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(Image: Endō Shūsaku)

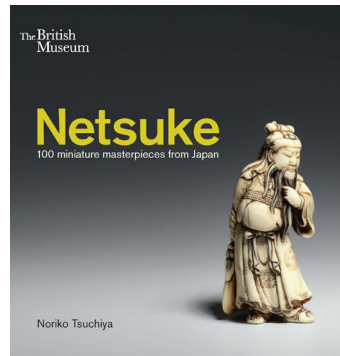
Netsuke: 100 miniature masterpieces from Japan

by Tsuchiya Noriko

The British Museum (2014)

ISBN 978-0-7141-9481-0

Review by Sir Hugh Cortazzi



Netsuke, as this book explains, were 'practical fashion accessories worn by men of the Edo period (1615-1868).' Japanese traditional dress had no pockets and men had to find a way of carrying their money and other accessories. These were attached to the sashes, which kept their clothes in place by means of *netsuke*, which were a form of toggle. They are often found attached to *inrō* (portable medicine cases) but *netsuke* were used with all sorts of *sagemono* (hanging things).

When the globetrotters began to arrive in Japan after the Meiji Restoration of 1868, they were fascinated by the exotic character of things Japanese. Like tourists today they wanted to take home some of the strange objects they saw in the souvenir shops (*kottoya*). *Netsuke* immediately took the fancy of the visitors. They were often of exquisite craftsmanship and they were small. This was a valuable consideration if, as was often the case, they were going on to China and other parts of Asia.

Japanese craftsmen soon realized how popular *netsuke* were with the tourists and to meet the demand the craftsmen involved developed and expanded production. All sorts of new *netsuke* were carved often primarily as ornaments.

The British were particularly avid collectors. The British Museum has some 2,300 *netsuke*. The hundred selected for this book are accordingly only a fraction of the museum's stock, but they are representative of the various types of *netsuke* made in Japan.

Tsuchiya Noriko explains the history of *netsuke* and describes the different materials used to make them including ivory and various kinds of wood. She also gives some account of artists and carvers involved in their manufacture and has usefully added a section on some of the well known signatures that collectors will encounter.

The majority of *netsuke* are, she explains, *katabori* or 'carvings in the round.' The subjects of such *netsuke* 'range from human figures and animals to plants and still-life objects.' Other types of *netsuke* are *sashi* which are 'longer and slender' and *manjū* which are so-called because their round flat shape suggests a *manjū* which is 'a round flattish rice-cake filled with bean-curd.'

The 100 *netsuke* chosen for this book include carved figures of humans, 'immortals,' ghosts and supernatural beings, masks, animals and various *manjū* objects. The seven images, which I have selected from the book, are ones which particularly attracted me. I hope that this subjective selection may tempt readers of this review to buy and enjoy this little book. §



Koto, Japanese harp, ivory, unsigned, mid-1800s



A 'stone lifter', wood, by Gessho, about 1800



Hare with loquats, ivory, by Yamaguchi Okatomo, late 1700s



A manju, walrus ivory, unsigned, 1870s mid-1800s



Goat, ivory, by Kaigyokusai Masatugu (1819-1892)



A sashi, sea horse, bone and coral



The human form | Foreigners

A 'foreigner', ivory, unsigned, about 1780

An Interview with Junichi Kajioaka

Interview by Mike Sullivan

Junichi Kajioaka is a prolific actor based in London who has been in numerous movies over the last twenty years, and incredibly he graduated from Tokyo Sushi Academy, which means he is a qualified sushi chef. He has had many appearances in TV dramas in China and has had a number of supporting roles in productions across the world including *47 Ronin*. His recent passion has been his own film project, *IMPHAL 1944*, a movie about a war veteran who comes to London for reconciliation between the British and Japanese who fought in Imphal in 1944.

When did you know that you wanted to become an actor? Were you inspired by anyone in particular?

It was when I was in high school – I wanted to do something different from everyone else. I'm still exploring different possibilities though. I was hugely inspired by Kurosawa's films. When I was younger

I wasn't a keen cinemagoer but after being involved in the making of *Devils on the Doorstep in China*, I started my passion for films. I watched 555 films in the year before I came to London. Kurosawa's 30 films were the most impressive and I could see how

his style changed as his life progressed.

How do you prepare for an audition?

First of all, I try to get any script for the role so that I understand the context for the piece I am performing. If I know who the director is, I will check their style and try and get inspiration from their past work. The rest of it relies on spontaneity!

What was the first part you ever had? Were you nervous?

My first role was a croupier in a one-off TV drama.



