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ASSEMBLING A SHORT STORY COLLECTION:
CREATING UNITY OUT OF DIVERSITY

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Fiction – Cohort 2012

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I. Introduction

In twenty-five years, Japanese author Yoko Ogawa has published more than twenty books and received major Asian literary prizes. Her collection Revenge was originally published in Japan in 1998 as Kamoku na shigai, Midara na tomurai. It is published in English for the first time this year following a translation from Stephen Snyder, Professor of Japanese Studies at Middleburg College. The collection consists of eleven macabre tales, all set in the same unnamed city and told by a different first person narrator, though Ogawa alternates between a female and a male point-of-view. The collection has been marketed, at least in America, as a character-linked short story collection.

On the other hand, Who I Was Supposed to Be is Susan Perabo’s debut short story collection, which she wrote while completing her MFA in Creative Writing from the University of Arkansas. It has been published three times. The 1999 edition was originally titled Explaining Death to the Dog. Three years later, the second edition still consisted of eleven stories, but its title was changed to Who I Was Supposed to Be. Finally in 2006, the seventh story of the collection was removed from the third edition—which this thesis proposes to study. More than half of these stories have appeared in major American literary journals, such as The Missouri Review and Glimmer Train. All ten contemporary stories follow the same traditional structure and are set in various American cities.

The in-depth analysis of Revenge and Who I Was Supposed to Be appears relevant to any writer attempting to assemble a short story collection since both works suggest that a collection is more than an accumulation of individual stories. Otherwise why would Revenge be marketed as a collection of interlocking stories? Why would the latest edition of Who I Was Supposed to Be differ from the previous ones? Furthermore, even though Perabo’s book is simply defined as a collection of short stories, even a first reading reveals thematic connections between its ten pieces. In this sense, both works exemplify David Jauss’
assumption that when it comes to assembling and organizing stories into a collection, even though there are as many possibilities as there are writers, all share the same objective: ensuring that a sum of individual stories becomes a cohesive and unified work.

Reflecting on Jauss’ essay “Stacking Stones: Building a Unified Short Story Collection” from On Writing Fiction, this critical thesis intends to analyze the techniques and principles applied to assemble Who I Was Supposed to Be and Revenge, thereby demonstrating that Jauss’ elements do help discover connections between stories, but other unexplored devices found in both collections can also complement this existing list. Furthermore this thesis will focus on the emotional consequences of these techniques and principles, especially how they influence the reader’s response towards an individual story, but also ultimately towards the whole collection. We will first analyze the diverse craft techniques unifying and connecting stories in the respective collections; and because Revenge is a translated version, any findings in terms of linguistic patterns will be assumed to be the result of the author as much as the translator. The second part of this critical thesis will reveal how the meaning of a story can be altered once juxtaposed with another. Finally a focus on Perabo and Ogawa’s books as whole works will highlight how different structural principles can help organize and assemble stories into a collection, and the subsequent effects on the audience.

II. Definitions of Terms

As the title of Jauss’ essay suggests, individual stories can be referred to as stones “of different sizes, shapes, textures, and colorations” (151). According to Jauss, successfully building a collection entails that once assembled these unities form a larger, expanded and global unity. The first challenge Jauss pinpoints is for the writer to unify two or more stories, which requires finding their inherent relationships. Jauss argues this is more about
discovering than creating connections, since “it is inevitable that there be unifying relationships between the stories,” because “our choices of words, characters, and plots arise from our own obsessive concerns and themes, from our own individual selves” (152). After discovering these relationships, the writer has to heighten their effects, which requires him to not only strategically add “connecting details, parallels, contrasts, repetitions, and variations” but also ensure that the stories are bound together in an optimal order (Jauss 152). The placement of a piece is critical since its juxtaposition with others will potentially modify its meaning, thereby intensifying, altering or reversing the reader’s response to the previous story. Finding the right sequence can be achieved by applying principles that guide the overall structure of a collection. Some of these principles of organization “take into account the reader’s experience of the work,” while others are dedicated to assembling “collections whose sequence serve to create unity” (Jauss 166). Jauss uncovered fourteen ways to think about short story organization, among which the principle of variety—the device most commonly used by writers even though it doesn’t always conduce unity—but also thematic and configurational structures, which are both especially relevant to Ogawa and Perabo’s works. Building a short story collection is about creating “unity out of diversity:” unifying and assembling in such a way that the stories “expand and elaborate each other and, ultimately, become one unified work,” the ultimate goal being to “turn piles of stones into well-structured houses” (Jauss 151).

III. Unifying Techniques

According to Jauss, some of the devices available to unify two stories are similar to those meant to connect two scenes within a same piece. Indeed writers often repeat certain key words and images in order to create links and bring cohesion between scenes. For example, in Perabo’s *Who I Was Supposed to Be*, which is not marketed as a linked
collection, “The Greater Grace of Carlisle”—the third story in the collection in which the narrator’s mother is struggling to deal with her addiction to the lottery—the following words reappear between two to four times within nine scenes: a neighbor, a garden, an attic, a mailbox, and a park. Jauss refers to such repetitions of key words as “liaisons.” In the same way they help connect different scenes, they are also “the principal cement that mortars our stories together into a unified collection” (153). “The Greater Grace of Carlisle” is unified through the repetition of key words, but also connected to the previous piece through a verbal liaison. Indeed, towards the middle of the story, the narrator Kathy finds an old magazine, “Princess Diana was on the cover, smiling with baby William, having no idea she would end up bulimic and divorced and dead” (Perabo 65). This detail helps build characterization, the sarcastic and bitter temperament of the narrator, but more importantly it sends the reader back to “Counting The Ways,” the previous story, in which Princess Diana is a major plot element. Katy, the narrator’s girlfriend, spends her inheritance on a dress that belonged to the princess. Both protagonists try to fool themselves into believing this outfit will bring light into their life, until the celebrity dies, and “the magic of the dress” wears off, and the couple is surrounded once again by a “damned blackness” (Perabo 43, 46). Both stories are at first glance very different since one is about a mother’s addiction, and the other about a failing love relationship, yet they are in fact subtly linked through the themes of hope, grief and disappointment, and such narrative liaison helps bring out this connection.

