

Good the modernization analysis of "the buddha in the attic" book review example

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The 2011 publication of the Otsuka's literary fiction tells the story of Japanese mail order brides who arrived in San Francisco little after the Second World War. Through the force of her language and the poetic elements in the style of writing, Otsuka creates a riveting recount of the Japanese women's desire to live the American dream. The author uses one of the most unorthodox but effective style of writing to relate the story of these women. Almost all of the story is presented in the first person plural narration form where the author uses the term " we" to refer to these Japanese women who have come in the hope of finding a better life, but have to endure the harsh conditions. Additionally, the author uses the pronoun " we" to refer to all of the Japanese who resided in the America. In contrast, there is the periodic use of " they" refers to their children and the Japanese men. But, the term " they" inexplicably refer to the Americans who regarded the Japanese at the " other" in their country. The writer will show that Otsuka sees modernization as a positive and negative process as it has an impact on both the immigrants and the citizens in the host countries. Julie Otsuka's *The Buddha in the Attic* gives a general overview of the history of Japanese women who had come to the United States as picture brides or mail order brides and who had met their husbands for the first time on the docks even though many of these girls were thirteen and fourteen years old. The fact that over a century ago women were had limited options for marriage makes the book one for much debate in the modern world. The novel focuses on the story of a these young Japanese girls, who " were mostly virgins," (1). They came " from the city and wore stylish city clothes, but many more of us came from the country and on the boat we wore the

same old kimonos we'd been wearing for years," (1) This harsh visual picture of the " faded hand-me-downs from our sisters that had been patched and redyed many times," (1) evokes in the reader a sense of pity for the young girls who came from the mountains and had never seen the sea before except in pictures, (1).

As Otsuka attempts to give the general treatment of these women she does not present no main character and the story the plural form of the first person narrative. Unlike Otsuka's other works, *The Buddha in the Attic* uses the choral narrative form. Still, the author successfully traces the extraordinary lives of these women as they journeyed by boat to San Francisco. The women exchange the photographs of their future husbands even before they decided whether or not they like each other or which island they were from, (1). Instead they imagined the uncertainty of their futures in the New World. The author also traces the arrival of these women and the arduous events that surround their first nights as wives to the cruelty of their struggles while picking fruits and scrubbing floors that belonged to white women. Additionally, Otsuka looks at the numerous struggles that these women face in trying to acquire and master a new language along with a new culture; the challenges they face during childbirth; their roles as mothers attempting to bring up their children who eventually reject their Japanese culture and history, and the racial issues surrounding during the war.

The first chapter sets the tone for the rest of the novel as the author shows quickly that the dreams of the Japanese young girls would be marred by the hardships to come. When the girls get off the boats, they are greeted with a

gathering of men wearing knitted caps and old black coats and not the handsome men that they had in the pictures. They quickly faced the realities that the photographs were at least twenty years old and this proved that they were dealt a blow that they would not survive fully. "First Night" recreates the devastation that the women experienced on the first night with their new husbands. The chapter is a major event in the book as Otsuka shows the shattered dreams of these young girls and evokes a sense of sadness, despite the humor in some of the experiences. There is no clear distinction between the voices of the girls in these experiences, but the readers can enjoy the rhythmic nature of the words as Otsuka pulls the readers along in the horrifying experiences of the women bleeding for days after their sexual encounters with these men.

Otsuka does not focus on a single woman or even two women, but instead maintains the collective voice throughout most of the novel. In fact, she focuses on the community as a whole and does not leave any of the characters out. The readers continue to share the horror of being a mail order bride as these young Japanese girls work the fields with their husbands, while some face cruel beatings from their husbands and run away to become prostitutes. Additionally, it is clear that some of the women are unhappy, while some are happy and this allows the readers to understand that the conditions of these women varied according to the situation that they faced. The symbolic nature of the decisions that the women make throughout the novel adds to the Otsuka's belief that there are possibilities in the worse situations. The women constantly break away from their oppressive situations and explore new possibilities.

