



## Hotel Iris

*Yoko Ogawa , Stephen Snyder (Translator)*

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A tale of twisted love from Yoko Ogawa—author of *The Diving Pool* and *The Housekeeper and the Professor*.

In a crumbling seaside hotel on the coast of Japan, quiet seventeen-year-old Mari works the front desk as her mother tends to the off-season customers. When one night they are forced to expel a middle-aged man and a prostitute from their room, Mari finds herself drawn to the man's voice, in what will become the first gesture of a single long seduction. In spite of her provincial surroundings, and her cool but controlling mother, Mari is a sophisticated observer of human desire, and she sees in this man something she has long been looking for.

The man is a proud if threadbare translator living on an island off the coast. A widower, there are whispers around town that he may have murdered his wife. Mari begins to visit him on his island, and he soon initiates her into a dark realm of both pain and pleasure, a place in which she finds herself more at ease even than the translator. As Mari's mother begins to close in on the affair, Mari's sense of what is suitable and what is desirable are recklessly engaged.

*Hotel Iris* is a stirring novel about the sometimes violent ways in which we express intimacy and about the untranslatable essence of love.

## Hotel Iris Details

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## From Reader Review Hotel Iris for online ebook

### Jr Bacdayan says

Equally intoxicating and disquieting, Hotel Iris is the story of Mari, a 17 year-old girl, her sexual awakening in the hands of a 67 year-old Russian Translator and their consuming sadomasochistic affair that tests the limits of love and desire.

There's something very straightforward about Yoko Ogawa's prose that disarms the reader into surrender. Like the powerful voice of the Translator, which Mari finds so spell bounding, Ogawa slowly coaxes us out of our reservations by showing a voice so simple yet confident that we are left following her lead in a daze. Her words cut laser-like through the whole thing as if narrating nothing more than an innocent love story between a man and a girl, not even pausing to consider all the grimy details and the grey-area implications.

“The desires of the human heart know no reason or rules.”

Make no mistake, this book paints a very clear picture of BDSM in all its inglorious, bare form. And it is easy to suffocate amidst all the clear depictions of twisted decadence that it offers, pages with soundless screams of pleasure and paragraphs filled with distorted expressions of love. Yet in spite of all this, there lingers a curious tenderness between Mari and her Translator. And what unsettles more than the graphic descriptions is the voyeuristic nature of the narrative that in someway desecrates the sacred privacy of two very fragile people trying to express to each other their hatred of the world who ignored them and never gave them a second look. Finding in each other the perfect outlet, each with a different form of expressing their hate, but both coming together to meet the needs of the other. There is undoubtedly a gloomy sort of beauty in the way these two people devoid of self-worth find comfort in discovering that there exists someone who needs them.

Somehow the fascinating relationship between Dominant and Submissive struck me as very strikingly similar to that of a Writer and Reader, especially in this case. Here we have a writer who makes it a point to push us to the very brink of our ethics with her words. Here I am, a reader, filled with unease yet obediently taking every word thrown upon me, even deriving some sort of wicked pleasure from the scenes they convey. It is a very curious affair, that of a writer and reader. To choose to read the words of someone is to give power to that person over you. Is it absolute authority? Not a chance. However every reader takes a vulnerable leap of faith and a certain trust is placed in the hands of the writer, every word an absolute, every period an unbreakable wall. We experience a whole range of emotions from pain, to sadness, to happiness all at the command of someone else and we derive pleasure from those words. Are we not all literary submissives? Are we not all in prostrate surrender till we gain the courage to write our own words and thus finally dominate those who would care to read? Maybe I am reaching too much, maybe my imagination is too strong. Maybe this review is my revenge against my literary submissiveness, but then again maybe this is the manifestation of my domination over you. But probably not.

At the end of the day this little novella is not asking for an exercise in moral fastidiousness. This is a little novella meant to convey a simple story with maybe no greater desire than to jolt us awake with its brand of painful passion. Indeed it is a powerful reminder of the terrifying potential of literature displaying romance, something we consider beautiful, in its most disfigured face. Asking us to consider how suffering and pleasure, hatred and love, even reading and writing, as not two different things altogether but two ends of the same stick connected by a body that is asking to be explored.

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### **Teresa says**

I find it hard to say I like a book with such subject matter -- a first-person depiction of a young girl seeking out disturbing behavior -- but as with the other works I've read by Ogawa, I can say I admire its deceptively simple prose. (I see I used that exact phrase in my reviews of her *Revenge* and *The Diving Pool: Three Novellas* as well.)