In Ogawa’s Revenge, marketed as a linked collection, key words reappear as well in order to reveal a “thematic relationship” between three stories, thereby demonstrating that liaisons can also link non-adjacent stories (Jauss 155). The first, second, and seventh story are connected through strawberry shortcakes. “Afternoon at the Bakery” deals with a mother who wants to buy that cake for her dead son’s birthday. The adjacent story “Fruit Juice” is about a boy having lunch with a classmate and her father, whom she is meeting for the first time, and
the girl devours a “strawberry cake covered in a thick layer of whipped cream,” which is her own way of expressing sorrow (Ogawa 20). As the title of the seventh story conveys, “Welcome to the Museum of Torture” is about a woman visiting a house exhibiting instruments of torture such as retractors to tear limbs apart and pliers to extract fingernails. This narrator, after arguing with her boyfriend, worries that the shortcakes she bought for him “would be getting stale,” whereas the narrator in the first story remembers watching the cake “rot” after the death of her boy (Ogawa 92, 6). As Jauss observed in his essay, liaisons take the form of key words “whose repetition links … seemingly divergent scenes … and thereby reveals their underlying connection and unity” (153). As different as they might seem, the scenes in which the words strawberry shortcakes are repeated include a thematic relationship, characters having to overcome a difficult and painful situation, and by connecting the sadness of these three characters, the key words ultimately connect all three stories. But mostly, Ogawa resorts to this craft technique in order to create a playful “narrative” connection between stories (Jauss 153). For instance, the repetition of Apartment 508 in the fifth, seventh and ninth stories reveals that all three narrators have a link with the same minor character, a woman who lives in the said apartment. Other repeated key words throughout Ogawa’s collection linking adjacent and non-adjacent stories include notably tomatoes, kiwis, peanuts, women knitting, girls with pale ears, cold fingers, and good-mannered children singing ‘The Little Dustman’ by Johannes Brahms.

Not only single words, but also similar sentence structures can be used as verbal liaisons. Half of the stories in Who I Was Supposed to Be present the same power struggle, a dominated male in a relationship with a stronger female character; however, some “liaisons do their work subliminally,” in a discreet way, and at first, the reader is not necessarily aware of these “underlying connections” between stories (Jauss 153). In the title story “Who I Was Supposed to Be,” the narrator observes: “My mother was … that tough, compact kind of little
that my father had never been able to achieve” (Perabo 108). In the adjacent story “Gravity,”
the narrator, who is also a little boy, compares himself with his best friend: “I tagged along
right behind, always trying to catch up with her but never quite able to do it” (Perabo 125).
By placing these stories side by side, but also because “never been able” and “never quite
able” are so close in terms of syntax, the reader feels more than notices the similarity of the
relationships in both stories, and this effect is reinforced every time such an imbalance
between couples or friends reappears within the collection. In Revenge, connections through
similarity of sentence structure often do their work in a more obvious and straightforward
manner. In “Old Mrs. J,” a woman remembers a day when her picture was taken: “It was all I
could do to keep my eyes open in the blinding sunlight …. I was clearly tense and
uncomfortable,” whereas in the next story “The Little Dustman,” her stepson, now an adult,
gets hold of the same picture, and notices that his stepmother was “looking terribly
uncomfortable. It had been a beautiful day and Mama was squinting in the sunlight” (Ogawa
34, 49). Here, this technique of liaison not only connects two adjacent stories but also
establishes a deep and clear connection between characters, and the consequent unifying
effect is important since both characters reappear towards the end of the collection.

Both Perabo and Ogawa seem partial to verbal liaisons in-between stories, but a
liaison can take other forms, including repeated actions, images or feelings. Ogawa’s
narrators are repeatedly found wandering the streets or getting lost. In two of Perabo’s
adjacent stories, a man is beaten up and regains consciousness in a hospital. Perabo even goes
as far as to wound the characters in similar ways, “a broken nose, three broken ribs” (108).
“This liaison helps connect two stories that are otherwise very different” (Jauss 154).

Perabo’s “Reconstruction” deals with a narrator trying to save his marriage, whereas “Who I
Was Supposed to Be” is about a young boy ashamed of his father and desperate not to
resemble him as he grows up.
The elements analyzed above demonstrate how repetitions help create narrative connections between stories, but repeated images seem especially valuable when the author’s purpose is to establish a more conceptual relationship between pieces. Perabo’s “Gravity” is about two friends who accidentally kill a little boy on top of a mountain. He “seemed to almost rock there for a second on the edge of the bluff, and then tumbled without a sound” (Perabo 122). This image of silence associated with death occurs in two other stories. In “Explaining Death to The Dog,” the narrator, hollow with grief after the death of her baby, comes to understand that “that was it, that was death, the quiet” (Perabo 83). In “Counting The Ways,” the television presenter announcing Lady Diana’s death comments: “the silence is disturbing” (Perabo 44).

Just like Perabo, Ogawa uses this repeated image of death and silence; however, in Revenge it “appears throughout” the collection, and Jauss defines such “an extended, expanded liaison” as a “motif” (155). Even though death is omnipresent in each of the eleven stories in Revenge—characters kill, witness, or have to deal with a loss—it takes diverse forms. Death moves the plot forward in “Lab Coats,” in which a secretary confesses to the murder of her lover. Occasionally it remains a detail, such as dead dolphins next to a resort. In “Poison Plants,” death becomes more conceptual with a woman wandering into a vacant lot and discovering her “dead self” tucked inside a refrigerator (Ogawa 162). Yet whenever death is present, so is silence. As the narrator of “Afternoon at the Bakery” recounts the death of her son, her interlocutor’s response is to smile “faintly, in a way that seemed perfectly suited to the quiet of the bakery” (Ogawa 5). Silence also gives human attributes to objects: books, a hill, a club, even the world. “Lab Coats” is the only story in which the words quiet or silence do not appear, however, realizing her colleague has killed a man, the narrator reacts: “I feel a scream rising out of me, but somehow I stop it, hold it back, and instead I calmly imagine the scene” (Ogawa 57). This image of death associated with silence becomes
a motif because these two juxtaposed images do not serve as “trailers” to link stories but “expand and elaborate the stories” (Jauss 156). The recurrence of death conveys an overall sense of darkness, while its correlation with silence creates an eerie atmosphere of calm and stillness, as if the tales were whispered to the reader, this effect being reinforced by the fact that half of Ogawa’s stories are framed narratives, the narrator becoming nothing more than a storyteller calmly sharing someone else’s slice of life.

