



Revenge

Yoko Ogawa , Stephen Snyder (Translator)

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Sinister forces draw together a cast of desperate characters in this eerie and absorbing novel from *Yoko Ogawa*.

An aspiring writer moves into a new apartment and discovers that her landlady has murdered her husband. Years later, the writer's stepson reflects upon his stepmother and the strange stories she used to tell him. Meanwhile, a surgeon's lover vows to kill him if he does not leave his wife. Before she can follow-through on her crime of passion, though, the surgeon will cross paths with another remarkable woman, a cabaret singer whose heart beats delicately outside of her body. But when the surgeon promises to repair her condition, he sparks the jealousy of another man who would like to preserve the heart in a custom tailored bag. Murderers and mourners, mothers and children, lovers and innocent bystanders—their fates converge in a darkly beautiful web that they are each powerless to escape.

Macabre, fiendishly clever, and with a touch of the supernatural, Yoko Ogawa's *Revenge* creates a haunting tapestry of death—and the afterlife of the living.

Revenge Details

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Author : Y?ko Ogawa , Stephen Snyder (Translator)

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From Reader Review Revenge for online ebook

Teresa says

I admire writers who can write such deceptively simple sentences and with no exposition make everything clear that they want to be clear. Ogawa, at least with these stories, is one of those writers; yet she doesn't want everything to be clear, another thing I admire. I especially loved her subtle, wicked sense of humor, even about herself, or at least about writers.

Each story from the first to the last is linked either by a mysterious happening or, in some cases, what seems like the passing of a baton in a relay, each story ratcheting up the tension, until the last story turns us back to the first in what almost seems like an Escher painting. I'm thinking specifically of his "Drawing Hands," as there are meta elements to some of these stories as well.

Every story is told from the first person point-of-view, though each narrator is a different person. At times you're not even sure right away whether the speaker is male or female, adding to the unsettling feelings.

Though this book is new to English translation, I see that the Japanese copyright is from 1988, which makes me happy, as I will now probably read the rest of her works in English in publication order.

Marita says

These tales of death and loss are each narrated by different people. Food plays an important role in each story: food as solace, food to carry on living. And so we have death/loss and strawberry shortcake, scallops meunière, strawberry cake with whipped cream, lots of kiwi fruit, plenty of tomatoes, five-fingered carrots, soft-serve ice-cream cones, hamburger, roasting meat, bacon and omelette, bouillabaisse and ...strawberry shortcake. Some of the stories are slightly macabre, a dash tongue-in-cheek. The brilliance of the stories lies in the manner in which they are all inter-connected. Be sure to watch for the repetition of words, phrases and numbers as you move from one story to the next. Yoko Ogawa subtly infuses her stories with humour and growing tension.

Nancy Oakes says

Seriously I have never in my life felt so off kilter during and after reading a book as I did with this one. It is truly a masterpiece of darkness like I've never seen before. You can read my discussion of this book [here](#). My advice: go get a copy now.

Jamie says

One of my favorite books this year. Every story was dark and had a somber feel to them, all the while, every short story linking perfectly to one another.

Hadrian says

A short collection of intertwined stories. Ogawa has a sparse style which creates the first impression of an ordinary banal existence, but she also has this subtle way of making each story grow more unsettling. Ogawa is not the type of horror author who parades blood and guts, but they have a creeping unknowable mystery about their stories.

Yamma Rashid says

Favourite of the year

Have you ever read a story and realized that it has the power to completely restructure your thoughts? If only I had words to describe Revenge. But for the first time in a long, long while, I've realized I am *speechless* .

This book...where do I even start?

I'm buying them for my son. Today is his birthday.
Really? Well, I hope it's a happy one. How old is he?"
"Six. He'll always be six. He's dead."

Before I delve into the review, allow me to give a shout out to ViratKaBichraBhai for this amazing recommendation. You rock, man!

Revenge is a series of stories, all very short and all interconnected in one way or the other. You can't call it an anthology, you can't call it one whole story. It's just so *out there* that no one can cleverly categorize it. And this will be the first series of short stories where I can't pick my favourite. I also cannot forget the story or stop thinking about it. If I had the power to give awards to the author, I'd hand her all awards known to man for this masterpiece. And I won't even hesitate in crowning her one of the best authors I have had the pleasure of learning from.