Mari, the narrator, doesn't name the other characters. They are their appellations: the translator, the nephew, the maid. Only Mari and the heroine of the Russian novel the translator is supposedly working on are named. The translator tells Mari the name of the heroine is Marie.

The ending may seem abrupt, but looking back I see clues in the story the translator tells of a toddler and with what happens to a mouse. This juxtaposition in a letter from the translator to Mari also caught my eye:

*I can picture every detail of Marie's suffering ... And then, in my mind, you, Mari, have taken her place.*

*Would you like to have lunch at my home next Tuesday? I will cook for you. ...*

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### **Paquita Maria Sanchez says**

Fucking is fucking weird. Fact.

Hrm. This one's tough. Just as with Ogawa's novellas, I found myself marveling at her ability to summon gorgeously terrifying, ornate mind-pictures with stark, crisp minimalism. She just chooses all the right words to put next to other words when she makes sentences. Out of words. But not very many words. Gimme that A, professor!

(Here comes the inevitable 3-star) but...in this case, she is using those words and words to make sentences to make paragraphs to make chapters to make a book about, well, BDSM. Not a subject I find myself studying much in my reading life, or a romantic situation I can relate to at all. A little bit of tuff tumble time is okay so long as it goes both ways, but if you're planning on choking me with a scarf, you'd better kill my ass or prepare for some cheap shots to the nuts followed by a television set for a hat. Anyway, it's all the rage, E.L. James, because apparently I am all alone in thinking being tortured and degraded is not a sexy prospect. So why doesn't Ogawa have millions of dollars and a Big Shit movie deal? Lady can write, son! Well, because this chaotic world's only semblance of order is its indisputable tendency to embrace unfairness, and the people who reap the rewards are too often those who write smut about tampons being yanked out of ladyparts, or shitty AB poetry about your annoying, pretentious boyfriend and what he means to your dental hygiene. That made sense to me, I promise.

So the torture scenes are tough to read because torture, but made easier to stomach by the fact that our 17-year-old narrator is just loving it. Hey, man, it's your bedroom, and if you're having a nice time with rope cutting into your wrists and nipples, groveling on the dirty floor so you can put a 60-something old man's socks on with your mouth, don't let me be the one to tell you how revolting everything I just typed is to me.

A BDSM tale with hints of murder mystery, contrasted with scenes of total sweetness. Our Christian Grey is an unattractive, aging translator, clumsy and unassuming out in the wider world, but pretty much psychotic when you dim the lights. He treats her like a precious jewel. He kicks her in the stomach. He writes love letters. He has a penchant for awkward segues.

*She resists, but he seizes her by the hair and throws her into the lake...She does not know how to swim, so her arms and legs thrash uselessly and her mouth opens and closes in wild convulsions...*

*I can picture every detail of Marie's suffering, from the way the seaweed wraps about her ankles to the echoes of her cries among the birches. And then, in my mind, you, Mari, have taken her place.*

*Would you like to have lunch at my home next Tuesday? I will cook for you.*

And

*How lovely your pale face looks when you are on the verge of suffocating and want to ask for my help...How long will this weather continue? It's the worst hot spell I have seen since moving to the island.*

Wow. Seriously, the weather? Niiiiice touch.

Oh, and this book has yet another absolutely horrifying subway death scene. Between this novel and *The Pale King*, I feel compelled to BEG you, my big city dweller friends, to make absolutely certain that every piece of your person and the clothing on your person has cleared the doors before they shut. The doors hate you. The doors want to eat you. Fear the doors.

This book is beautifully written, but totally fucked. You can see all the little wormies wriggling around inside teeny-cutesy Ogawa's creeptastic, hall-of-mirrors nightmare skull, and you rightly squirm. Not my kinda subject in this instance, but definitely my kinda gal in general. More, please.

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### **Viv JM says**

4.5 stars

I feel a little weird rating this book so highly. I mean, it is a somewhat dark and disturbing tale of a sadomasochistic affair between a 17 year old girl and a much older man!! But the writing is just so breathtaking. There is not a superfluous word in the whole book, and along with the shocking violence and cruelty there somehow manages to be such tenderness and beauty. Not for the faint-hearted, perhaps, but definitely an arresting read. I will certainly be seeking out more of Yoko Ogawa's work.

