

Farewell to manzanar

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The novel *Farewell to Manzanar* contains several levels of irony, beginning with the title of the novel in comparison with its subject matter. This irony can be found in the fact that the protagonist-narrator Jeanne Wakatsuki expresses through the events of the story her inability to say farewell to the place that housed her family for several years during the internment. Her youth and early adulthood are spent in direct contrast with the novel's title, as she has had haunting memories of the place that was both home and prison to her family. She spends the length of the novel regaling her readers with the memories of Manzanar that have remained etched in her mind for decades.

Irony also exists in the situation faced by the Japanese men who lived in America at the time. This situation is embodied in the life and story of Papa, Jeanne Wakatsuki's father. He is labeled a traitor in the American society in which he lives because of his status as an immigrant. The irony in this lies in the fact that in order to become a resident of America, he had to abandon the country of his birth, in effect committing an act of treason and sedition.

He finds himself abandoned by the country he has chosen in favor of his own, and is therefore left in limbo. Having made a choice to embrace America and live here, that choice is ironically thrown back into his face, as he has been branded as an outsider who could never belong. He has given up so much to come to this country—even the place in his samurai order, and the irony of the situation is that it has proven to be as inhospitable (or even more so) as he had considered the Japan he left behind.

The boys of fighting age in the novel also face irony in the fact that they are forced to make a choice regarding their allegiance—whether to Japan or to the United States. What is ironic is that many of them feel torn between the two places, having a love for each. In crying “ Yes, Yes” to the pledge of allegiance to the states, the young Japanese men agree to not just to fight for the country they love and live in but against the other country they love and whose heritage they share.

If, however, they respond in the opposite manner by saying “ No, no” then what appears to be an opposing prospect ends up feeling strangely the same—fighting for a country they love while fighting against one they also love. In fact, the opposing responses ironically end up having almost exactly the same result as they get deported to Japan if they do not pledge their allegiance to America and sent to war (also in Japan) if they do.

Jeanne Wakatsuki faces many losses during the childhood she spent in Manzanar. She loses not only carefree and happy times with her family, but her paternal influence and the ability to live in a non-fabricated world of freedom. The time spent in Manzanar is hard on her family, and the strain put on her mother and father during that time spills over into her life at that period.

While she is a spirited child who is unaware of the anomalous nature of her surroundings, she is still faced with the tensions felt by her father and the effect it has on her mother. Because of this, she loses the happy times she could have had with them were situations better. She also loses quality time with her father, whose life and psyche go on a downward spiral once they

move into Manzanar. She writes, “ Papa’s life ended at Manzanar, though he lived for twelve more years after getting out” (Houston 195).

The true Papa figuratively dies as he becomes emotionally unbalanced and unable provide the secure paternal guidance she needs during her formative years. She also loses her freedom in a way that is at first unknown to her. Yet, the family was unable to leave that area for a long period, and during that time she missed out on simple pleasures of family trips across the country and perhaps even to Japan, the home of her culture and ancestors.

Work Cited

Houston, Jeanne Wakatsuki. *A Farewell to Manzanar*. New York: Random House, 1973.