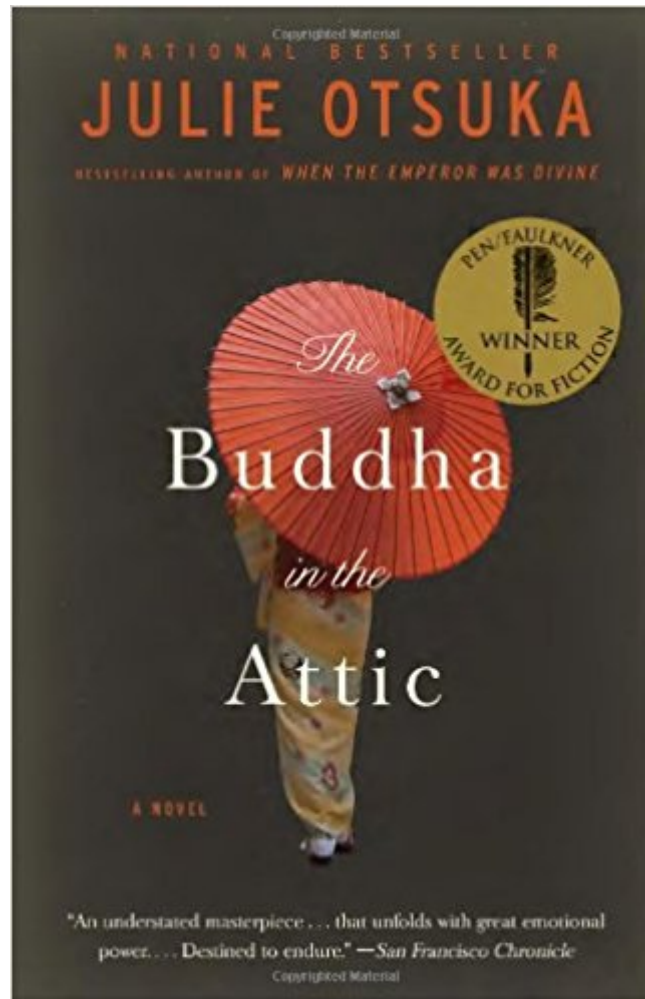


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The Buddha In The Attic (Pen/Faulkner Award - Fiction)



Synopsis

Winner of the PEN/Faulkner Award For Fiction National Book Award and Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist A New York Times Notable Book A gorgeous novel by the celebrated author of *When the Emperor Was Divine* that tells the story of a group of young women brought from Japan to San Francisco as "picture brides" nearly a century ago. In eight unforgettable sections, *The Buddha in the Attic* traces the extraordinary lives of these women, from their arduous journeys by boat, to their arrival in San Francisco and their tremulous first nights as new wives; from their experiences raising children who would later reject their culture and language, to the deracinating arrival of war. Once again, Julie Otsuka has written a spellbinding novel about identity and loyalty, and what it means to be an American in uncertain times.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Julie Otsuka works magic, inventing an unwavering plural voice to illuminate the hidden experience of second-class women, Japanese mail-order brides in 1920s California. The device seems too ambitious at first but quickly yields a textured atmosphere, a sort of immense and important existence unlike anything you've ever read. Then you can't stop reading, greedily absorbing her every precise and haunting observation. And don't be fooled: Otsuka is as fierce and desperate a commentator on America's paradoxes and cruelties as the best of them.

Two recent issues of "Granta, The Magazine of New Writing" featured chapters of Julie Otsuka's

forthcoming novel "The Buddha in the Attic." The first chapter, featured in Granta 114, and titled "Come, Japanese!" left me completely floored and I had to pause and think quite some time before continuing with the rest of the issue. The style of writing in the third person was extremely effective in my opinion. The subject matter was so intense, and so ultimately sad, unjust and horrifying, that a less dispassionate style of telling this story would have rendered it sensationalist. It is powerful enough to just "list the facts." Once one "gets" what is being told in the stories of these very different Japanese women with a common future, you hurt for them and wish retroactively, that you could have done anything to make some of their lives better. Then in the most recent issue of Granta (115) I was thrilled another chapter of Ms. Otsuka's forthcoming book had been featured: "The Children". Same effect. I had already determined to purchase this book, or several copies as soon as it was published, after reading the first excerpt. I am not a reviewer, but am a reader of serious literature and a human rights activist and advocate. I loved this book. It is part of American history. The writing is spectacular.