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### **jo says**

Το ξενοδοχε?ο ?ρις το αγ?ρασα μετ? απ? πολ?μηνη σκ?ψη. Δεν ξ?ρω γιατ? ε?χα δε?τερες (και τρ?τες) σκ?ψεις για την αγορ? του μιας και τελικ? μου ?ρεσε πολ?! Στην καρδι? της ιστορ?ας κρ?βεται μια σαδομαζ?χιστικ? σχ?ση μεταξ? εν?ς 67χρ?νου ?ντρα και μιας 17χρ?νης κοπ?λας

αλλ? π?ρα απ? την βιτσι?ζικη αυτ? πλευρ? της σχ?σης τους η συγγραφ?ας σου δε?χνει και την πιο ευα?σθητη και ρομαντικ? πλευρ? της.

Θεωρ? ?τι σε πολλο?ς αρ?σει να διαβ?ζουν που και που για σχ?σεις καταδικασμ?νες ? λ?γο εκτ?ς των ορ?ων, των κοινωνικ?ν αλλ? και ψυχικ?v, και θεωρ? πως η διαφορ? ηλικ?ας του «ζευγαριο?» θα ε?χε λιγ?τερη σημασ?α αν η συγγραφ?ας δεν μας ?δινε πολ? περιγραφικ? και με αρνητικ? χροι? το κ?θε τι επ?νω στον ?ντρα που πρ?διδε την ηλικ?α του. Νομ?ζω πως ?θελε να μας τον?σει την μεγ?λη του ηλικ?α για να μας σοκ?ρει και να κ?νει την μικρ? της οπο?ας τις σκ?ψεις ακολουθο?με ακ?μα πιο... «αν?μαλη».

Η γραφ? ε?ναι πολ? καλ? και ?σοι διαβ?ζουν Ιαπωνικ? λογοτεχν?α ξ?ρουν πως το συνα?σθημα κρ?βεται π?ντα κ?τω απ? στρ?ματα φαινομενικ?ς αναισθησ?ας. Μπορε? οι χαρακτ?ρες να μας φα?νονται π?ντα συναισθηματικ? αποκομμ?vοι και αδι?φοροι εμπρ?ς σε γεγον?τα αλλ? εγ? ?βρισκα π?ντα πως αν ξ?ρεις που να κοιτ?ζεις βρ?σκεις φοβερ? δυνατ? συναισθ?ματα. Ξεχνο?με συχν? πως οι Ι?πωνες ε?ναι τ?σο διαφορετικο? απ? εμ?ς!

Ο χαρακτ?ρας που με ενδι?φερε περισσ?τερο ?ταν αυτ?ς της κοπ?λας μιας και ?ταν η δικ? της φων? που μας συν?δευε. Η συγγραφ?ας μας ?δειξε πολ? φανερ? γιατ? της ?ρεσε να της φ?ρεται ?τσι ο ?ντρας που εκε?νη αποκαλε? «μεταφραστ?ς» και δυστυχ?ς περιορ?στηκε σε πολ? ε?κολες λ?σεις π?ραυτα ?μως ?ταν πολ? ενδιαφ?ρουσα χαρακτ?ρας.

?να απ? τα ωρα?α χαρακτηριστικ? του βιβλ?ου ?ταν και η τοποθεσ?α στην οπο?α διαδραματιζ?ταν η ιστορ?α, μια παραθαλ?σσια Ιαπωνικ? π?λη. Οι περιγραφ?ς της περιοχ?ς σε ?κανε να νομ?ζεις πως βρ?σκεσαι σε κ?ποια π?λη της Ελλ?δος!

Θα το προτε?νω σε ?σους ?χουν πιο ανοιχτ? μυαλ? μιας και μας δ?δονται δυνατ?ς σκην?ς μ?σα στο βιβλ?ο που κ?ποιος που δεν ?χει συνηθ?σει σε αυτ?ς ?σως σοκαριστε?. Το απ?λαυσα στις διακοπ?ς μου, δεν με κο?ρασε καθ?λου και σ?γουρα θα το θυμ?μαι για καιρ?.