The story starts off with a brilliancy that has you amazed. The protagonist is in a bakery, she wants to get a cake for her boy and she can't find anyone inside the shop to help her. A small conversation with another customer, an older woman, reveals the truth quoted above. And while you may find it sad, the author puts a shocking twist on it, later having our main character recreate her son's final moments before his death to feel closer to him.

"The door that would not open no matter how hard you pushed, no matter how long you pounded on it. The screams no one heard. Darkness, hunger, pain. Slow suffocation"

And since the author *knew* this would ensure she had us, the story ends there. And we start on with the next.

Although it can get frustrating for people to have just the minimal amount of information in any tale, the author spun her own magic within her book, making the storytelling so rich and so detailed that you find yourself constantly mesmerized.

"The reason she was crying didn't matter to me. Perhaps there was no reason at all. Her tears had that sort of purity."

Throughout the book, we get introduced to a series of colourful characters; some were selfish, some were cruel, some had an evil hidden side, some had a softness that made your heart ache, and some, especially the ones in the last story, had an ethereal beauty to them, one that had you both startled and, surprisingly satisfied, when you reach the end.

I didn't expect a story as short as 5 or 6 pages to have such complex features hidden between the words. And most of them are beautiful enough to be interpreted whatever way you want, in however way you want, and still be perfectly applicable to your own life.

"You may be thinking that a bag is just a thing in which to put other things. And you're right, of course. But that's what makes them so extraordinary. A bag has no intentions or desires of its own, it embraces every object that we ask it to hold. You trust the bag, and it, in return, trusts you. To me, a bag is patience; a bag is profound discretion."

When a story has the ability to make you ponder, it's a given fact that it has the ability to encourage sentiment in the harshest of souls. It's the way the author has struck a chord by narrating in such a way that you find yourself connecting with the characters, wondering about your own life and ultimately finding yourself falling in love with someone living thousands of miles away, with an ocean's worth of talent hidden in her brain.

"I would unearth memories, beginning in childhood, of places and occasions when someone had hurt me. In that way, I believed, I would see that my pain was due not only to my husband but to the cruelty of countless others besides. I found it somehow comforting to think that his coldness was in no way special or unique."

It can be hard to argue that love can develop in between a few pages, but it's a remarkable effort on the author's part to invoke emotions in her characters with as few words as possible.

"The prose was unremarkable, as were the plot and characters, but there was an icy current running under her words, and I found myself wanting to plunge into it again and again."

And when all of the stories ended, and I was sitting there wondering how to interpret the last scene, how to complete the puzzle the author had helped me build from the first story, I realized that she had done the impossible; she had somehow woven enough charisma in her characters to have you admire them, despite hating them, and had somehow kept an element of mystery around her stories, so when you are at the last page, you find your brain completely spoiled, unable to be impressed by ordinary stories anymore. And for that, I think she deserves all the literary awards and readers in the world.

"Lean on me," he would whisper in my ear, and those few words had the power to make me utterly content."

Lynne King says

It was the title that struck me first of all, that of "Revenge: Eleven Dark Tales" and so on a whim I purchased it. I had never heard of Yoko Ogawa before.

What an extraordinary selection of eleven short stories and what an imagination the author has.

One of my two favourites was "Old Mrs J" and what a lot she has to hide. For a start, the death of her husband is quite a mystery.

Imagine "a carrot in the shape of a hand". Well I kept on thinking about that and wondered what could possibly result from this. Well to begin with, there's the headline in the paper one day:

"Curious carrots! Hand-shaped and fresh from Granny's garden!"

And the ending. Well that was superb and yes, despite reading this short story, I do still love eating carrots in whatever form they come.

"Lab Coats" is rather macabre, medical and so I enjoyed this but what a dreadful death is described in it. It's amazing what you can find in a lab coat, say a tongue for example.

As for "Sewing for the Heart", well many a true word is spoken in jest! What a cliché but how appropriate here. And as for the poor hamster; well that was sad.