There were so many famous actors in the shooting including my then-mentor Teruyuki Kagawa. Of course I was so nervous before the shooting and got a severe headache on set but once the shooting started my headache and nervousness were gone and all my attention was concentrated on listening to the director and paying attention to camera positions and the other actors. Concentration! It turned out to be an enjoyable experience and I can say that I learnt some really useful things on set!

What has been your most memorable role so far and why?

My most memorable role was, I have to say, the one for *47 Ronin* because it was my first Hollywood film. I went to the auditions three times and each one was for a different role. In the end I was given a speaking role but it was just one line! It was very tough! Actually I was cast for another big-budget film at the same time in China. However, in the time that I waited for the *47 Ronin* shooting in London, the big role in that other film was filled. It's not the only time that potential projects have clashed. I wish I had two bodies!

Looking back at all of the projects you have been attached to it seems like you work really hard! Although you are based in London, are you normally moving from one place to another? Do you often have work in Japan?



From *Imphal 1944* (2014), his own project.

I worked as an actor in Tokyo for seven years and then moved to China in 1995. I've acted in films and TV series in China. I was often away from three to six months for Chinese projects and moved from one place to another. These days I'm

still moving a lot. I've just come back from a tour in Glasgow and Paris. I hope to go to India again soon and a film festival in Monaco in December. Yes, definitely I'm often on the move!

Your latest project is *IMPHAL 1944*, a place in India where there was an important battle between the Japanese and allied troops. It seems that you have been the driving force behind this?

Yes, I've been involved in another Indian film project which has had a long gestation period. It was originally

intended to be finished in time for the 70th anniversary commemoration of the Battle of Imphal this year. In March when I realised that this wasn't going to be possible I decided to make my own film instead. It was a very intensive project due to the timescales involved. Of course, it's so hard to make and produce one film but it's so rewarding! I will definitely continue with writing and producing my own films now.

What kind of reaction have you had from the audience for this film?

So far it has only had private presentations in Imphal and Delhi screenings, including the 70th anniversary commemoration in Imphal. When I received a round of applause from hundreds of people in the theatre I felt very emotional. A lot of newspapers and magazines in Japan and India wrote about our film and my acting life. Now that I am back in the UK, it is wonderful to know that so many people are interested in our project.

What do you think are the differences between being an actor in Japan and in the UK?

There are always different challenges. In Japan belonging to a good agent and being established

definitely helps to get you a job. In UK, there is always an audition to get a role so it's based more on one's ability to perform in a particular role. But there is not such a great variety of roles for minorities so you tend to be typecast. That's why I'm exploring more opportunities not only in Japan and the UK but in other countries. I am also not just waiting for auditions as an actor but also making my own films with a UK/Japan theme. I want to find and tell little known stories to the world through my film making.

What are your favourite things about Japan, and your favourite things about the UK?

I love eating out and shopping in Japan – it is cheap and convenient. The first thing I do when I go back to Japan is go to a sushi restaurant to eat as much sushi as I want and then pop into convenience stores in the middle of the night. This is my obligatory routine!

I love the easy-going life style in UK, and the cultural diversity in London. I feel a sense of freedom living in London. People here are so patient and open-minded. They never put you in their box and judge people. You are just comfortable being yourself. §

Kiku's Prayer

by Endō Shūsaku

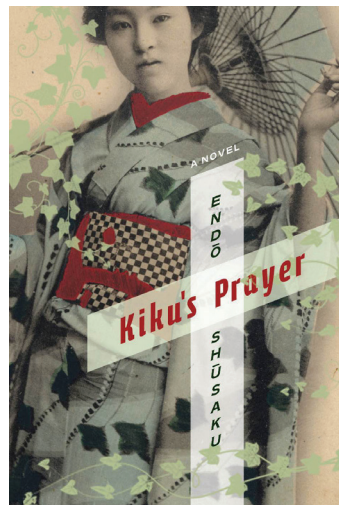
Columbia University Press
(2013)

ISBN: 0231162820

Review by Suki Maw

Kiku's Prayer is an English translation of Endō Shūsaku's novel *Onna no Isshō: Ichibu – Kiku no Baai* (*Woman's Life: Volume I – Kiku's Case*), first published in 1982.

Endō Shūsaku (1923 – 1996) was a Japanese novelist born in Tokyo. While many of his light-hearted, humorous works are widely read in Japan, he is particularly highly regarded for his serious novels with strong Catholic themes. (His literary work is sometimes compared to that of Graham Greene.) Following the divorce of his parents at the age of ten, Endō was baptised into the Catholic Church on his mother's persuasion. However, his spiritual journey was not a smooth one. Finding it incongruous to be a Japanese and a follower of the Western religion, he formed the view that the cultural and ideological milieu in Japan was such that it did not allow the Christian faith to



truly permeate among the Japanese, and the clash between Japan and Western Europe in religious and ethical contexts became one of the main themes in his literary work. At the same time, Endō's literary work features a focus on weak or cowardly individuals, and a compassionate image of Christ developed and embraced by the Japanese. On this point, Endō's analysis was that, the image of compassionate Christ was developed in Japan by those who sought forgiveness for ostensibly abandoning their Christian faith for fear of torture and death under persecution.

