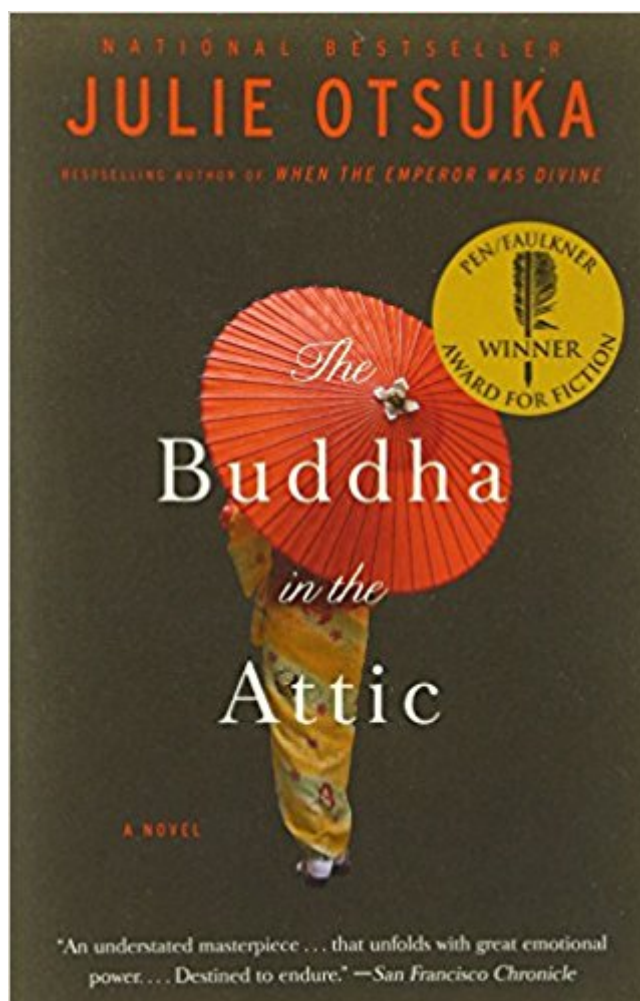


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# The Buddha In The Attic (Pen/Faulkner Award - Fiction)



## 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

“Exquisitely written. . . . An understated masterpiece that unfolds with great emotional power. . . . Destined to endure.” *The San Francisco Chronicle*

“Arresting and alluring. . . . A novel that feels expansive yet is a magical act of compression.” *Chicago Tribune*

“A stunning feat of empathetic imagination and emotional compression, capturing the experience of thousands of women.” *Vogue*

“Otsuka’s incantatory style pulls her prose close to poetry. . . . Filled with evocative descriptive sketches and hesitantly revelatory confessions.” *The New York Times Book Review*

“A fascinating paradox: brief in span yet

symphonic in scope, all-encompassing yet vivid in its specifics. Like a pointillist painting, it's composed of bright spots of color: vignettes that bring whole lives to light in a line or two, adding up to a vibrant group portrait.

**The Seattle Times** "Mesmerizing. . . . Told in a first-person plural voice that feels haunting and intimate, the novel traces the fates of these nameless women in America. . . . Otsuka extracts the grace and strength at the core of immigrant (and female) survival and, with exquisite care, makes us rethink the heartbreak of eternal hope. Though the women vanish, their words linger."

**More** "Spare and stunning. . . . By using the collective 'we' to convey a constantly shifting, strongly held group identity within which distinct individuals occasionally emerge and recede, Otsuka has created a tableau as intricate as the pen strokes her humble immigrant girls learned to use in letters to loved ones they'd never see again."

**O, The Oprah Magazine** "With great daring and spectacular success, she has woven countless stories gleaned from her research into a chorus of the women's voices, speaking their collective experience in a plural 'we,' while incorporating the wide range of their individual lives. . . . The Buddha in the Attic moves forward in waves of experiences, like movements in a musical composition. . . . By its end, Otsuka's book has become emblematic of the brides themselves: slender and serene on the outside, tough, weathered and full of secrets on the inside."

**Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel** "A gorgeous mosaic of the hopes and dreams that propelled so many immigrants across an ocean to an unknown country. . . . Otsuka illuminates the challenges, suffering and occasional joy that they found in their new homeland. . . . Wrought in exquisite poetry, each sentence spare in words, precise in meaning and eloquently evocative, like a tanka poem, this book is a rare, unique treat. . . . Rapturous detail. . . . A history lesson in heartbreak."

**Washington Independent Review of Books** "[Otsuka] brazenly writes in hundreds of voices that rise up into one collective cry of sorrow, loneliness and confusion. . . . The sentences are lean, and the material reflects a shameful time in our nation's past. . . . Otsuka winds a thread of despair throughout the book, haunting the reader at every chapter. . . . Otsuka masterfully creates a chorus of the unforgettable voices that echo throughout the chambers of this slim but commanding novel, speaking of a time that no American should ever forget."

**Minneapolis Star-Tribune** "Daring. . . . Frequently mesmerizing. . . . Otsuka has the moves of cinematographer, zooming in for close-ups, then pulling back for wide lens group shots. . . . [Otsuka is] a master of understatement and apt detail. . . . Her stories seem rooted in curiosity and a desire to understand."