"Welcome to the Museum of Torture" and all the rest of the short stories are excellent but what is remarkable is that there is a continuous flow from one story to another and that is so skilful in itself. "The Man Who Sold Braces" for example is followed on by "The Last Hour of the Bengal Tiger" and they both have the "tiger" as a common denominator. Also the so important final sentence or paragraph to each story that says it all.

"The Tomatoes and the Full Moon" is the most intriguing story, however, in the book.

"I checked in at the front desk and picked up my key, but when I opened the door, I found a strange woman and her dog in my room."

A mistaken room, number 101? A woman with a bundle, a black Labrador, some tomatoes and theft of a manuscript. It was called "Afternoon at the Bakery". It is so simple but so meaningful.

I'm going to change my mind. This is indeed my favourite story in this collection.

Death, murder, suspicion, blood, mystery, poignancy, libraries, etc. flow throughout these remarkable stories, and I think they're brilliant.

I will definitely purchase the "Hotel Iris" by this author.

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Diane S ? says

This grouping of clever and gracefully written stories, I really enjoyed. It was fantastic how the author

weaved something from one of the stories into another, it was almost like receiving a King cake at Mardi Gras, and discovering the prize. Some were about revenge but others were just deliciously creepy. I think these were some of my favorites so far.

Kris says

Yoko Ogawa has made a name for herself as a writer who can unsettle her readers with her precise, detailed, impassive prose. Two of her previously published books, *Hotel Iris: A Novel* and *The Diving Pool: Three Novellas*, introduce themes of unsettled families, unhealthy relationships between characters and food, and sado-masochism. (Another of her novels, *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, is a much gentler story, showing Ogawa's range as a writer.) In *Revenge: Stories*, Ogawa revisits her earlier themes in an elegantly macabre collection of eleven linked stories. Ogawa slowly and exquisitely shows her readers the perverse side of human relationships, almost as if she's moving a log to show us what is crawling underneath. In many ways, her stories are all the more effective -- and terrifying -- because of their bland settings. They could be taking place in Japan, or the US. For all you know, they are unfolding right next door to you.....

My longer review, which was posted at the California Literary Review <http://calitreview.com/35422>, is included below.

Yoko Ogawa is a household name in Japan. She has published over 20 books, short story collections, novels, and works of non-fiction. She has won five prestigious literary awards in Japan, and in 2008 was awarded the Shirley Jackson Award for "The Diving Pool," a novella contained in the collection *The Diving Pool*. Only four of her works have been translated into English. Her most recent short story collection, *Revenge*, is likely to garner her attention from English-speaking fans of literary fiction, Japanese fiction, and horror alike. The collection has been described repeatedly as "Japanese Gothic," a label which captures some of the atmosphere of ominous mystery in the stories, but which fails to convey the sense of almost sterile anonymity of her characters, or the precision with which Ogawa slowly builds a sense of horror to a crescendo by the precise description and accrual of detail after detail. Ogawa begins by showing her readers the apparently boring, normal face of human society, and then slowly lets this face of normality slide back to reveal decomposition, death, and emptiness.

Ogawa is masterful at depicting a seemingly normal scene with a tinge of fear that all may not be as bland and routine as it first appears. She establishes this atmosphere in the opening paragraphs of the first story, "Afternoon at the Bakery":

It was a beautiful Sunday. The sky was a cloudless dome of sunlight. Out on the square, leaves fluttered in a gentle breeze along the pavement. Everything seemed to glimmer with a faint luminescence: the roof of the ice-cream stand, the faucet on the drinking fountain, the eyes of a stray cat, even the base of the clock tower covered with pigeon droppings.

Families and tourists strolled through the square, enjoying the weekend. Squeaky sounds could be heard from a man off in the corner, who was twisting balloon animals. A circle of children watched him, entranced. Nearby, a woman sat on a bench knitting. Somewhere a car horn sounded. A flock of pigeons burst into the air, and startled a baby who began to cry. The mother hurried over to gather the child in her arms. You could gaze at this perfect picture all day—an afternoon bathed in light and comfort—and perhaps never notice a single detail out of place, or missing.

