

### ***The Swimmers* by Julie Otsuka**

This recently released novel has the feel of two books sharing one main character. In the early chapters Otsuka introduces the swimmers who consider the underground pool “their place”. The regular swimmers come consistently to escape the pressures of the world walking on the street above their heads. The regulars participate in lap swimming. The routine of the process provides security. In fact recognizing each other in the water, but not necessarily on the street or at the pharmacy, this group of dedicated swimmers found peace and comfort in the routine delivered through swimming.

Until the crack in the pool floor shows up, and creates fear and confusion. All too quickly the day arrives when the pool is considered structurally unsound and the decision is made to close the underground pool. Alice is one of the patron swimmers. While she’s not young, she comes almost daily. The others at the pool know Alice has memory issues, Alice knows this of herself as well and is quick to share her problem.

After the pool closes, Otsuka continues Alice’s story. With the same style of writing used in the first part of the book, the “swimming in laps” pattern now portrays Alice’s growing dementia, the deterioration of her body and mind, and ever increasing heartbreak this brings to her daughter who has returned home to help.

I found the first part of the book almost lyrical, but quite slow. Using the same word cycles over and over to portray the increasing dementia and heartbreak was an interesting style of illumination. *The Swimmers* is a quick read, but one that is capable of providing food for thought for a long time.