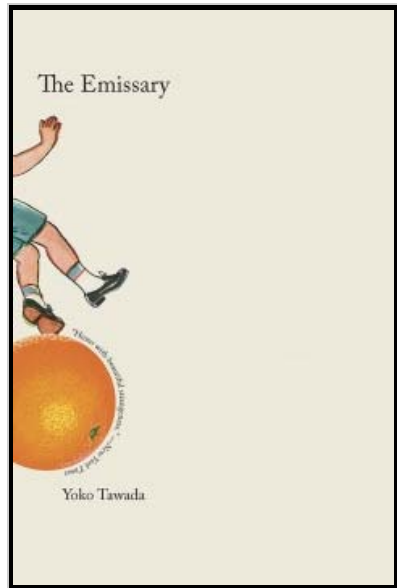


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 The Emissary



The Emissary

by Yoko Tawada, Margaret Mitsutani

Price: \$14.95(Paperback)
 Published: April 24, 2018
 ☆☆☆☆☆
 Rating: 0.0/5 (0 votes cast)

From the Publisher: Japan, after suffering from a massive irreparable disaster, cuts itself off from the world. Children are so weak they can barely stand or walk: the only people with any get-go are the elderly. Mumei lives with his grandfather Yoshiro, who worries about him constantly. They carry on a day-to-day routine in what could be viewed as a post-Fukushima time, with all the children born ancient—frail and gray-haired, yet incredibly compassionate and wise. Mumei may be enfeebled and feverish, but he is a beacon of hope, full of wit and free of self-pity and pessimism. Yoshiro concentrates on nourishing Mumei, a strangely wonderful boy who offers “the beauty of the time that is yet to come.” A delightful, irrepressibly funny book, *The Emissary* is filled with light. Yoko Tawada, deftly turning inside-out “the curse,” defies gravity and creates a playful joyous novel out of a dystopian one, with a legerdemain uniquely her own.

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About The Author

Yoko Tawada, Margaret Mitsutani
 Yoko Tawada—“strange, exquisite” (*The New Yorker*)—was born in Tokyo in 1960 and moved to Germany when she was twenty-two. She writes in both Japanese and German and has received the Akutagawa Prize, the Adelbert von Chamisso Prize, the Goethe Medal, and the Tanizaki Prize.

 Margaret Mitsutani has also translated Japan’s 1994 Nobel Prize laureate Kenzaburo Oe.

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What We Say

Think of “*The Emissary*” as a quieter, homebound spin on “*The Road*.” In Yoko Tawada’s new dystopian novel set in Japan, something has happened. An unnamed disaster has upended the world in odd, unsettling ways that quietly reveal themselves with a word here or an observation there. We watch a great-grandfather named Yoshiro care for his great-grandson Mumei and slowly the picture comes into focus. Old people have been robbed of death -- they just live on and on and are the only people with the energy and physical ability to do banal, daily tasks. They live so long that people are now called young-old (those in their 70s) middle-old (80s and up) and the venerable plain old “old” like Yoshiro, who is

approaching 108 years of age. Now the elderly are somewhat spry and the children are feeble and fragile, unable to walk much, eat food and so on. In another reversal, the old people are sad and angry and confused while the young seem to have a complacent or perhaps philosophical acceptance of their fate. This is a curious book, just 128 pages long but only shyly revealing some of its secrets, even at the end. Japan is quarantined from the world or perhaps has shut the world out. Foreign words are not allowed, either because the outside world is seen as hostile and inferior (in an embrace of Japan's Edo past) or perhaps because foreign countries now charge money for words they have exported and the Japanese government can't afford the cost. Even the purpose of the emissary in the title is left fuzzily unclear -- even after it is explained, we're not sure what to make of it. What does come through is life, the need to get by however dire or absurd or heartbreaking the struggle may be. We slip into the consciousness of various characters including the child Mumei, a teacher, the boy's great-grandmother and others. But mostly we see the world from the point of view of Yoshiro, who patiently continues to write his fiction though no one will publish it, patiently cuts up an orange for the boy and tries to learn from this Buddha-like child. "The Emissary" is strange, beguiling and not quite satisfying. One can't help worrying over the translation when the publisher insists this gently mournful novel is "delightful, irrepressibly funny." Perhaps they're as scared by the book's essential melancholy as Yoshiro and everyone around him, who whisper about or simply don't mention the cold facts of the world they made. Nevertheless, it's hard to shake and lingers in the mind with a half-life all its own. -- Michael Giltz

What Others Say

An airily beautiful dystopian novella about mortality. Tawada’s quirky style and ability to jump from realism to abstraction manages to both chastise humanity for the path we are taking towards destruction and look hopefully toward an unknown future. - [Enobong Essien Booklist](#)

Wonderful—what is truly affecting is Tawada’s language, which jumps off the page and practically sings. - [NPR](#)

Recessive, lunar beauty [with] a high sheen. Her language has never been so arresting—flickering brilliance. - [Parul Sehgal The New York Times](#)

The Emissary carries us beyond the limits of what it is to be human, in order to remind us of what we must hold dearest in our conflicted world, our humanity. - [Sjón](#)

Persistent mystery is what is so enchanting about Tawada’s writing. Her penetrating irony and deadpan surrealism fray our notions of home and combine to deliver another offbeat tale. An absorbing work from a fascinating mind. - [Kirkus Reviews](#)

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