As in Ogawa's other writing, such as *The Diving Pool*, food becomes a focus for displaced love, but holds

within it not a substitute for human affection and closeness, but excess without the possibility of satiety. In “Fruit Juice,” the narrator is invited by a classmate to have dinner in a French restaurant with her and her father, whom she has never met before. After the dinner, the two classmates come across an abandoned post office. They break in to find it filled with kiwis:

Indeed, they were kiwis, just like the ones they sell at the grocery store. But the scene before us was grotesque and dizzying. We moved slowly into the room, which was cluttered with shelves and desks and cardboard boxes. A pencil sharpener, a red ink pad, and a dusty scale sat on the counter. But the rest of the space was filled with kiwis, enormous heaps of them. The air was both sweet and sour. She reached down to pick up a piece of fruit. I watched, afraid she might disturb the pile and bring it tumbling down on us. The kiwi was perfect, not a bruise or a blemish anywhere.

“Don’t they look delicious?” she said, gazing at the mountain of fruit. “More than you could ever eat!” Then she bit into the one in her hand. I could hear her teeth sink into the flesh.

For a long time, she stood there eating kiwis, one after another. She consumed them like a starving child, dizzy with hunger. Her carefully ironed blouse and her beautiful hands grew sticky. I could only watch and wait until she ate through her sadness.

Ogawa changes narrators from story to story, but they all share a sense of isolation and displacement from their surroundings and fellow characters. In the third story in the collection, “Old Mrs. J,” the narrator describes her peculiar relationship with her landlady. The apartment is located on the top of a hill with an idyllic view of the town below. The hill is covered with fruit trees, including kiwis; *“The kiwis in particular grew so thick that on moonlit nights when the wind was blowing, the whole hillside would tremble as though covered with a swarm of dark green bats. At times I found myself thinking they might fly away at any moment.”* Mrs. J is even more unsettling than the kiwis, as she makes frequent visits to the narrator’s apartment, carrying gifts from her garden that grow more and more peculiar:

“Look at this!” Mrs. J called as she came barging into my apartment one day.

“What is it?” I asked. I was in the kitchen making potato salad for dinner.

“A carrot,” she said, holding it up with obvious pride.

“But what a strange shape,” I said, pausing over the potatoes. It was indeed odd: a carrot in the shape of a hand.

It was plump, like a baby’s hand, and perfectly formed: five fingers, with a thick thumb and a longer finger in the middle. The greens looked like a scrap of lace decorating the wrist.

“I’d like you to have it,” Mrs. J said.

As the story continues, the narrator feels ever more trapped by her proximity to Mrs. J, perplexed by her landlady’s increasingly odd behavior, and unsettled by the carrot hands that proliferate in Mrs. J’s garden.

As the collection continues, the details in Ogawa’s stories become even more macabre. In several stories, a Museum of Torture figures prominently. The collection of torture implements, all which the caretaker swears have been used, is held in a mansion, where dining room tables and overstuffed armchairs share their space with chains, stocks, and other torture devices. Ogawa sets the scene in the following passage from “Welcome to the Museum of Torture”:

We were standing in the living room. The furniture included a pair of couches; a claw-foot cabinet; a long, narrow table like something from a church; a rocking chair; and a record cabinet. There was a real wood-burning fireplace at the end of the room.

It was a fancy room for a rich man, the kind of place I’d like to live in myself. But there was one strange thing about it: every bare space was covered with some devise for torture.

They were crammed in the cabinet and lined up on the table, stacked in the bay window, on the mantel, under the chairs, behind the curtains. Even hanging on the walls.

At this late stage in *Revenge*, Ogawa has moved horror directly into a home. The characters do not have to break into an abandoned post office or dig in a garden to find the macabre. It is on display in plain sight, used just as a table or a chair or a record player.

Throughout *Revenge*, Ogawa's technique of linking her stories together, first by small details (for example, a bakery selling strawberry shortcakes makes several appearances), and later by subsequent revisiting of characters and places, provides an additional sense of growing tension and fear. As the perspective and point of view change from story to story, the reader feels ground shifting constantly. The result is a collection that is unsettling, destabilizing, and alienating, written with a spare elegance that makes Ogawa's conjuring of gruesome details all the more effective. In *Revenge*, Ogawa introduces us to the ultimate horror, not confined in a haunted house, but surrounding us every day.