<https://cherrybookreviews.wordpress.com>

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## MTK says

Ειλικριν? δυσκολε?τηκα με αυτ? το βιβλ?ο. Κατ' αρχ?ς το αγ?ρασα αφο? ε?χα διαβ?σει το "Ο αγαπημ?νος μαθηματικ?ς τ?πος του καθηγητ?", ?να τρυφερ? βιβλ?ο για τη σχ?ση μεταξ? εν?ς ηλικιωμ?vου μαθηματικ?, της οικιακ?ς του βοηθο? και του μικρο? γιο? της. Το "Ξενοδοχε?ο ?ρις" ε?ναι σα να το ?χει γρ?ψει ?λλος ?νθρωπος. Δεν ε?ναι μ?νο ?τι περιγρ?φει την αρρωστημ?vη σεξουαλικ? σχ?ση εν?ς διεστραμμ?vου ηλικιωμ?vου με ?να ευ?λωτο δεκαεπτ?χρονο κορ?τσι, ε?ναι ?τι η ηρω?δα (το βιβλ?ο ε?ναι γραμμ?vο σε πρ?το πρ?σωπο απ? την δικ? της οπτικ?) αποτελε? την ενσ?ρκωση των φαντασ?σεων κ?θε σεξουαλικο? εγκληματ?α. ?χετε ακο?σει ? διαβ?σει τις σκ?ψεις εν?ς παιδεραστ? που ισχυρ?ζεται ?τι τα αν?λικα θ?ματ? του τον αγαπο?v και τον θ?λουν και ?τι δεν κ?νει τ?ποτα κακ? ασελγ?vτας σε δεκ?χρονα; Ε, το βιβλ?ο αυτ? σχεδ?ν επιβεβαι?νει πανυγυρικ? την αντ?ληψη ?τι ε?ναι δυνατ? κ?τι τ?τοιο.

Εντ?ξει, υπερβ?λλω. Η ηρω?δα δεν ε?ναι ε?ναι ν?πιο, αλλ? δεκαεπτ? χρον?v. Αλλ? εξακολουθε? να

ε?ναι μια μοναχικ? ?φηβη, απομονωμ?νη και καταπιεσμ?νη απ? μια μητ?ρα η συμπεριφορ? της οπο?ας αγγ?ζει τα ?ρια της κακοπο?ησης, τουλ?χιστον της ψυχολογικ?ς. Συναντ? ?ναν ?νθρωπο για τον οπο?ο απ? την πρ?τη στιγμ? γνωρ?ζει ?τι ε?ναι σεξουαλικ?ς σαδιστ?ς και αισθ?νεται ?ντονη μαζοχιστικ? ?λξη για αυτ?v, τον αναζητ? και π?φτει στην αγκαλι? του με τη θ?λησ? της. Και ?λο αυτ? παρουσι?ζεται ως, αν ?χι φυσιολογικ?, μια αποδεκτ? απ?κλιση και η κοινων?a ε?ναι κακι? και δεν καταλαβα?νει το μεγαλε?ο του ?ρωτ? τους.

Ε?ναι αναμφισβ?τητα καλογραμμ?νο. Αλλ? του ?βαλα? ?να αστ?ρι γιατι η κοινωνικ? ομαλοπο?ηση τ?τοιων καταστ?σεων ε?ναι επικ?νδυνη, ακ?μη και στο ?νομα της τ?χνης.

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### **Evi \* says**

C'è sempre timore a mettere una valutazione elevata ad un libro di genere erotico, i libri di genere erotico a volte si leggono per poi massacrari in nome di un perbenismo atto a mostrare che in realtà è un puro divertissement per chi legge che invece se ne tiene a debitissima distanza.

In realtà peccato perché *Hotel Iris* non merita, gli assegnerei una valutazione tra le due e le tre stelle, ma mi astengo e non so decidere.

Storia dell'iniziazione sessuale di una ragazzina da parte di un uomo molto più anziano di lei.

Per Mari che vive una esistenza repressa, soffocata da una madre autoritaria ed egoista che a 17 anni l'ha obbligata a lasciare gli studi per dedicarsi alla gestione di un misero albergo sulla costa, quest'uomo rappresenta nella sua vita il primo contatto con l'universo dei sentimenti ma anche uno spiraglio di libertà e una via di fuga.

*Tese una mano verso di me. Con la punta delle dita mi sfiorò una guancia. Fu una sorpresa da togliermi il respiro. Ma era stato un gesto spontaneo di gratitudine, non m'era dispiaciuto. Solo, il cuore si era messo a battere così forte da farmi male*

In nome di un desiderio di tenerezza che grida di smettere di implodere ma finalmente esplodere accetta le perversioni imposte dall'uomo si fa legare con ardite tecniche di b d s m, lacci che la stringono ovunque sospesa nel vuoto, corpo imperlato di sudore, si presta a camminare per casa a carponi a raccogliere con la bocca oggetti sparsi sul pavimento, come un quadrupede, ma priva di grazia ed equilibrio e altre cose del genere.

Mari prova piacere? Prova piacere nel suo essere oltraggiata o Mari si disprezza?

