exclusive teahouses and was able to see maiko (geisha-in-training) being made up, having their hair done, and entertaining. Throughout the book, she muses on the fate of the modern geisha, as other sources of entertainment threaten to crowd them out. Downer concludes that because of what they represent--romance, fantasy, the golden days--the institution won't die out. Kristine Huntley Copyright American Library Association. All rights reserved