Unifying and expanding the significance of diverse stories is also the purpose behind the use of “recurring characters” within a collection (Jauss 156). Each story in Revenge includes at least one recurring character, even the last piece, in which a writer reappears through an excerpt of her book. An intriguing character in Ogawa’s collection is a doctor, who is mentioned in four different stories, yet never interacts with other protagonists, nor appears in any scene. “Lab Coats” ends with the narrator holding the doctor’s lab coat, while the adjacent story “Sewing for the Heart” starts with the hospital’s public address system repeatedly calling “Dr. Y from Respiratory Medicine” (Ogawa 59). His discreet and subtle omnipresence sometimes allows the collection’s plot to move forward, at other times serves purely as a transition between two tales. While this recurring character opens the door to another story, another recurring character in Revenge exemplifies what Jauss means when he quotes Andrea Barrett: “Each time a character reappears, doors open between the stories, enlarging the view” (156). The curator of a museum is present in three adjacent stories; he is the narrator’s interlocutor in the second part of “Welcome to the Museum of Torture,” he is then “The Man Who Sold Braces,” and this story is about him and narrates his adult life until his death. Finally he is a character in the last scene of “The Last Hour of the Bengal Tiger.” Through the recurrence of liaisons such as a bow tie, pearl cufflinks, and a cologne that “smelled like a fern,” he is described similarly in all three stories, however each piece presents not only a different slice of his life, but also a different aspect of his personality.
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(Ogawa 88). In the first story, he describes methodically each instrument of torture inside the museum and confesses that he does not exhibit an object unless he has “the desire to use it” (Ogawa 96). He strikes as a confident, cold-hearted and mysterious man, whereas the second story shows a loving uncle yet at the same time a quirky untrustworthy man who ruins everything he touches and doesn’t “think twice about abandoning a job or a woman to start over from square one” (Ogawa 98). When reading this second story, the reader’s emotional response towards this character changes, especially at the end of the piece, which narrates the last few months of his life, and he appears as a lonely and vulnerable man “on the verge of tears” (Ogawa 113). This piece alludes to a dead tiger, and the final scene of the adjacent piece details this death. Here, the curator is a compassionate and kind-hearted man, producing in the reader’s mind contradictory feelings compared to those created in “Welcome to the Museum of Torture.” With each new story, our view of this man is enlarged: he evolves from an unsympathetic to a sympathetic character, but the opposite would not necessarily be true if these stories were presented in a different order. “Welcome to the Museum of Torture” has to come first so that the reader is inclined to dislike this character or at least question his taste for torture. His behavior raises questions, and the next two stories provide answers, but if “Welcome to the Museum of Torture” were to come last, the reader would already know these answers, and the emotions springing from the mystery surrounding his character would be lost. The same way the curator’s tiger serves as a liaison between two stories, two more recurring animals are included in Ogawa’s collection, a stray cat—in five stories—and a hamster.

Apart from a squirrel appearing twice throughout Who I Was Supposed to Be, Perabo’s collection does not include recurring characters; however, her collection offers an interesting example of “how a recurring setting can help unify stories with a variety of characters” (Jauss 157). In six out of ten stories, within the intimacy and privacy of a
bathroom, the author allows her characters to hide from everyone but the reader and to act as whoever they ache to become, their true selves or someone else. For instance in “Who I Was Supposed to Be,” the narrator hides in the bathroom to smoke cigarettes and wear sunglasses, pretending to be someone cool and confident, nothing like himself or his father. In “The Measure of Devotion” and “Gravity,” both narrators let old painful feelings resurface, being themselves for just an instant. In “Some Say the World,” the unnamed narrator lets her drugs “sink to the bottom of the toilet” because she feels as though her brain “has been rewired for a task other than real life” (Perabo 179, 177). Ogawa also resorts to the unifying technique of recurring settings, namely a bakery, a train, a hill, a vacant lot, and the most interesting, a plaza, whose details remain generic and general, it could be any plaza almost anywhere in the world. However two characters from different stories notice the exact same details: the ice-cream stand, the balloon vendor, a flock of pigeons, the clock tower, its discolored figurines and its four o’clock automaton show. The daily routine of the plaza comes alive from the almost word-for-word repetition of these details, and this obvious narrative liaison links two different and unrelated stories with no recurring characters, the first one “Afternoon at the Bakery” and the seventh one “Welcome to the Museum of Torture.”

Such reappearances of characters and settings provide a narrative connection between stories that “differ in style, form, tone, setting, theme, and so forth” (Jauss 157). But a writer can also unify stories through a more conceptual link, the recurrence of subject matter and feelings, as is the case in Who I Was Supposed to Be. In five stories, protagonists struggle with guilt, whereas in “Reconstruction,” the narrator should be experiencing this feeling but denies it, which is emphasized by the story’s placement, between “Explaining Death to The Dog” and “Who I Was Supposed to Be,” since in both stories guilt is a major theme. Shame towards family is another recurring subject matter connecting stories in Perabo’s collection. In the first story, “Thick as Thieves,” “the son with the mansion” is uncomfortable being seen
with the “father in the old hat,” whereas the narrator of “The Rocks over Kyburz” experiences “moments that made him embarrassed for what” his wife has become (Perabo 17, 139). This connection only reinforces an existing connection, since both stories share similar themes, the emptiness of life and the need to feel alive, but it also creates a link with “Who I Was Supposed to Be,” which explores more deeply this feeling of shame, since it becomes an obsession for the young narrator, who is desperate not to resemble his father as he grows up.