*Così riesco a sentirmi miserabile fino in fondo. Quando mi usano brutalmente, quando divento un semplice pezzo di carne, allora finalmente dalle profondità della mia anima si fa strada una sensazione di piacere puro*

Lo so che non ha senso leggere un libro erotico e fare del moralismo e inoltre ritengo che le strade della felicità anche sessuale siano imperscrutabili e insindacabili, non però quelle di una ragazzina di 17 anni la cui formazione sentimentale e sessuale non può, non deve, non dovrebbe mai cominciare con una deformazione disfunzionale così grave, credo irrimediabile per la sua salute mentale, scelte di sessualità estreme possono essere frutto di un'età più matura mai di un'età che sta per sbocciare.

In ogni caso non è questo il punto, *Hotel Iris* è solo un romanzo e la letteratura ha il diritto / dovere di scrivere di tutto e su tutto, e non è assolutamente un libro da cestinare in toto, ci sono alcuni passaggi che meritano uno fra gli altri in cui l'autrice descrive l'attesa che è condivisibilissimo:

*Il vero senso dell'attesa, però, l'ho conosciuto solo quando ti ho incontrato. Mentre aspetto che venga l'ora del nostro appuntamento davanti all'orologio floreale, provo una felicità indicibile. Sono già felice prima ancora che tu compaia.*

*Spio tutti quelli che arrivano dal lungomare, e quando appare una ragazzina che ha qualcosa di te mi balza il cuore in gola, poi subito mi accorgo che è un'altra e distolgo lo sguardo. È un'operazione che ripeto con pazienza senza mai arrendersi. Sono disposto a sbagliare anche mille, duemila volte, prima di trovarti. Al punto che per me non c'è più differenza tra l'impazienza di vederti subito e il piacere di prolungare quell'attesa all'infinito*

E devo anche dire che Yoko Ogawa ha un posto di certo rilievo nel panorama giapponese contemporaneo, forse non era il titolo giusto.

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### **Dhanaraj Rajan says**

I finished the novel in two sittings. It is very racy - at least I found it that way - and has an engaging plot. But after having finished the story, I am not sure what to make of it.

There are and can be many interpretations.

May be it is a psychological probe into the nature of love, and especially to that aspect which is 'untranslatable'. In this story a young girl of seventeen 'falls in love' with 67 year old man (translator by profession) and this man subjects her to all kind of sexual humiliations. The girl takes everything of the cruelty with longing/craving. Be warned: There are graphic descriptions about sexual violence. It is revolting for an ordinary person. But the girl finds in it ecstasy.

Taking into account the fact that the girl has only her mother and the female servant for company, can we understand her willingness to submit to the old man a longing for the lost father? Is there anything opposite of Oedipus Rex Complex? If so, is this novel treating that as the main theme? Even then, will daughter fantasize so cruelly about her father? No idea.

Sometimes, I felt that this is a story about translation. The male protagonist is a translator (from Russian to Japanese). The girl gets attracted to him by hearing his voice. The name of the girl in the Russian novel that is under translation is the same as the girl protagonist. Only the spellings differ. Fictional character is Marie and the real character is Mari. The translator's effort in tearing out every piece of cloth from the girl may indicate to getting to the bottom of the original text. Because the violence takes place only in the place where the translator is usually engaged in translating. He does not want her to get another opinion from another person of the same event narrated by the translator (translator's jealousy!). When she does he is furious. The final product of translation is necessarily a changed version, hardly closer to the original (the disfigured girl at the end). This act is always considered a crime (at least in the mind of the translator). The translator dies at the end leaving only his far-from-perfect-product.

I am not sure. May be, I am reading too much into it. This story, however, left me in a confused state.

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## T.D. Whittle says

\*\*\* Plot spoilers ahead! \*\*\*

*Hotel Iris* is beautifully written but not easy reading due to the grim sexual violence. It was necessary to tell the story, though, so not gratuitous. Given that I read an English translation from the Japanese, I imagine the writing would have been even more impressive in its original language.

Despite what the book blurb says, and what other reviewers here on GR have said, I am going to go out on a limb here and say that this book is NOT about BDSM. I read this because of Yoko Ogawa's well-regarded reputation as a writer of literary fiction (sorry but I am going to make that distinction), rather than as a writer of commercial, pulp, or erotic fiction. This book did not disappoint. It is certainly nothing to compare to E.L. James. Reading about poor young Mari and her lecherous ageing and cruel lover for sexual kicks would be about as satisfying as reading Proust for quick tips on dating.