Arguably, Otsuka's style is remarkable on a number of levels as the craftsmanship of her style of using the plural form of the first person narrative allows the reader to compare her style of writing to that of a juggler who skillfully balances a number of events, even while keeping the readers riveted to the events in the book. Additionally, Otsuka refuses to remain focused on the events in the life of one immigrant and this allows one to see the endless possibilities that life has to offer. The injustice meted out to the Japanese women comes as the events of the Second World War unfold and the women are grouped as a single entity despite the fact that they are dramatically different. The dramatic irony becomes apparent as the immigrants console themselves with the thought that it was better to suffer by marrying a stranger in America rather than marry and grow old in their native lands.

Otsuka uses parallel sentences to lead off the emotional experiences of these women. In " Babies" the chapter is riddled with repetition or " We gave birth" In fact almost sixty of the sentences in the chapter begins with the phrase, and ultimately leads to the devastating conclusion that " We gave birth but the baby had already died in the womb and we buried her, naked, in the fields, beside a stream, but have moved so many times since we can no longer remember where she is." One could say that this is the author's style of evoking sympathy from the reader as the use of the repetition adds to the strength of the collective voices of these women and leaves the readers enthralled in the emotional power. Of course it also adds to the paranoia that the women face in their confusion.

The truth is that the events in Otsuka's book are similar to the different

dating websites in the modern society. Men often mislead women with their advertisements and these women fall blindly for the images they see on the websites. In the end, they face challenges that are similar to the challenges that the Japanese women face when they land for the first time. The setting is vital to the analysis of the novel as it is almost like one of the characters in the novel. Otsuka shows that these women journey to a land that is different from those that they have encountered before. This land should have offered them the opportunity for a better life, but the conditions that the Japanese women faced was unlike any dream that represented the American Dream. To these women, the idea of being in American is an exotic dream, and their homeland was one of a vast expanse of wasteland. Still, the harsh conditions they faced in the lands of dreams only appeared harsh at first, but in the end the Japanese women benefitted from being in a free country.

When one thinks of the history behind the two named countries in the book, one is forced to think of war between America and Japan and the impact it had on those who grew up in California. It is therefore ironic that Otsuka chooses to set the novel in San Francisco amidst the negative history. Yet, the author writes the novel during an era when the Muslims have taken credit for the September 2011 attacks despite the fact that America offers the opportunities for a better life for everyone. In the novel, the Japanese were the enemy, and in the present, the Arabs and the Muslims are the enemies, yet they live in the land that brings them hope. One could argue that Otsuka writes of past events that could easily pass for the present conditions. In fact, she tells a story that needed to be told, but the lesson is lost on some individuals as the history forget to mention the war between Japan and

America and this has probably led to the repeat experience with the Muslim world.

Nonetheless, the theme of immigration and the conditions that are associated with immigration to foreign lands is a cause for concern. The Japanese are not unique to the harsh conditions that greet immigrants despite the views that America is a safe haven for everyone. The harsh reality that Otsuka does not state explicitly comes through the clear analysis of the racism that still exists in the society against blacks. But, this modern view of the challenges of adjusting to a new culture remains as a point of contention in the world today. The truth is that individuals will face hardships wherever they go. The idea of false advertisement of person or wealth will continue to be a problem around the world as individuals crave the need to make a better life for self. The question remains on the lips of everyone: Is modernization a negative or positive process?

The truth is that modernization is both negative and positive and the individuals who are involved are left to suffer the harsh conditions of racism on many levels as they are seen as outsiders rather than individuals who can add to their culture. Most Western readers would prefer not to accept the harsh truth that modernization is hard on everyone as individuals face the dilemma of adjusting to a new way of life. Those individuals who have lived through the experience of individualism will find it difficult to appreciate the grey masses that many individuals face as they try to find new opportunities. Otsuka breaks away at the traditional conventions of individualism and creates a novel that deals with the collective experiences of many women. In fact, there is no evidence of a traditional plot or well-defined characters, but

this does not detract from the views that modernization has a negative impact on immigrants. Otsuka writes: " Because if our husbands had told us the truth in their letters - they were not silk traders, they were fruit pickers, they did not live in large, many-roomed houses, they lived in tents and in barns and out of doors, in the fields, beneath the sun and the stars - we never would have come to America to do the work that no self-respecting American would do," (" Whites") Clearly, the changes in the way of life of these individuals had a negative impact on the way they saw the new society.