Whereas Jauss describes only “recurring characters, settings, and subject matter” as possible connectors, Ogawa experiments with other techniques in Revenge, for instance the recurrence of “not at all disagreeable” smells exuding from ripe fruits and plants, though it remains a detail, a subtle liaison between stories (156; Ogawa 4). “Afternoon at the Bakery” and “Fruit Juice” are more openly connected through the repetition of a scene. Towards the end of the first story, the narrator observes a woman crying in the bakery’s kitchen and in the adjacent “Fruit Juice,” the story ends with the narrator listening to a woman crying on the phone. He had known her briefly as a kid, and knows that she “went to a cooking school that specialized in pastry-making” (Ogawa 24). While it is never clearly spelled out that both scenes involve the same woman, the reader is encouraged to establish this connection. Both stories are divergent, and this woman crying is only a minor character in one scene of “Afternoon at the Bakery,” yet it exemplifies Jauss’ assertion that “the collection’s unity and diversity are integrally connected” (Jauss 157). Both stories, as divergent as they might be, share this moment, two narrators witnessing the same scene through different and imperfect angles, imperfect since in the first one, the narrator only watches the woman’s back, and in the latter the narrator only listens to her cry. Furthermore, just like a motif, this recurring scene expands and elaborates the stories’ meanings; “Afternoon at the Bakery” raises the question as to why the baker is crying, while the adjacent piece answers it in its final scene.
This technique also ensures details of the first story resurface in the reader’s mind as she’s reading the second story, almost contradicting Jauss’ assumption that a short story “is a discreet thing” (150). Later in the collection, Ogawa provides a slightly different version of recurring scenes: the exact same scene narrated by two different unstable points of view, unstable in the sense that the first narrator suffers from a mental disorder, and the other one is an adult recalling a childhood event. In “The Little Dustman,” the narrator recalls an afternoon at the zoo with his stepmother, who finds it absurd that giraffes have such long necks, but the ten-year-old boy does not understand the meaning of the word. He remembers wearing a brown coat with artificial fur at the collar and cuffs, earmuffs, gloves, two pairs of socks, but no scarf. In “Tomatoes and the Full Moon,” his stepmother ascertains that she remembers “exactly … the pattern on his scarf. He asked me why the giraffe’s neck was so long. He said it was ‘absurd’. How did a ten-year-old child know a word like ‘absurd?’” (Ogawa 140). Such a recurring scene doesn’t only unify both stories and make the previous one resurface towards the end of the collection, but it also requires the reader’s participation through his own sense of memory. Furthermore, the reader is reminded of a similar situation—analyzed above—when these two characters were describing a picture in the exact same way. These divergent and convergent memories represent contrasting moments of connection and disconnection between the boy and his stepmother but also connect three different stories in the reader’s mind.

IV. Parallels, Contrasts, Mirrors and Frames

While the unifying techniques discussed—liaisons, motifs, and recurrence—help connect one or a group of stories, others do not only link but also change the stories’ meanings. In his essay, Jauss highlights “extended, expanded” forms of liaisons that unify a collection by “making one story parallel another” (158). The repetition of a phone call in
Revenge’s first two stories produces such an effect. The structure of “Afternoon at the Bakery” alternates between the present time inside the bakery and the narrator’s memories. The final flashback narrates a phone call this woman received from a stranger who claims he knew her son when they were in a theatre club together in middle school. Yet the mother doesn’t interrupt the caller’s praises to explain that her child died when he was six, because her “son had read his picture books so well that it seemed quite likely he might have had a leading role in a play one day,” and this delusion brings her the peace of mind she had been looking for through her previous attempts to “experience the same suffering” her son had (Ogawa 12, 9). As mentioned previously, in the adjacent story “Fruit Juice,” the male narrator calls a woman he hardly knows. When they were kids, he had agreed to accompany her to meet her father for the first time, but they have seldom seen each other since this day, which she had spent eating through her sorrow, and when she starts to cry on the phone, he understands that “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” (Ogawa 24). Both these phone calls from strangers bring comfort and peace to the characters, and this parallel in terms of plot connects the stories but also draws the reader’s attention to the characters’ similar need for peace of mind. Jauss suggests that paralleling ensures that “the emotion of the second story is intensified because of the repetition,” which is especially true in this situation since the first reaction, the one from the mother, is discrete, seemingly devoid of physical and emotional manifestations and thereby makes the second one stand out even more (158). We might not even have noticed such a parallel if these stories were not placed side by side, therefore we only really understand and appreciate the effects this phone call produces on the narrator of the first story after we come across the final scene of the following story.
Creating a parallel between two stories is also a technique Perabo experiments with in *Who I Was Supposed to Be*; and just like in *Revenge*, these stories are placed back-to-back in order to emphasize “their parallel compositional patterns” (Jauss 158). As the title suggests, “Explaining Death to the Dog” deals with a woman determined to make her pet understand the concept of death, and even though she never acknowledges it, she is in fact the one who needs to make sense of the loss of her newborn. In the adjacent story “Reconstruction,” narrator Martin fakes amnesia in an attempt to rewrite the past, convinced that his wife will fall in love with him all over again and forget that their marriage is over. Both characters try to fool every one around them in order to fool themselves. At first Martin’s conduct seems condemnable, especially since his lies towards his family do not make him “feel too cruel” or guilty, and when his friend accuses him of “being an asshole,” the reader might be inclined to feel the same way (Perabo 94, 99). However, because we have just read the previous story, we understand better that “love can make you do extraordinary things” and “when we reach the end of the second story, we are … simultaneously (though to different degrees) experiencing” both narrators’ despair and their need for irrational behavior (Perabo 99; Jauss 158). This repetition of lies born of hope and love builds on the emotion of the previous story, but if those stories were not placed side-by-side, the overall effect might be diminished.