These two people, Mari and her Translator, whose name we never learn, are both lonely and desperate and living in a kind of emotional exile from themselves and everyone else. The Translator seems to find relief from his barely-contained rage only by expressing it in acts of sexual cruelty. For this, he needs a willing victim. Mari, whose beloved but alcoholic father died when she was eight, lives like an impoverished princess in her mother's economy castle, the Hotel Iris, a seaside accommodation that only comes to life for one season a year. Mari has been pulled out of high school by her mother, in order to help at the hotel. She has no friends, no boyfriends, no life of any kind outside the monotony of the hotel and her domineering mother, as well as her mother's friend and part-time maid, who steals from Mari.

One can understand such a girl, at seventeen, feeling desperate to be seen and touched and cared for by someone—almost anyone, really—and most especially a man, since the only person who ever seems to have loved her deeply and unselfishly was her dead father. It is not so surprising that the girl seeks to escape her emotional pain via the infliction of enormous physical pain. In fact, she seems at times to seek the release of death but without having to accomplish the act herself. Girls like Mari are often found with slices on their arms, legs, and various hidden places on their bodies, where they cut themselves to gain the kind of release Mari seeks through brutally punishing sex acts with the Translator. Sometimes, these girls go too far, cutting too deeply or hitting an artery, and accidentally killing themselves. This sad scenario is not dissimilar to Mari's sex with the Translator. (And would release the same opiate-like beta endorphins that cutting does too.)

So, yes, sex is the medium, but what is the message here? I don't think it's only about the lovers' high that can result from two people engaging in an edgy, consensual, painful but safe sexual act involving whipping, bondage, cutting, etc. This is very different. For one thing, there are no discussions about what kind of sex is going to happen and no real seeking of consent. No safe words. No out. Mari is repeatedly degraded, humiliated, injured, and nearly killed. This is not enacting anything. It's the real deal. The Translator translates her emotions for her, pulling each one out of her like a fisherman gutting a trout, and in turn, allowing her to see herself from a distance. In those moments, Mari reaches a level of ecstasy that a martyr's religious fervor might induce: she is finally free of herself and her pain, and she is unafraid of dying.

Unlike cutters and heroin addicts, though, Mari needs an Other to impose his will on her. That's part of the experience she craves and, indeed, that is the slim connecting thread to other people who reach a

transcendent "sub space" via submission to a Dominant, in BDSM terms. But Mari's needs go way beyond that of a robust psycho-sexual fetish. Really, she is too young and inexperienced to even know about that type of life and what it involves. Besides living a cloistered life, there is no internet (the original book was published in 1996) or even a mention of television shows she watches.

Mari is a virgin when the Translator gets hold of her. Of course, she needs to be young and virginal to satisfy the dark, voracious god he feeds. And his violent acts must be repeated weekly because he, like Mari, can only be temporarily sated. The Translator is like a starving monster gorging on raw meat out of desperate necessity but without any apparent pleasure.

A significant third person in this arrangement is the Translator's nephew, a young man who cannot speak, who briefly also becomes Mari's lover, which leads to the Translator trapping Mari on the island where he lives and nearly killing her in their final meeting. The young man represents many things, which might be left to the mind of the reader. I was never fully convinced either of his being the Translator's nephew or of the story that the two men tell Mari about the Translator's dead wife.

This book is a slim volume that punches well above its weight. It's contemplative and melancholy and poetic, despite its gruesome violence (i.e. the sex acts enacted upon Mari by the Translator). There's nothing genuinely erotic or titillating or even sexy about the sex scenes. I don't think Okagawa was aiming for her readers to read her book in the bubble bath. \* Quite frankly, the sex is terrifying, as the reader isn't sure from one moment to the next whether the young girl will survive. Up until the end, I expected the denouement to reveal that my narrator all along had been Mari's ghost, which would have been very Japanese in a way but also not unheard of in fiction.

It's hard to say I enjoyed this book, though I did enjoy its eloquence, and I was deeply immersed in Mari's life. I cared about what happened to her. I cheered her on against her domineering mother and the wicked maid, and hoped for her to find happiness in the end. It is to Ogawa's credit that the mother and the maid, despite their unappealing and selfish personalities, are rendered subtly enough that one feels pity for them, too, in the end. The book is light on feelings. Everything is action and reflection without the sharing of feelings. The reader takes on all the feelings. This is a rich and moving experience. Though, it must be said, the feeling I most enjoyed was my own happiness at the death of the Translator at the end. He well and truly had it coming.