In *Kiku's Prayer*, Endō depicts the characters in different situations amidst the persecution of the Christians in Urakami, a suburb of Nagasaki, during the turbulent years of the latter half of the nineteenth century. While *Kiku's Prayer* is a fiction, the novel incorporates meticulous research conducted by the author, and contains accurate accounts of the historical events as detailed below, along with the names of priests, political figures, places and buildings.

Christianity was introduced to Japan by Francis Xavier, a Jesuit, in 1549. The number of Christians in Japan, or *kirishitan* – the word referring to the Japanese Catholics until the lifting of the ban on Christianity in 1873 – is estimated to have been as high as 600,000 circa 1600 (approximately 2.4% of the country's population). However, following the *shōgun* Toyotomi Hideyoshi's

abrupt order to expel the Jesuit missionaries from the country in 1587, the Tokugawa *shogunate* imposed a total ban on Christianity in 1614. Within the country, a strict anti-*kirishitan* policy was maintained throughout the remainder of the Tokugawa era, a period of some 250 years. Under this regime, ferocious attempts were made to eradicate Christianity altogether by means of torture and death. (For example, some *kirishitan* who refused to renounce their faith were thrown alive into a volcano in Nagasaki.) Also, systematic methods were employed for suppression, including trampling on sacred Catholic images by all subjects in front of government officials and the compulsory registration of all subjects as parishioners of their local Buddhist temples.

However, a few months after the completion of Ōura Catholic Church – the church built for the French Catholics residing in Nagasaki – in 1864, Fr. Bernard-Thadée Petitjean had a dramatic encounter with a group of *kirishitan* from Urakami. While Tokugawa's anti-Christian edicts were still strictly in force amongst the Japanese, to Fr. Petitjean's astonishment and joy, these Urakami *kirishitan* confided in him that they shared his faith, and were overjoyed to see the statue of Virgin Mary with "Baby Zezesu" in her arms. This implies that, remarkably, Christianity had not been extirpated in Japan in spite of the severe anti-*kirishitan* policy for over 250 years.

In fact, while having to abandon all the outward manifestations of Christianity, groups of Japanese Christians had clandestinely preserved their faith for two and a half centuries, despite having no access to a priest, the Church or the Bible, and of course, at the constant risk of death. *Kirishitan* skilfully developed their own ways of practising their faith, and passed the teachings from one generation to the next. For example, Maria Kannon, images of Our Lady in the guise of a Buddhist deity, were created, and secret posts were assigned within underground communities to baptise the children (called *mizukata*) and to communicate the Church calendar (*chōkata*).

Following Fr. Petitjean's dramatic discovery of the hidden Christians at Ōura Catholic Church, the Urakami *kirishitan* grew increasingly expressive of their faith. In 1867, they went as far as to collectively express their wish to no longer have any dealings with the Buddhist temple at which they were forced to be registered. Bewildered, the local magistrate reported their resistance to the central government. The newly formed Meiji government's decision was to exile the entire village of Urakami, in spite of the fierce criticism

and protests from Fr. Petitjean and Western diplomats. In total, over 3,000 Urakami *kirishitan* were exiled to various places within Japan, including Tsuwano in south-western Honshu, where particularly harsh tortures were inflicted upon them. In fact, the Urakami *kirishitan* had endured three crackdowns previously. However, this fourth became the most extensive.

The political situation in Japan was changing. In 1868, the Tokugawa *shogunate* was overthrown, and the Meiji government was formed with the emperor restored to the throne. As a consequence, along with the collapse of the Tokugawa era's feudal system, the samurai ruling class with hereditary privileges had been abolished. In *Kiku's Prayer*, their fate and the drastic changes to the country's political and social hierarchy are skilfully depicted in the contrast between two individuals, Itō Seizaemon and Hondō Shuntarō.