Paquita Maria Sanchez says

If I were rating this against the other Ogawa books I've read then I'd probably go lower with the stars, but as a standalone it is no more and no less than meh, fine by me. It is just fine, a "woo" without an exclamation point. A straight-faced, monotone "woo" probably accompanied by a lethargic blink and some dried up streamlets of slobber. Seriously, it is totally just fine.

The thing with Ogawa that I love is the way she renders a scene. She's makes these little minimalist snapshots in these muted pastels like polaroids, but with horrifying subject matter that seems totally out of place frozen in time all bright and milk n' honey like that. She's generally a more sensory than intellectual reading experience, more like art-uh films-uh than lit-uh. Or something. This novel or short story collection or whatever you want to call it has some of that awesome icky-in-the-light-of-day going on, but seems to rely on the disturbed feelings these images rouse simply by the nature of what they are - creepy, disturbing things, rather than using them as foundational blocks to build up from via craft. She doesn't really play with her sick-twisty ideas as much here, rather just throws them on the page and lets 'em do all the work. And they are lazy buggers.

Oh, and stringing together a bunch of different stories by having the characters cross paths at some point doesn't turn your short story collection into a *novel* about "murderers and mourners, mothers and children, lovers and innocent bystanders, their fates converg[ing] in a darkly beautiful web that they are each powerless to escape." It makes it a *short story collection* featuring murderers and mourners, mothers and children, lovers and innocent bystanders. Look, I get that Tokyo is crowded enough that it probably blows your mind when you even see the face of your upstairs neighbor more than once in an entire lifetime, but that doesn't mean every crossed path has some crazy-profound meaning. Besides, none of these people should even know each other in the first fuckin' place. Y'ask me, they are all far too psychotic to be building any webs together, beautiful or otherwise. It is for the best.

Anyway, this SHORT STORY COLLECTION is totally fine. It just seems like maybe Ogawa got pressured to release another novel, and all she had was this notebook full of sketches for novels, and she just couldn't bring herself to flesh any of them out because life happens, so she scotch-taped them all together and gave us this instead. And it is stupefyingly just okay.

Anish Kohli says

This is a BR. Nooooo. Not a Buddy Read. Did you notice the “is”? It’s a **Buddy Review!!** With the most awesome Sillyhead and it was her idea too! She’s pretty ~~great~~ dumb like that!! We read the book like a month apart but we are posting our reviews together today. In a way I am glad we’re starting both our booky years in this fashion. May there be several more such reviews and reads together!

Here goes the review:

You know what’s so wonderful about being here on GR? I mean, I know there are like a million reasons but for me the most important one is to be able to discover books. Not just through GR but through people on GR. People who you’ve never spoken to before. I could read in solitude for a 100 years but still not pick books like this one. It came as a recommendation from Nishith and I picked it up on faith.

Little did I know I would spend days trying not to finish the 160 paged book I had in my hands. I read it slow on purpose! This book was a damn treat! A huge shoutout to the man who suggested this. Thank you Nishith/Horus. Forever grateful. Although stop changing your name! :P

I don’t really know how to review this book bcz this is so different from anything I have ever read. This is a whole new style. Here is my feeble attempt at reviewing it.

“I’m buying them for my son. Today is his birthday.”

“Really? Well, I hope it’s a happy one. How old is he?”

“Six. He’ll always be six. He’s dead.”

This book is a first of its kind for me. It has no character names, no locations, no dates, no times, and no specifics of any kind. It’s one of THE MOST pure forms of storytelling I have ever read. I can sum up my review in just one quote from this very book itself.

“The prose was unremarkable, as were the plot and characters, but there was an icy current running under her words, and I found myself wanting to plunge into it again and again.”

There is a coldness in this book. A feeling of detachment towards life that comes with life being a bitch to you, taking away something from you that you couldn’t ever bear to lose. A loss that makes you indifferent to many things that should matter and curious about things that should be morbid.