Two non-adjacent stories can also benefit from such a technique, as long as the parallel created infuse the feeling that “one plus one equals not two but a larger One” (Jauss 158). Ogawa’s “Lab Coats” and “The Last Hour of the Bengal Tiger” provide a good example through the recurrence of a character, a hospital secretary. Having narrators from both stories observe this woman at work creates a parallel. In the first story, the secretary is described as “such a perfectionist, but she can get pretty sloppy if she’s thinking about her doctor,” her lover (Ogawa 56). Four stories later, Ogawa builds a scene, in which the secretary is struggling to accomplish her work, and the narrator—the doctor’s wife—wonders
why she felt “jealous of someone so pathetic” (Ogawa 124). This parallel brings an irony to this scene: the reader is inclined to assume that the secretary is at this moment thinking about her lover, since that information has been conveyed in the previous story. That ironic effect is also intensified by the disappointment of the doctor’s wife, who “had wanted to see her discharging her duties in an elegant manner, efficiently typing” her husband’s papers (Ogawa 124). The final effect of such a parallel is to help build the secretary’s characterization: the author is first telling us about her personality in “Lab Coats,” then showing us in “The Last Hour of the Bengal Tiger.”

Paralleling can also unify more than two stories—not necessarily placed side-by-side—as exemplified by Perabo’s collection. The adult male narrator in “Counting the Ways” is trapped in a doomed love relationship, his devotion emanating from “guilt and panic,” until he finds the strength to break free from his girlfriend’s hold in the final scene (Perabo 42). In “The Measure of Devotion,” the adult male narrator still remains devoted to a friend who broke his heart twenty years ago, until he ultimately admits the truth about this girl and the dysfunction of their past friendship. In the third piece “Gravity,” the true face of the young narrator’s best friend is revealed after they accidentally kill a classmate, causing the boy to struggle with his feelings towards the little girl. They ultimately break free from this toxic relationship at the end of the story. Even though these three stories are diverse when it comes to situations, tones, settings, types of relationships, and characters’ ages or degrees of maturity, there is a clear parallel in terms of subject matter and resolutions, which produces “an effect of intensification through repetition” in order to reveal a “thematic intention” (Jauss 158, 159). Through these three stories, Perabo explores variations around the same theme, devotion, and presents three negative consequences. This parallel is made even more obvious through other minor conceptual liaisons, such as the recurrence of the same imbalance between male and female protagonists, the denial of their feelings, but also
narrative connections, for instance the bathroom as a recurring setting, characters seen smoking, and a destructive mother-daughter relationship.

Contrasts stand right next to parallels in terms of craft devices; the structural technique of “repetition with variation” remains the same but the purpose of a contrast is not to intensify or reinforce but to complicate and alter “the reader’s response to the previous story” (Jauss 159, 160). Such a contrast is created through three stories from Ogawa’s *Revenge*. The first two are juxtaposed, and the third one appears towards the end of the book, but each piece narrates an episode in the life of a recurring character mentioned previously, a writer. She appears first as the narrator of “Old Mrs. Juice,” however, as often in Ogawa’s work, the narrator is nothing more than a storyteller; here she is telling the quirky and dark story of her landlady. No specific information is granted about the narrator. After reading this first piece, she remains a neutral protagonist in the reader’s mind. However in the next piece, “The Little Dustman,” her story is told through the eyes of a man, who was once his stepson. He reveals that the narrator of “Old Mrs. J” is in fact a woman with psychological problems. This revelation makes the reader look back at the previous story and question the reliability of this woman as a narrator. And Ogawa goes even further in complicating the audience’s response when “Tomatoes and the Full Moon” “repeats with variation” “The Little Dustman,” in which the reader has been told that towards the end of her life, the writer “thought her work was being plagiarized ... she apparently started carrying her manuscripts around tied up in a scarf” (Jauss 160; Ogawa 48). In the first scene of the tenth story, “Tomatoes and the Full Moon,” when the narrator meets a strange woman, who “clasped a bundle wrapped in a silk scarf under her arm,” we understand right away that this woman is in fact the writer (Ogawa 133). We know more than the narrator, and our reading of this story is altered since we are already aware of the unreliability of this woman as a character. If we hadn’t read “The Little Dustman” first, we would have to follow the steps of this reporter
encountering this woman for the first time. In the end, not only our response to the first story, but also to the second and third, is complicated and altered.

A mirror is slightly different from a contrast since its purpose is not to complicate but reverse “another story’s situation, plot, characters and/or theme” (Jauss 161). In Ogawa’s “Sewing for the Heart,” we follow a bag maker who slowly loses his mind after meeting a woman “born with her heart outside her chest” (64). She asks him to build a bag to protect her heart and at first this task, then the organ itself become the narrator’s obsession. The story ends when he ultimately expresses his desire to cut the woman’s heart out, though the murder is not confirmed at this stage. In the adjacent story, the curator of a museum of torture mentions that an exhibit designed to crush internal organs was “brought … by a bag maker,” who designed it himself “specifically for use on women” and that testing “revealed traces of human flesh on the inside” of the corset (Ogawa 92). This bag maker is not important to the plot of “Welcome to the Museum of Torture” and is never mentioned again, which demonstrates that “even something as small as an inverted liaison can make one story mirror another” (Jauss 162). These few words of liaison reverse the previous story’s situation and characterization only because the events of “Welcome to the Museum of Torture” occur at the same time as “Sewing for the Heart.” This leads us to conclude that the bag maker is not, in fact, just a lonely and quiet man who experienced an episode of madness, and his customer is not, in fact, the trigger, as we were led to believe. He had already lost his mind and developed a certain taste for torture long ago, thus “Sewing for the Heart” becomes a much darker tale, and it reverses the reader’s response by cancelling any positive feelings he might have experienced towards the bag maker in the first story—in “Sewing for the Heart,” the characterization was such that the bag maker appeared more sympathetic than his customer.