In the novel, Kiku, a self-assured peasant girl in Urakami, falls in love with Seikichi, a young peddler from another district of Urakami and a devout Catholic. While she witnesses Seikichi quickly make 'some strange gesture' at the entrance of Ōura Catholic Church, Kiku knows virtually nothing about Christianity. When the Tokugawa era's abhorrence of *kirishitan* in society in general was still prevalent, it is not surprising that, to Kiku, a naive country girl, *kirishitan* were 'strange people' who held 'pointless beliefs'. In fact, she associated the word *kirishitan* with criminals on death row. However, instead of abandoning his 'evil *kirishitan* faith' as Kiku wished, Seikichi begins to assume that *kirishitan* have now become able to publicly express their faith with the demise of the feudal ruling elite on the arrival of a new, emperor's era. However, he was completely wrong. Seikichi is exiled to Tsuwano in the fourth Urakami crackdown. During Seikichi's exile, Kiku determines to alleviate his misery, and is moved to great self-sacrifice. The single-minded efforts she makes for Seikichi are painful. The novel has a profound religious climax.

One feature in Endō's literary work is the focus on weak or cowardly individuals. In *Kiku's Prayer*, the contrast is stark between the self-confidence of the sharp, ambitious Hondō Shuntarō, a government interpreter, and the clumsiness and tactlessness of Ito Seizaemon, a lower-ranking Nagasaki official and a persecutor of *kirishitan* himself. ('A pathetic soul' in contemptuous Hondō Shuntarō's words.) However, it is worth noting that, in the author's afterword, Endō confesses that he 'began to sympathise with this despicable man – and [that he] felt not just sympathy but even a love for him'. The author further explains that

'[u]p to the very end of the novel [he] couldn't bear to forsake him'. This is perhaps why Endō had Fr. Petitjean say to Ito that God loved him more than he loved Hondo Shuntaro. Overall, the role that this dishonest, cowardly yet complex man plays in the novel seems no less important than that of the eponymous Kiku.

On the whole, *Kiku's Prayer* is a faithful translation of *Onna no Isshō*. In addition, the footnotes will prove useful to readers in gaining background information on some political figures. One disappointment, however, is the absence of the nuances which the regional dialects convey in the original novel *Onna no Isshō*. In the first line of the author's afterword, Endō explains that *Onna no Isshō* was an attempt to repay some of the indebtedness he felt towards Nagasaki. *Kiku's Prayer* is not free from apparent translation errors, omissions

and typographical errors. For instance, Yokohama and Nagasaki, north-western and south-western Honshu, and younger and older sister are confused. Also, it is particularly puzzling why Moriyama Jinzaburō, an Urakami *kirishitan* who was actually exiled to Tsuwano in the fourth Urakami crackdown, is referred to as Moriyama Kanzaburō throughout the book. However, the overall faithfulness of the translation more than compensates for these slips and inconsistencies.

Kiku's Prayer contains strong Catholic themes, and some aspects may be lost on a reader without an understanding of the Catholic faith. Nonetheless, it will appeal to a wider audience thanks to Endō's ingenious and insightful depictions of human virtues as well as their failings. §

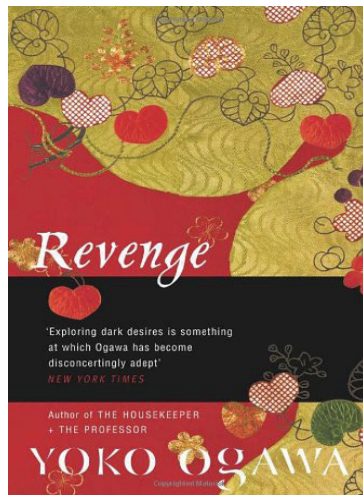
Revenge

By Ogawa Yōko

Vintage (2014)

ISBN-10: 0099553937

Review by Chris Corker



Ogawa Yōko is a well-established and highly respected author in Japan, who, to quote from her profile at the start of this taut book of short stories, 'has won every major Japanese literary award including the Akutagawa and the Tanizaki prizes'. Ogawa is now in her 50s, and these stories certainly have the marks of a confident author in free-flow. There is an undeniable beauty of narrative in each tale and in the discreet connections that bind them together as a coherent whole.

Ogawa seems to be an author who is more comfortable with the short story and novella genres that make up the majority of her oeuvre, rather than more extended prose, and this work, despite containing a total of eleven stories, stands only at a well-spaced 176 pages. Still, it is hard to complain when the stories are crafted so meticulously, with an economy of prose that often cuts right to the heart of the matter. On occasion, however, she does have a tendency to rush ahead with the narrative with such vigour that the dramatic impact is lost, a build-up of tension impossible.

Rather than a collection of randomly selected short stories, the tales that comprise *Revenge* have a broader significance to one another, generating a sense of co-dependence that gives birth to a narrative greater than the sum of its parts. In a manner somewhat reminiscent of David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, the stories hop through various times and places, and their connection to each other is not always immediately apparent; the desire to find out how each story is interlinked generates a pleasant page turning anxiety not often found in the short story genre.