This book is an embodiment of all that it is to be human. Being a human is not about being happy and mentally healthy. It’s not the only way. It’s the way we approve of. To be all smiles and to care about things and people. To act a certain way. To conform. Those who do not fit the box are branded as misfits, weird, crazy, mentally unfit and discarded. The outcasts. We are accepting of only the ones who can keep their darkness in check and hidden. What about the ones who are beaten by their demons? The ones who lost to the darkness and would rather stay there now. The ones who are lost? The ones who are okay being lost. Food for thought!

This book is a collection of short stories, or so it seems at the start. It’s amazing how one by one the author connects all the short stories, weaving them into one beautiful piece that comes together to form a hauntingly perfect picture. Perfect bcz it is not untrue. It’s possible. Very possible. It could all be happening somewhere out there, maybe even in your country, or your own town. Maybe it’s happening next door. Or maybe it is your story. It could be. After all, you are just as human. And what’s more scary than humans? More pitiful even? More needy? More scared?

““Lean on me,” he would whisper in my ear, and those few words had the power to make me utterly content.”

What's comforting? The known. Wouldn't you say? For me, atleast, it is true. When I picked this book, on a random recommendation, no less, I was afraid of what I might be getting into. If I would end up hating the book or writing a ranty review. As I read, I was comforted by a very particular feeling that I have come to love. It is something that I have only ever read in SK's works before. That feeling of coldness. The knowledge of the fact that we carry light and dark both within ourselves. And we are just as capable of being monsters as we are of being angels. Someone's savior is another's tormentor.

“Monsters are real, and ghosts are real too. They live inside us. And sometimes, they win. - SK”

This book is written in first person POV and it has a sad and dark undertone. The feeling of loss and gloom is rich and it is wonderfully done. The first person POV works like a cherry on top bcz it makes the stories that much more personal. And I personally feel that the anonymity this book has, it only adds to the magnificence of it all. You don't get to connect to the characters which is why you can focus completely on the story and the feeling of it. The feeling of helplessness and despair. You can feel the bond that darkness can forge. The understanding that it can bring.

“The reason she was crying didn't matter to me. Perhaps there was no reason at all. Her tears had that sort of purity. I realized she was finally letting flow the tears she could not cry at the post office, and that this sadness was coming to her peacefully from the distant past.”

The best part about this book for me, personally, is the thing that I practice in order to forgive someone who's wronged me. It's a practice that I couldn't put in words or was not even conscious of until I read it in this book.

“I would unearth memories, beginning in childhood, of places and occasions when someone had hurt me. I found it somehow comforting to think that his coldness was in no way special or unique.”

This is right up in the top five reads of this year. I feel so glad to have taken this book on faith and given it a fair chance. I did myself a service. Completely amazing and enjoyable for such a short read and I would suggest this book to probably everyone who might like a dark read. Pick it up and dive right in! Who knows, you may find something of yourself in these lovely words and stories.

“The door that would not open no matter how hard you pushed, no matter how long you pounded on it. The screams no one heard. Darkness, hunger, pain. Slow suffocation.”

Laysee says

Revenge: Eleven Dark Tales by Yoko Ogawa is a collection of delectably disturbing stories. I read one or two stories at a time like a wickedly good dessert.

The prose is clean and simple. The characters in the stories are unremarkable people who have their fair share of disappointments and heartaches in life. The eleven stories feature spurned lovers, spouses left in the

cold, abandoned or dead children. Each story picks up an innocuous detail in a previous story (e.g., a proprietor of a cake shop heard crying on the phone or a truckload of tomatoes strewn on the road after a traffic accident). The stories flash backward or forward in time and convey the background or eventual destiny of the characters that have been presented in earlier stories.

The stories cover a wide range of pent-up emotions seeking release: jealousy, anger, grief, betrayal, guilt, sadness, and spitefulness. What stirs beneath the human breast is hidden, a complex churn of emotions simmering in a dank, venom-gathering cauldron, but what bubbles to the surface is shocking. Revenge is expressed in myriad ways: self-punishment, passive-aggressive behaviors, homicide, and murder. An "icy current" runs through these darkly charged stories, but a tenderness can often be detected behind the tension. Not all stories are about revenge (as traditionally understood) but they are rightly "dark tales".