Sometimes parallels, contrasts and mirrors are “separated by another story, or even stories, in order to … suggest a thematic relationship with the story or stories that appear
between them” (Jauss 162). Perabo uses this framing technique to unify three stories of her collection. As demonstrated earlier, there is a clear parallel between “Gravity” and “The Measure of Devotion,” the seventh and ninth stories, both exploring with variations the same themes of devotion and dysfunctional relationships between children. However, at first glance, they have no connection to the story placed in-between, “The Rocks over Kyburz,” narrated by a bitter adult male who did not achieve his dreams and cannot bear the emptiness of his present life. He is so engrossed in his desire to feel alive that when he discovers his two teenage sons having sex with the same girl, he seems unsure of the moral consequences, struggling between understanding “the fire of being fifteen” and the realization that this is a questionable act, that “he would say it was nothing. He would believe it himself” (Perabo 152, 153). “Framing this seemingly unrelated story with two overtly related stories … brings its images and themes into focus in a way that would be impossible if the story appeared anywhere else in the collection” (Jauss 164). This frame draws the reader’s attention on the complexity of children’s innocence and experience, as well as parents’ bias towards their kids, which are also themes discernible in the framed piece. Therefore, there is in fact a clear connection between these three stories, even though the framed piece is not about the children but about their father. And because “Gravity” has already exposed the potential tragic consequences of a dysfunctional relationship, and because the third story reveals how childhood feelings and memories can bear consequences throughout adulthood, we are more inclined to notice and question the father’s insouciance: the reader’s response towards the narrator is influenced by both framing stories. This frame also brings into focus images common to all three pieces. The children in both “Gravity” and “The Rocks over Kyburz” hide on top of a mountain to behave in a transgressive and questionable way, whereas in “The Measure of Devotion,” the narrator only allows his bitter nature to prevail as he stands next to a battlefield memorial where Abe Lincoln had once proclaimed: “The world will little note
nor long remember what we say here” (Perabo 171). But the purpose of such a technique is also to focus “our attention on the story that is framed,” and Perabo’s “Counting the Ways” offers a good example (Jauss 163). The narrator wants to hold on to the illusion that a dress can protect his girlfriend from the darkness of her mind and improve their relationship, yet they both remain imprisoned in their own unhappiness, until the narrator ultimately finds the strength to move forward. Whereas this tale is about the negative side of hope, the two stories framing it are about the necessity to hope. “Thick as Thieves” deals with a father and son who both hide the failure of their lives by assuming new faces; whereas in “The Greater Grace of Carlisle,” which explores a mother and daughter relationship, both women need to find hope to overcome a different kind of emptiness in their lives. These stories are about what it means to hope; both narrators understand that the quirkiness of their parents’ behaviors is their solution to overcome feelings of grief and sorrow, the only way for them to move forward. Such a technique highlights a thematic relationship but also attracts the reader’s attention on the framed piece, and intensifies its contrast: the only way for the devoted and delusional boyfriend to move forward is to quit hoping. Both framing stories are also lighter and more cheerful in tone, which only accentuates the darkness and melancholy surrounding the framed one. If “Counting the Ways” was placed anywhere else in the collection, these effects might not be achieved.

Ogawa chooses another kind of framing technique by having the last story of her collection “returns to the … images of the first story” (Jauss 164). In “Afternoon at the Bakery” a mother discovers her child suffocated inside a refrigerator abandoned in a vacant lot. “He had curled up in an ingenious fashion to fit between the shelves and the egg box, with his legs carefully folded and his face tucked between his knees,” whereas the narrator in the last story “Poison Plants,” an old woman, sees her dead body inside an old fridge, “legs neatly folded, head buried between the knees, curled ingeniously to fit between the shelves
and the egg box” (Ogawa 5, 162). “Framing a collection with stories that parallel each other not only conveys the sense that all the stories are related, part of one thing, but also a sense of symmetry, of the collection coming full circle” thereby creating a sense of closure (Jauss 164). Here, this sense of symmetry is reinforced by the author’s similar choice of words. And once again, Ogawa goes even further by inserting a second symmetry between these scenes. In the first story, when the mother discovers her son, she notices an elderly woman nearby, her disheveled and dazed appearance making her appear “more dead than” the narrator’s son (Ogawa 4). That old woman resembles the narrator from “Poison Plants,” whose life is “full of ghosts,” especially her daughter who died when she was young (Ogawa 154). Even though Ogawa chooses not to dwell on these details, they create another sensation of symmetry between both stories that the reader feels more that notices.

V. Structural Principles

After unifying and connecting individual or groups of stories—through liaisons, motifs, recurrence of characters, settings and subject matter, as well as parallels, contrasts, mirrors and frames—one more aspect has to be taken into account when building a collection, what Jauss describes as principles of organization. As it was noted earlier during the analysis of the museum’s curator as a recurring character in Revenge, the order in which stories are presented is key to achieve the desired effect on the reader. “A story collection, when it’s really good, is a unified whole, one whose parts cannot be rearranged without doing damage to its unity” (Jauss 150). The final step for a writer building a successful collection is therefore to establish the right placement for each story, and various structural principles can help guide our decisions.

The principle of variety is one that takes into account the reader’s instinctive need for diversity in terms of form but also content. Jauss demonstrates that, the same way a lack of
variation in structure within a story creates a “stultifying effect,” so does a monotonous rhythm when it comes to a collection (168). “An important part of constructing a collection, then, is discovering its appropriate “syntax,’” the one that will ensure the reader’s interest remains until the final word of the book (Jauss 168). Therefore, the analysis of a collection’s syntax reveals “what Walter Murch calls the work’s ‘rhythmic signature’” (Jauss 168).