In 'Afternoon at the Bakery' a woman waits for a baker to return so that she can buy a strawberry shortcake for her six-year-old son, who died twelve years ago inside a fridge. As she waits she recollects the aftermath of his death. This story, like many others in this collection, is about not just the cruelty and indiscriminate nature of death, but also its loneliness – symbolised here by the dark, cramped fridge – both for the deceased and their loved ones. The strawberries on the shortcake are at first ripe and vivid, but quickly discolour and wilt. This story has a strong sense of place and transports the reader smoothly into a Japan of cats, drinking fountains and snap-happy tourists. The woman inside the bakery, though, is alone, separate from that world. The next story, 'Fruit Juice', also features bereavement and concerns a girl who, left alone by the death of her mother, goes to see the father who abandoned them. It is not obviously connected to 'Afternoon at the Bakery' at first, but we eventually learn that they share a common character, despite their chronological displacement.

'Old Mrs J' – my favourite story within the collection – is a dark, modern and discreetly sinister fairy tale. A writer – who features in many of the stories in a metafictional role – is intrigued by her new landlady, who seems at times to be elderly and infirm, and at others able and nimble. One day she gives the writer a carrot in the shape of a human hand. Soon after, more and more of these carrots, replicas of the first, are gifted to everyone in the building. This story – redolent of the Succubus myth – builds up tension very well and maintains its intrigue until the end. In the next story, 'The Little Dustman', a young girl is sitting on a delayed train on her way to the funeral of a writer.

For 'Lab Coats' Ogawa favours a present tense reporting style. Here we are introduced to another common theme in *Revenge*: the irrational power of obsessive – sometimes unrequited – love. It is portrayed as a blind feeling that will forgive even the most despicable acts. In the morgue of a hospital, two characters – one in love with the other despite their cruel personality – itemise soiled lab coats. One of them is building up to a confession of love, the other to a much darker revelation. Briefly revisiting the same hospital is the protagonist of 'Sewing for the Heart'. In this cleverly metaphorical tale of human isolation, a bag maker is commissioned to make a pouch for a woman whose heart hangs externally at her side. 'Sewing for the Heart' illustrates how a seemingly noble act can turn quickly sour, how love can be dangerously possessive:

'I wondered what would happen if I held her tight in my arms, in a lover's embrace, melting into one another, bone on bone... Her heart would be crushed. The membrane would split, the veins tear free, the heart itself explode into bits of flesh, and then my desire would contain hers – it was all so painful and yet so utterly beautiful to imagine.'

The subsequent stories build on these same themes and delve into the part of the human psyche that finds interest in the macabre, as well as the connection between sadism and eroticism, love and hate. Another constant is the fear of the speed of death and of non-existence ('Why was everyone dying? They

had all been so alive just yesterday.'). Thematically, all of the stories fit snugly together to create a foreboding collage of the futility of human relationships. And yet there is a vein of quietly optimistic beauty that runs through each page, preventing the collection from leaving one numb.

The book is not without its faults. I found the voice of the male protagonists far less convincing than their female counterparts; the voice differs very little from story to story, and without a clear identification of gender, I found I was sometimes confused as to the relationship of certain characters.

Some readers may also find the cruelty and violence in these stories – sometimes rendered more acute for being perpetrated by young girls – exaggerated, stepping outside the realms of the believable. Yet we have only to look at the recent case of the schoolgirl in Sasebo, who beheaded her classmate and cut off her wrist because she "wanted to dissect someone". Sasebo had already seen a similar incident in 2004 when a schoolgirl killed her classmate, and in 1997 a 14-year-old student killed two of their classmates in Kobe, leaving the head of one at the school gates. It may be uncommon, but the cruelty is there, and nothing here eclipses that horrifying reality.

Prior to *Revenge* I hadn't had a great success rate with Japanese fiction by female authors. I found Kirino Natsuo's *Out* to be perfectly readable but misandristic in theme and so angry as to be caricatured; in contrast, I found Banana Yoshimoto's *Kitchen* sickly-sweet and melodramatic. It was a pleasant surprise then that I found in *Revenge* something intriguingly dark in tone, but also familiar and comforting, something sinister but not depressing. Some of the stories do stand head and shoulders above the rest – I found 'Lab Coats' the weakest of the bunch – and the breathless nature of the narrative sometimes betrays the otherwise carefully established atmosphere. Having said that, I also have to admit that these stories are at times masterpieces of the sinister undertone. In all, this is a work that benefits from its sparseness and implies a world and narrative much wider than the one on the page. §

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