A starter selection of my favorite tales follow and hopefully, it will whet your desire to check out this selection of stories.

(view spoiler)

Dhanaraj Rajan says

The Beginning:

On the back cover of the book I found this blurb (an extract from Washington Post Review). Usually I do not depend much upon the blurbs stated on the covers of the books. But after reading this collection of short stories I could not but depend on this blurb which I think captures the sentiments very rightly.

Here is the blurb:

"...Ogawa writes stories that float free of any specific culture, anchoring themselves instead in the landscape of the mind."

The phrase 'Landscape of the mind' is very important here. For all the stories deal with the feelings that go on in the mind. And now add to this piece of information the title of the book - REVENGE (Interestingly none of the stories in the collection has it as its proper title). So you guessed it right. Instead of being just a story with the theme of revenge, in fact the entire collection has a common theme - Revenge.

How do the feelings of revenge take its shape in the mind? How does the mind reason out in the moments

filled with vengeful feelings? Where and how does the mind find joy in 'killing a person' without killing him/her actually?

Just two examples: The betrayed wife on the way to meet the mistress of her husband to demand some answers finds incredible joy in driving over the tomatoes that are accidentally spread over the road. A teen age girl who is apparently rejected by her lover finds joy in listening to the explanations for the instruments of torture in the Museum.

These seem to be very simple in my 'reporting' it. But read it in the narration of Ogawa and you will find it very chilling and creepy.

Another specialty in this collection is the inter-connectedness between the stories. That is, an aspect of a story or a person of a story somehow appears in the next story. They both are two different stories and yet the reader can find some connection between the two. This is in a way a strategy to establish that the entire collection is just a Grand Story in which the individual story is a part. And Ogawa's genius lies in her choice of first person narrative for all the stories. The reader goes from one story to the other and sees the events with his/her own eyes. The reader can not but associate the stories and see the actual events. The reader is part of the entire collection. And the entire collection helps the reader in identifying the chilling reality of a vengeful feeling.

Now read the The Washington Review blurb that I gave at the beginning. It has said everything I explained in a single sentence. Isn't it?

Michael says

An aspiring writer moves into a new apartment and discovers that her landlady has murdered her husband. Years later, the writer's stepson reflects upon his stepmother and the strange stories she used to tell him. Yoko Ogawa weaves together a collection of short stories to create a haunting tapestry of death.

While this is a collection of short stories, Yoko Ogawa has managed to link each story with the last with recurring images and motifs. Apparently this is an old tradition from classical Japanese poetic collections. This is an eerie and very sinister novel but there is a real beauty within it too; not just in the writing, but in the imagery. Yoko Ogawa takes the reader on a clever journey of life and the afterlife.

I love what Ogawa does in this book, not only looking at the human psyche but plays with it a little to mess with the mind. From the very start of this book, I was planning my next dip into the world of Yoko Ogawa, I was hooked and I wanted to explore her writing more. It was just the combination of beauty with the sinister tones of the stories that really worked for me.

If this book is anything to go on, Yoko Ogawa is an amazing writer; showing the reader the beauty behind the dark and disturbing. Each story is macabre but the best part of the entire book is the way the stories link together and the beautiful tapestry Ogawa weaves. Highly recommended for lovers of short stories and the dark and disturbing, you won't be disappointed by how Yoko Ogawa captures your attention.

This review originally appeared on my blog; <http://literary-exploration.com/2013/...>

Viv JM says

I think the adjective I would use to describe these interlinked short stories is "unsettling". Dark and odd, with beautifully sparse prose, these stories really got under my skin.

Jason says

4.5. it deserves a re-read since the frail, gentle connections between the stories were overshadowed by the more overt, forced ones. Simple in prose and calm and succinct in writing style....succulent. did you ever notice the pipe in the mouth of the man, forefront, second to the far right, black top hat in *Bal au moulin de la Galette, Montmartr*? No? Look again...