\* Having said that, I am aware that there are some folks out there who might get aroused by the sexual violence in this book. (There are no moments of straightforward intercourse, and one suspects the Translator is incapable of it.) There are people who get hot and bothered reading Lolita too. I don't claim to speak for everyone, but I will stand by my original claim that this book is not written as commercial erotica (as with E.L. James et al.) but as literature. It absolutely deserves that standing and the respect that goes with it.

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### **Clint says**

While I didn't enjoy this nearly as much as The Diving Pool and The Housekeeper and the Professor, Yoko Ogawa's style and sense of the bizarre and grotesque saved this book from the three-star category.

There is almost a cliche these days of feminist writers having to do at least one really sadomasochistic book where a woman LOVES being abused by a man, something I just can't understand. Among Yoko Ogawa's kinswomen Natsuo Kirino and especially Amy Yamada spring to mind.

Hotel Iris was written with the same kind of extremely insular main character the other two books I've read of hers are. Off the top of my head, I might be wrong, but I think the narrator Mari is the only character in the book with a name. The antagonist is simply the Translator, and there are also Mother, the maid, the translator's nephew, the boy with the accordion, the coffee seller, etc etc. It's a first person and extremely limited point of view, the reader almost feels like Mari does when she's hiding in the closet, looking at the world through just a small crack in the doors.

The main story is about a 17 year old girl whose father was beaten to death, living and working in a seaside family hotel with her mother, and one night this older guy has a huge fight with a prostitute who's screaming at him, and leaves the hotel. When Mari runs into him later on the street she is mysteriously drawn to him, and he to her, in his timid, awkward way, but when they are alone he proceeds to just physically abuse and humiliate her, which she loves, and keeps going back for. A nephew is introduced later with no tongue, and a back story on the older man's dead wife that seems a little questionable, and a denouement that happens just after a night stranded on an island with the Translator during a huge storm with the worst torture and debasement of all. The ending was really really great and unexpected and sudden, though the reader is left with way more questions than usual at the end of a book. Is Mari a fucking nut? Was the Translator a killer? Did the nephew really lose his tongue to cancer? Was the wife accidentally choked to death by a scarf and a subway car?

I think there is only one more Yoko Ogawa book in English for me to read, which I'll probably do in the next few days because I have time and REALLY want to see how she does short stories.

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### **Praj says**

From the age of 12, I have been obsessed with assorted novels revealing love affairs flanked by adolescent girls and older men. Perhaps, due to an discontented teenage fantasy or the fact that reading Marguerite Duras's 'The Lover' during my 7th grade History class while picturing a virginal 15yr old fucking a 27-yr old Chinese tycoon, made me scribble '*Orgasm*' in my notebook. I do not know the precise cause of my addiction, but the sinister juvenile seduction still tantalizes my imagination.

So, when I selected Hotel Iris, I grinned at my literary dosage of unsophisticated seduction, highly unaware of the disillusionment stored ahead.

Initiated on the lines of 'The Lover', the narrative ineffectively proceeds into a murky atmosphere of sexual supremacy and secrecy. Ogawa spins a story about Mari and her sexual sadistic lover- a Russian translator in the midst of a scenic Japanese island among numerous ferocious BDSM sessions. Entrancing as it sounds; the tale of a 17 year old Japanese girl taking pleasure in being a sexual slave to a 67yr old closet sexual aggressor is a careless attempt to be Duras. Mari does not come through as seductive or fragile lass. The characterization of each protagonist fails miserably leaving the confrontations dreary. The ineffectiveness of the narrative slithers out as soon the Japanese bondage, sexual frolics fail to electrify your nerves let alone being pulsating from them. Moreover the underlying mystery about the reclusive Russian is misplaced amid the chaotic array of sexual nuances and feeble recovery of the criminal component in the script leaves a trail of skepticism over the designated plot stuck between erotica and mystery. Assertions of Ogawa being the latest Marguerite Duras are an utter sham.

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## **Tony says**

Recommended for those too self-conscious to be seen with a copy of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. There's even a blurb on the front cover from Hilary Mantel, serving as a literary beard. And actually, there is much in the writing to recommend: a minimalist style that paints mood well, for instance.

Yet, the story, told well, requires some suspension of reality. The images of foreshadowing are not subtle.

Our narrator is a seventeen year-old girl, obsessed with a much, much older sadistic man. This is not play-acting scenes. I'm no BDSM expert, but the infliction of pain in this story seemed moved by anger, a flipping-out, not control in an exchange. But as I said, what do I know?

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## **Camilla \*tactile seeker\* says**

I had to change the rating of this book. Three stars really weren't enough for this compelling, powerful, sensual and at times very macabre little story.