Revenge includes eleven stories ranging from eight to twenty-two pages in length, fourteen pages in average. All stories are set in the same unnamed city, which is made obvious only through liaisons such as the recurrence of a plaza or a similar apartment number. Just like the name of the characters is never mentioned, there is also no clear indication of time, though the reader discovers through the repetition of key words and actions that the fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh stories happen within a few days from each other, and the ninth and tenth stories on the same day. It seems as though specific places, names and time are mere details that should not interfere with the story and distract the reader. A different first person narrator tells all eleven stories; and Ogawa alternates between a female and a male point of view. Ten stories are told in the past, though three uses the present tense in a sentence or two, in order to reveal a framed narrative. For instance, “Poison Plants” is narrated in the past, except for one sentence, which appears towards the end. “I’ve had a wonderful time.” He said the same words each time he left me, and I believe he meant them” (Ogawa 159). The present tense applied to the verb “believe” indicates that the narrator is in fact recalling these events, and it constitutes the only indication throughout the whole story. Ogawa actually alternates a framed narration with a regular chronological structure, often involving flashbacks. In terms of rhythmic signature, the fifth story “Lab Coats,” placed in the middle of the collection, combines many exceptions compared to the ten other pieces. It is the only story narrated completely in the present tense, but also the only one without the words silence or quiet, the only story in which the narrator notices an unpleasant smell, “death and disinfectant,” and the
only one without an allusion to sunlight (Ogawa 54). Indeed, in five stories, the “sunlight streamed in through the window,” and in five others, the sun blinds the narrator or is reflected from hard surfaces (Ogawa 14). “Lab Coats” is the only story in which the sun is never mentioned, but also the darkest piece plot-wise, since a character narrates bluntly how she murdered her lover, and the story ends with a “still soft … maybe even warm” tongue falling off from the victim’s lab coat (Ogawa 58). In terms of flow, these variations in the fifth story provide a welcome change in rhythm, as well as the alternating of gender and narrative structure, yet overall, the regularity of these variations might constitute for certain readers a rather monotonous flow. Yet, *Who I Was Supposed to Be* is even flatter if we compare—like Jauss does—the flow of a story or collection to an attractive landscape, one that offers “continual variety of tone, style, point of view, gender, time, setting, subject matter, and length” (167). Eighteen pages constitute the average story length in the collection, and only “Explaining Death to the Dog” is fewer than ten pages; three stories are set in major American cities, seven in smaller towns; all ten stories are contemporary in terms of time; eight employ the first person; seven are told by a male narrator; seven focus on the point of view of an adult; and nine stories are in the past. Furthermore, each story follows the same traditional structure; Perabo does not experiment with forms, second person narratives, or even shifts in points-of-view the way many contemporary writers often do. One might regret the lack of rhythmic signature in both collections, however Jauss argues that variety “is not necessarily conducive to unity,” and *Who I Was Supposed to Be* seems to demonstrate the veracity of this argument (167). As mentioned, in a previous edition, the book consisted of eleven stories, the seventh story “Retirement” having disappeared from the collection when it was republished in 2006. In terms of aesthetics, it was a shorter piece, less than ten pages, and in terms of tone, it was lighter, which would have been a much-needed addition to the collection by diversifying its landscape. However in terms of content, “Retirement,” which is
narrated by Batman’s butler, was at odds with the realism surrounding the collection. More importantly, this piece shared none of the themes recurrent in Perabo’s ten stories, which makes us wonder if “Retirement,” and thereby flow, have been sacrificed for the sake of unity and cohesion. A flowing collection takes into account the reader’s need for variety and entertainment; however, flow might be detrimental to unity when it comes to the overall organization of the work.

As hinted above, Perabo seems to have favored instead another structural principle to assemble her collection, the “principle of thematic structure” (Jauss 169). In the first part of this thesis, we have already alluded to recurring subject matter and thematic relationships linking stories. As a matter of fact, the whole collection is designed according to “variations on a theme;” “Its stories addresses, in different and complementary ways, the related” theme of identity, as the title of the collection suggests (Jauss 169). The first 1999 edition of the book was titled Explaining Death to the Dog, and renamed in 2001 Who I Was Supposed to Be, which seems more cohesive, and demonstrates that “titles … can serve to announce the thematic unity of the stories to follow” (Jauss 171). The story “Who I Was Supposed to Be” is indeed the most representative of the collection’s theme. The young narrator pretends to be someone else in order to reject who he believes he’s going to become, someone resembling his father. In this sense, the collection could be divided into two sub-thematic parts, that story marking the turning point of the book; yet another reason to accept it as the collection title. In the first half of the book, narrators refuse to face the reality of who they or their loved ones are; they close their eyes. In “Thick as Thieves,” “Counting the Ways,” and “The Greater Grace of Carlisle,” not only the three narrators but also the three main characters are under the false illusion that playing a role will change their reality. In “Explaining Death to the Dog” and “Reconstruction,” both narrators are in denial and only realize at the end of the final scene that there is no escape, they have to find a way to accept their bitter reality; they
cannot close their eyes any longer. In the second half of the collection, narrators and characters do open their eyes and face reality right from the beginning of the stories, but recognize in the end that “it’s funny, being able to see so well. But not great so much” (Perabo 183). All resolutions revolve around the idea that sometimes one should be “content to not get the whole picture” (Perabo 179). Perabo resorts to recurring sub-subject matter as a way to illustrate and consolidate these variations on a similar theme. As mentioned earlier, one of these techniques is to repeat the same gender power struggle in numerous stories: men shrug and give up whereas their female counterparts are fighters, “ill mannered” and “untouchable” (Perabo 156, 128). Another technique to convey this thematic structure is the repetition of a pattern: the naive attachment of characters to goods or money. For instance, in “Thick as Thieves,” the narrator enumerates his possessions. “We had twenty-four rooms in our home, eleven paintings worth over forty thousand dollars apiece, seven cars, and three machines to grind coffee beans” (Perabo 17). These material tokens, such as a dress, lottery tickets, sunglasses, cigarettes, a comic book, and so on, represent symbolic shields behind which characters hide in order to reinvent themselves or forget their true nature. In terms of craft, such details create a conceptual but also a structural connection, thereby reinforcing the thematic structure the author applies to the organization of her collection. Thanks to the thematic structure applied to *Who I Was Supposed to Be*, Perabo’s stories build on each other. Each story matters, is a “unity unto itself,” yet as a whole, each story is enriched by the whole work (Jauss 150).