We are a book group of 12 and have been together for 12 years. We are mothers and wives. Some work - some don't. We gather once a month to talk about the book, but mostly talk about our kids. We are like most women in most book groups - opinionated, sometimes intellectual, sometimes irreverent. We always have fun. We are good friends. This is our first official book review. We chose "Buddha" before it was released - it was not yet on any top ten or top 100 list, bucket list, or best-seller list - lists we often choose from. There were no reviews. We entered our reading with no pre-existing sway. Some loved "Buddha" - others not so much. The book provoked great debate. It was a book we actually discussed at length. Together we share, in a less-than-perfect attempt at "collective voice": The happy hausfrau cum MSW, LCSW loved this work of poetry. "The form punched the story beautifully: basic humanity crumbles in the face of fear, war sucks, three pages of rape is a drop in ocean of what women have suffered in and out war time. Each paragraph (stanza?) told a hundred stories. This one small book told volumes of tales in plain, rhythmic language; like the breath and beating hearts of each individual she describes, but collectively! And what about the title of the book? And the single sentence in the text that refers to it?? Is the Buddha just a little piece of identity hidden but preserved, watching over the house? Or a representation "self/spirit" hidden away, denied, stifled in the dusty attic with with other ghosts? Identity and self quietly preserved and celebrated? Or a God demoted, obsolete and even dangerous to recognize in a new land?" 4 Stars The marketing consultant couldn't get past page pp. 19 to 21 and tried three times. "The book lacked character development." 1 Star One rockin' housewife found the book to be

stylistically superior in its deviation from a traditional narrative form. "Through her use of first person plural the author captures 'a people' rather than individual characters; she powerfully and effectively illustrates the Japanese migration to America culminating in the war's effect on the culture. Otsuka's stylistic use of contrary statements creates a denser, richer and ultimately cleaner and more concise work." 5 Stars

Une femme de moyenne age thought that the book failed to connect with the reader in a meaningful emotional way due to the use of the multiple character list format. "At the beginning of the book the novelty of this writing device seemed interesting but by the end of the book it seemed like it was a grocery list of people and activities that served to minimize, instead of enhance, the development of empathy and understanding with the characters. I simply lost interest in reading the lists." 1 Star

The diabetes doctor, chocolate loving mother thought the book an exquisite piece of prose that effectively described the collective experience of female Japanese immigrants in the U.S. "The book described the hopes and dreams and illuminated the suffering, challenges and sometimes the happiness they discover in their new homeland." 5 Stars

The desperate housewife found the book piquing her interest in the first chapter. "The varied snippets of the many Japanese wives' thoughts set the stage for what promised to be an interesting book. Little did I realize that the author's use of multiple voices would go on (and on and on . . .) throughout the book. I soon found myself losing interest and becoming frustrated at not knowing even one person's entire story. The promise of the first chapter never came to fruition -- disappointing." 1 Star

One member, an avid reader and former expatriate, found the narrative quite compelling. "I likened the style of prose to a conversation between friends, or documentation of an oral history project." 4 Stars

The crazy professor, but mostly sane mother said: "The book was composed of many quick and beautiful brush strokes that painted a picture of Japanese women's experiences as they tried to navigate a new life during a very difficult time in US history; however, I yearned for the author to slow down and depict the events more purposefully and with greater detail." 1 Star

The teacher of many found the book to be very thought provoking and relevant. "The multiple nameless characters brought home the sheer magnitude of the injustices endured by this entire community. I also found the historical parallels interesting. Buddha in the Attic reminds us that fear and ignorance have spurred the mistreatment of entire races and cultural groups throughout history, and it is sadly still happening in modern day America. Many important reminders and lessons in this book." 4 Stars

The cynical realist said that at the risk of being skewered by the aforementioned intellectuals; found this book to be an enjoyable read despite the serious subject matter. "Though it is narrated in an atypical style, I found the snippets of many nameless people's lives provided a collective glimpse into one of our nation's 'dirty little secrets'. The book is easy to read whether you do it in a few minutes at a time or

in one sitting. At completion, this beautiful little book also looks lovely on a coffee table!" 4 Stars
 The multi-tasking mom thought the book started out very enjoyable and is poetically written, but after a few chapters became boring and annoying. "Everything was 'listed' and nothing had any depth. I would have rather followed the lives of 5 women instead of 50 stories never followed through. At least the author kept the story short because with any more pages I don't think I would have finished it." 1.5 Stars
 The one who recommended the book, and main-stream-reader in the group had hoped her recommendation would be a good read for all but because of the non-traditional literary style, worried about the group's response. "I thought the subject matter might make the book a 'page-turner' but as I made my way through the first chapter, quickly determined that the writing would lend to a discussion more on style and less on content. Though I too, struggled with the 'lists', I appreciated the author's research efforts and respect her daring experimentation in style. I believe that in the end, Otsuka's choice to write in a collective voice imparted an eloquence and poignancy in her story telling. I was thrilled that the book provided our group a vibrant discussion." 3.5 Stars

; I was very disappointed with the format and voice of the book; first person plural. This was a book of lists. telling the story of Japanese women who came to the USA in the early 1900's. The format was so redundant I ended up skimming a lot of the material. This would have had much more appeal if the author had followed the journeys of several women and the families they raised.

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