But surely you noticed the two lovers dancing, stolen in a moment, rather large negative space between them and others.... eyes forward. Or the women, stretched lazily over the bench in the nearest the frame?

This is what it is like to read these stories. You can, and you will pay great attention to the larger themes, but as a result you may miss the beautiful rendering of details.

You must be careful to slow down. Cry with the baker. Listen to the rustling of the birds feathers. Sniff the metallic scent of dried blood on leather. Let your fingers slide down broken book binding. Feel the blood course through the tigers chest, the rise in your blood pressure. Turn your head but look out of the corner of your eye at that pale membrane thumping... thumping. Notice the subtle tightness in your nerves, the bees stirring in your chest as you move closer to seeking your revenge, then the release of these feelings, and the vapid hole left in its place..... and the divide between. Let the feeling conjure of the abrupt shift from resentment to hostility. the type of rage that boils, ruptures the defining qualities of self control, and forces steal between ribs, all the way back to rest between T2 and T3....clink... metal on bone. Become the lifeless body... the pulsing of the last bit of blood leaking around steal, seeping between the fingers of your assailant.... Be the observer, as well as the observed.... slowly... and take pause between chapters.

I enjoyed the first two and last two stories the most. There are some gems here, but the connection, those things which are meant to thread these stories together are sometimes too taut, when a looser approach may have been more appropriate. My only disappointment is that the web Ogawa attempted to weave between each story—back and forth—, were, at times a bit more forced and predictable. Some stories go on and on and on, while others end abruptly (not really, you just sit there begging for more... they end quite nicely, actually). But this is the reality of short stories, isn't it?

and fyi, comparing this book to any of haruki murakami's is just plain fraudulent.....

Ogawa enjoys setting the scene, out there, beyond the scope of the characters, beyond your immediate attention. but be warned dear reader, she is careful, and every single word holds meaning. the reader immediately knows that specific clock—its shape, its sound, its faults—the moment it is mentioned. The

movement of things—birds, trees, people—are central here, while pasta and ears are, for the most part absent.

Didi says

I thoroughly enjoyed this book. Ogawa never ceases to amaze me with her capacity to tell an interesting story. This is a collection of short stories that are linked. Each one has a bit of creepy in it. The way they link together is genius. I can't wait to read more of her novels. Ogawa is making me curious to check out more modern Japanese authors. Definitely worth the time and it's a very quick read since it's only 162 pages.

Trudie says

This book was suggested to me by my wonderful local bookshop lady and she certainly pushed me in a direction I don't normally go, namely translated short stories.

Ogawa starts most of these tales very matter-of-factly, calm sensory descriptions, leaves fluttering, people reading or going about their daily activities but something always feels slightly eerie and it is hard to put your finger on what. Eventually, the weirdness escalates in utterly unpredictable ways. The things that happen are odd and often creepy but I would not say this is horror. It feels like the reading equivalent of looking at miniature surrealist still life paintings.

I really enjoyed that these stories were linked, mainly by central characters in one story appearing tangentially in others but also by odd things like strawberry shortcakes and the scent of ferns..

A book that would reward repeated reading.

I will leave this review with a segment from the story "Old Mrs J". These hand shaped carrots haunted me !

"I sensed the lingering warmth of the sun as I washed the flesh of the carrot. Scrubbing turned it bright red. I had no idea where to insert the knife, but I decided it would be best to begin by cutting off the five fingers. One by one, they rolled across the cutting board. That evening, my potato salad had bits of the pinkie and the index finger."

Jr Bacdayan says

This is a fascinating collection that weaves together the lives of broken people unable to cope with lingering memories and pains. United by a sense of commonality in the quest of gaining triumph against their personal devils, the stories move hauntingly, enveloped with an off-kilter atmosphere, told with a chilling precision often eerie. There is even a dreadful sense of self-awareness in the collection when one story would be read or alluded to in another. Ogawa also manages to playfully insert self critique in one of them saying: "The prose was unremarkable, as were the plot and characters, but there was an icy current running under her words, and I found myself wanting to plunge into it again and again." Is this accurate? Probably, however for a vengeful theme I expected a bit more.