But, the truth is that these immigrants adjusted to the conditions that they faced and they tried not to draw attention to self as they wandered the clean streets, (" Whites"). Despite the fact that the Japanese women tried to dress and walk like the Americans and walk in large groups, they are still hurt by the harsh treatment they received from the Americans. These visual imagery adds to the haunting memories that these women faced simply because they wanted a better life for themselves. Additionally, the development and changes that the Japanese endured encompassed the changes that were made to their names. One may see the change as a simple act, but Otsuka hints at the efforts to make the new generation of Japanese more modern and added to the way that these children disregarded the past and the culture. In fact, Otsuka writes: " Etsuko was given the name Esther by her teacher, Mr. Slater, on her first day of school," (The Children). 'It's his mother's name,' she explained. To which we replied, 'So is yours,'" (The Children).

According to the author, modernization affects everyone as the social

changes in the society leads to modernization. The arrival of the Japanese women brought a number of changes that would ultimately change the culture of those living in San Francisco. The women brought with them a language and their kimonos that fascinated the whites that they worked for. In fact, some of the men required that they speak their native language and dress in their traditional way, if only so that they could enjoy a sexual experience. Still, the integration of the Japanese changed the way that the Americans saw them and eventually, their children had an easier time as they were born in American and were bi-racial.

But even though, the Japanese women secured a solid future for their children, they faced the problem of adjusting to the new environment at the time of their arrival in the country. Hence, one could say that Otsuka believed that the process of modernization had a greater negative impact on these women who despite trying to work and save to pay their way back to their native country, they could not afford it in the end. These women had left their homeland as laborers working in Yamaguchi rice fields or the brothels in Osaka became laborers in the fields in California and maids for the white women in the mansions that they could only dream of as their homes. Still, they adjusted to the development and changes around them and this proves Otsuka's belief in the resilience of the Japanese women.

In fact, one can truly say that these women lost themselves in the process as they eventually learnt how to change their names and way of life in order to fit into this new society. Modernization, in general, demands that there be a framework on which to compare. In order for these women to become modernized, they had to change into a pattern that was different from their

known pattern. These women were not expecting to marry older men and live in abject poverty, but when they first arrived in America, they realized that they had been lied to and that their lives would be difficult. Of course, the changes brought with it suffering but the Japanese women eventually learnt to accept the negative treatment of their husbands even as they ran away and embraced a life of prostitution. In addition, the women accept the poor living conditions even as the single cat hid from the looters who attempted to break into their homes, (" Traitors). Nonetheless, they rose above the challenges of their lives and created a better life for selves by surviving and creating businesses and homes with their children and their husbands until the whispers of World War II became a reality.

In concluding, Otsuka creates a profound historical review of the hardships that the Japanese women faced when they arrived in San Francisco. The author uses a unified voice to create the collective hardships that comes with modernization. The changes that these women encountered had a negative impact on their lives as they struggled to racism and the violation of their pride and the rape that they endured by their husbands. Instead of relying on the traditional conventions of narrative writing, Otsuka take the novel to a higher level with the poetic and rhythmic revelation of a truth that the society would prefer to keep hidden. But, the truth is that these picture brides were lied to by the men who they thought that they could trust. While this happened nearly a hundred years ago, there is still the cycle of pretentious males and females who mislead their counterparts across the print and electronic media. The reality is that there is no difference in the way men mislead women across the modern media about their wealth and

physical appearance and in the end, the vulnerable believers fall victims to modernization.

Clearly, modernization is inevitable in all societies as individuals search for a better way of life. Many will face the challenges of adjusting to a new way of life, and many will have to live with the scars of adjusting to a new life. The historical allusions in the novel are easier to read than if it had appeared in non-fictional works as the simple language and short sentences that Otsuka uses makes the events come alive. Despite the complexities of the use of the plural first person narration, the reader can easily grasp the fact that the events in the novel impacted a number of individuals and not just a few. And, while many Americans would prefer to forget the events that occurred by not teaching this reality in the schools, Otsuka does a remarkable job of integrating the role of modernization in the changes of the cultures and the challenges that comes with combining two or more cultures.

Works Cited

Otsuka, Julie *The Buddha in the Attic*, 2011, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, Random House Publishers, Print