God, where have I been while all these incredibly talented new Japanese authors were publishing their books?! I was stuck with writers of the past (they're amazing) and didn't think I could've found such a beauty in an author so young!

*Ogawa Yoko*'s writing left me simply mesmerized: simple, yet polished, almost completely free of figures of speech and so, so far from resembling purple prose, but yet unmerciful, unrelenting, captivating, so dark, so disturbing but impossible to ignore and not to feel drawn to. Such a talent deserves to be praised over and over again.

Mari is the protagonist of the story. She's a seventeen-year-old girl who works at her family's Hotel, the Iris of the title.

She's the teenager with the most defined and determined nature I've ever found in a book. She lost her father when she was still a child, witnessed the gradual decline of her grandfather's sick body; she's obsessed with violent death, with its most gruesome aspects, often finding herself imagining how fascinating the decay of the human body is.

Her only close relative still alive, her mother, is a strict, cold woman who exploits her daughter at the work place, denying her the fun and the normal, healthy life a girl so young should have.

So maybe this is a study in human psychology. Mari has no men in her life, all her male relatives are dead. As a reaction against death, against its mysterious power to suddenly manifest itself and steal people from her life, a mechanism that's hard to understand and accept, she turns into this pain-seeking, violence-addicted young woman, whose most exciting thoughts revolve around provoking and defying death, breath control and hardcore bondage, all sorts of humiliation and degrading acts, like she doesn't deserve to be alive.

Her "submissive" nature makes her notice a man who is thrown out of the hotel, one night. Referred only as

the "translator", because he translates works from Russian into Japanese, she feels attracted to him, his authoritative and aggressive tone, sensing his "dominant" disposition.

It doesn't matter that he's old enough to be her grandfather. They start a disturbing relationship, where she lusts after every single brutal act he inflicts on her.

However, Mari is far from being a victim, here. She craves it, she can only orgasms in those moments, she's simply made that way. It might be because of her past, or the lack of love from her mother, we don't know for sure. She's just incapable of feeling anything, besides dark and fucked up desires. She also has this irresistible dark humor. It might sound as an oxymoron, but I laughed a lot while reading this book, even at times when I should've probably cried or felt shocked. It made the book even more charming to me.

The whole story carries an oppressive atmosphere of approaching tragedy. You can't help but knowing it since the first pages of the book. That's why the absolutely chilling, non-romantic, anti-climatic ending leaves you rather full of questions about Mari's future, more than heartbroken over the turn of the events.

*Hotel Iris* is not for the faint of heart, nor for too sensitive people.

There's heavy BDSM here, graphic descriptions of corpses, death and sex.

But if you have a strong stomach and are looking for beautiful prose, original plot and an interesting, contemporary author, this is the right book for you.

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## **Repellent Boy says**

Creo que no termino yo de adaptarme a esta autora. He leído cuatro libros de ella y cada uno se ha llevado un número diferente de estrellas. Sus historias son muy regulares y o me gustan por lo sorprendente, o me aburren por la falta de trama, o me encantan por la ternura que desprende o, como esta última, me horroriza por como cuenta lo que cuenta.

Lo primero que diré es que no os dejéis engañar por la sinopsis. No es una historia de amor con un tipo de relación sexual diferente. Es una relación de dominio y maltrato. La protagonista, deprimida y acomplejada, encuentra en el protagonista, que tiene casi 50 años más, un imagen paterna. Sintiéndose sola por una madre opresiva y poco afectiva y la ausencia desde niña de su padre, cae en lo que cree un refugio. No lo es.

Y si la idea de la autora fuera la de presentarnos una trama desagradable, a modo de crítica o con ganas de impactar. Me parecería bien. Pero no termino de estar seguro de si lo ve así, o realmente lo plasma como si fuera una historia de amor trágica. Si quería hacer una crítica, me ha faltado que lo mostrara más.

Aun así, si tengo que decir algo bueno, es que esta autora es ideal para iniciarse en la literatura japonesa. Quizás una de las que más. Tiene una manera de narrar muy sencilla, muy directa y sin excesivas descripciones. Y eso, sobre todo para quien se inicia, es de valorar. Le dejaré las dos estrellas, por su narración adictiva.

En definitiva, no me ha gustado. Ya van una que me gustó, una que me dejó indiferente, otra que me maravilló y esta que me disgustó. A saber que me deparará el siguiente xD.

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**Katie says**

Well....when people referred to this as "Japanese 50 Shades of Grey"....they were right in some ways. Would you all want to see a review of this?

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