**Bookpage** "Precise, focused. . . .

Penetrating. . . . See it and you'll want to pick it up. Start reading it and you won't want to put it down. . . . A boldly imagined work that takes a stylistic risk more daring and exciting than many brawnier books five times its size. Even the subject matter is daring. . . . Specific, clear, multitudinous in its grasp and subtly emotional. •The Huffington Post

Julie Otsuka was born and raised in California. She is the author of the novel *When the Emperor Was Divine* and a recipient of the Asian American Literary Award, the American Library Association Alex Award, and a Guggenheim Fellowship. She lives in New York City.

Incredibly well written description of the agony so many Japanese 'war brides' had to suffer from the moment they left their homes in Japan, their arduous journey across the ocean, their hopes, and fears described in surprisingly poetic style, making one part of their difficult journey and their great expectations only to be shattered by brutal reality when they arrived. Their dreams did not come through, they found themselves in virtual slavery, providing free labor and often badly mistreated by their husbands with no way out...They bore it in silence, suffered unbelievable hardship in silence and submission, something that they had been taught by their mothers in Japan. And then the ultimate punishment, being accused of collaborating with the Japanese aggressors in the war and just because of their Japanese roots they have to leave their homes, farms shops, and they are shipped to internment camps. The most soul wrenching chapter is at the end when we witness the reaction of their former neighbors. An unforgettable read!! Wonderfully presented.

A new culture, a new language, strange customs and faces surround you. The new culture must be accepted and become yours, even those of white skinned strangers whose faces are different, whose language is impossible to pronounce, and whose habits of daily living would not gain the approval of your mother. You must accept the loveless labor and back-breaking work never before experienced. How can anyone be deceived into believing the lies and promises of freedom, wealth and easy living in America. How can anyone let the deceiver into her bed at night? The kow-towing Japanese woman born in Japan! The woman who must face the challenges . The Buddha must be stored in the attic, kept in the recesses of the mind but never forgotten.Otsuka has captured the essence of the Japanese woman's mind during the era of Japanese "picture brides" and the following decades of motherhood and family, up to the beginning of WW2. Her story is well told and well researched. Those readers who could not tolerate the "endless lists" in the book failed to recognize the reasoning and the effectiveness of inclusivity. The lists included all types of people,

activities, habits, places, customs...whatever needed to be discussed...to cover everything and all things. To limit the story to one person, place or problem, is tantamount to failure in capturing a broad, complete picture of a specific ethnic group coping with abnormal circumstances. My mother was of that generation, though she did not arrive in America as a "picture bride." My father, who had emigrated to America, went back to Japan to marry my mother and bring her back to this country. Nor was my mother from a poor family looking for a better life and future in the prosperous land of the free. Her parents were well-to-do landowners. She was not permitted to marry until her older sister married; thus, she was already 25, almost 26, old for marriage by the standards of the day, when she and my father were married. She was an accomplished woman, having taught in a special school for sewing and related classes. But like the picture brides of Otsuka's story, she had not expected the dramatic change in lifestyle and the hardships she would have to endure. I learned much of the Otsuka story through my mother who never forgot the easy life she led in Japan. The most important quality of character that the first generation Japanese could and would display and relay to their descendants was undoubtedly what pulled them through, with dignity, the so-called "relocation" of Japanese during WW2: Gaman. Gaman is reflected by perseverance and an almost stoic will to survive with dignity.

This type of novel is not a book I would normally read; however, I found "The Buddha in the Attic" by Julie Otsuka an absolutely delightful and interesting read. I picked up this volume at the library and because I have always had an interest in Japanese martial and cultural arts, I decided to read it. It is a short (129 pages) novel, and it was so compelling I finished it in a few hours. This is a novel about Japanese women who came to America in the early 1900s. They came from different parts of Japan and they came by ship. They were motivated to come to America by Japanese men who had written them to be their wife. These women only photographs of the men along with their letters. This book tells of the hardships and difficult times, but this tale is also about courage and the ability to adjust to a new country with men who often lied to them. It is a book about Japanese families and what they had to endure with being strangers in the U.S. This is also a story about what many Japanese people had to adjust to when World War 11 began and they were sent to camps. The strength and determination these ladies showed makes this book a must read for anyone who desires to understand the heart soul of the Japanese people. A great read. Rating: 4 Stars. Joseph J. Trunciale (Author: The Samurai Soul: An old warrior's poetic tribute).

You'll either love it or hate it! I enjoyed the first chapter and got hooked into buying it for my kindle,

thinking that the author's technique was an interesting way of creating picture of the many different women who were brought/sent to America from Japan in the 1920s. I thought that eventually a few characters would be developed and one would get a more in depth picture of some of the women. Instead it was a tiresome list of: some liked it, some hated it, some enjoyed it, some were revolted by it, and so on and so on and so on. Just like a tapestry may be beautiful when looked at as a whole, and there may be some added interest in looking at a small portion of the needlework and admiring the intricacies of the threads, I do not think that I would want to examine each and every inch in that manner. When I first bought the book, having only read the sample sent by , I felt cheated that the book looked so short. By halfway, I couldn't wait for it to end. So very disappointing.

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