Looking at Ogawa’s collection title, it might seem like the collection is organized around a thematic principle as well, yet it is misleading since revenge is not a theme emerging in every story. In his essay, Jauss discusses fourteen structural principles he came across when studying successfully unified collections, however none applies perfectly to *Revenge*. Ogawa’s unique structure thereby suggests the existence of endless possibilities in
terms of principles of organization. Still, her structure seems influenced by at least two principles studied in Jauss’ essay. First *Revenge* resembles the configurational principle Jauss calls “the ring:” when “stories are linked by the reappearance of characters in an ingenious pattern: throughout the collection, a minor … character in one story reappears as the protagonist of the next (or vice versa)” (177). As noted earlier, the unifying technique of recurring characters is predominant throughout Ogawa’s work; however, characters are not always the link between two stories. The woman seen crying in the first story reappears in the second one, however not as a narrator, but as a character; and the crying scene from the first story is also an element of the second story. This scene and the woman are the links between “Afternoon at the Bakery” and “Fruit Juice.” The latter is linked with “Old Mrs. J” not by a character but a recurring place, an old post office filled with kiwis, it is narrated by the woman writer, who is the connector to the adjacent piece “The Little Dustman,” in which she becomes a character. The narrator from that story and a character mentioned in juxtaposed “Lab Coats” are both travelling on the same train. Then, “Lab Coats” and the four following stories are linked through six characters, reappearing at least once. The ninth story “Tomatoes and the Full Moon” is connected with the previous one through a bridge and an accident, but it is also linked to the fourth story through its characters, especially the woman writer. The final piece “Poison Plants” is loosely connected to the tenth story through a book written by the writer. And as mentioned, Ogawa “brings her interlocking stories full circle” through the same image of a dead body tucked in a fridge (Jauss 178). In a sense, Ogawa does create a “ring of stories,” though it is not always a character “passing the baton” to another (Jauss 178). Still it would seem reductive to limit her structural configuration to a ring, since it resembles more a spider-web made of interconnected spiral and radial threads. As the analysis of the collection demonstrated, all these “interconnections between” stories are further stressed through numerous unifying techniques (Jauss 178). But that’s not all; the real
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strength of her structure lies in the fact that her stories seldom end with their final word. They keep evolving discreetly within others, for example by answering questions, and in this sense, her principle is also a “reader-centered approach,” and one even more powerful than the principle of variety examined previously, since each narrative connection—thread—involves directly the reader by sending him back to a previous story (Jauss 167). Only towards the end of “Fruit Juice” does the reader realize that the purpose of this tale is in fact to explain why the baker was crying in the first story. It also clarifies why she was even part of “Afternoon at the Bakery;” every word in a short story has to matter, and at first glance, this character does not push the plot forward or lead the narrator to any kind of resolution, her role is to provide a transition and open the door to the second piece. Then, when in “Fruit Juice” the narrator and the little girl step inside an abandoned post office oddly filled with kiwis, no explanation is granted, it comes only towards the end of the third story, “Old Mrs. J.” the landlady is the one storing fruits in the building, and this post office is the narrative connection between the two stories. And as mentioned previously, all the questions raised by the writer as a narrator receive answers in the fourth and tenth stories. “Lab Coats” and “Sewing for the Heart” both allude to murders committed by a secretary and a bag maker, though these crimes are only confirmed in the seventh story “Welcome to the Museum of Torture.” “The Man Who Sold Braces” reveals that two characters from the previous piece became lovers, though it’s purely a detail, “he had been involved with an eighteen-year-old woman, a beautician” (Ogawa 110). We are told in the same story that the curator of the museum used to take care of a tiger, who “died in the garden … it was a beautiful death” (Ogawa 115). This detail adds nothing to the plot itself, but opens the door to “The Last Hour of the Bengal Tiger.” In this story, the narrator witnesses an accident on a bridge, and the next piece confirms her assumption that the truck driver did die. Having questions about a story answered in a following one connects them both and involves the audience, but other threads create a
similar effect, this time by raising new questions in the reader’s mind. In “Lab Coats” we
learn that the doctor’s wife just had her first girl. However, in “The Last Hour of the Bengal
Tiger,” the doctor’s wife mentions her “daughter’s kindergarten,” yet this story happens
before the previous one (Ogawa 120). This could be a mistake, or it could be a device
designed to confuse the reader, a way to illustrate the imperfection of human memory and
information flows; after all, this information about the doctor having a baby girl reached the
narrator through word-of-mouth. Whatever the reason though, it makes the reader participate
by challenging his own memory and triggering a need for explanation, almost forcing him to
go back to the previous story, though Ogawa deprives the reader of an answer. It happens
also in “The Little Dustman,” in which the narrator remembers a woman’s “low, powerful
voice, which sounded odd coming from such a tiny body,” whereas the narrator in “Tomatoes
and the Full Moon” notices that the same voice is “much like a young girl’s, so ill matched
to” the woman’s appearance (Ogawa 43, 131). Similarly, this could be a mistake, or a device
to reflect the subjectivity of reality, but once again, whatever the reason, Ogawa seems to be
playing with the audience, involving the reader completely through these craft techniques. By
the time we read the third story, her playful process becomes evident and the reader finds
himself actively searching for liaisons and links between stories. Even missed opportunities
(purposefully or not) become noticeable; for instance, in “Tomatoes and the Full Moon” the
protagonist stays in room 101, and in “The Man Who Sold Braces” the mailbox’s number of
the curator is 201. This would have been an easy liaison, but in any case, this non-liaison still
has the same effect on the audience, one story brings us back to a previous one, connects
them in our mind, and the reader is reminded yet again to pay attention to every word.

These interconnections answer or raise questions, sometimes force the audience to
reconsider the truth of what she has read previously, but one last technique goes even further
by causing the reader to reconsider the truth of a story itself. Three times throughout the
collection, a short story becomes a connection. In “Old Mrs. J” the writer narrates the story of
her landlady, and old woman who digs up a carrot “in the shape of a human hand, with five
perfect fingers. In the end, they discover her husband’s body buried in the garden, minus the
hands” (Ogawa 48). In the following story, “The Little Dustman,” this same writer, now a
character, is in fact said to be the author of a book, Old Mrs. J. In the final story “Poison
Plants,” a young man finds Old Mrs. J in a library and reads an excerpt. Finally, in
“Tomatoes and the Full Moon,” the same recurring writer claims to have written a book
Afternoon at the Bakery but the narrator realizes that this work—available in the library of
the hotel where he’s staying—was actually written by someone else. Through this confusing
but playful technique, Ogawa’s structural principle also approaches what Jauss describes as a
“mimetic structure,” when “the form of the book imitates its theme” (181). The odd story of
the landlady, or even “Sewing for the Heart,” evoke the possibility of a blurred line between
fiction and reality, and sometimes the structure of the collection imitates this point as well. Is
“Old Mrs. J” a reality or a fiction imagined by the narrator? Is it a novel by the narrator or a
story by Ogawa? She goes even further in this mimesis structure by inserting herself as an
author in the collection. When one of her narrators reviews “Afternoon at the Bakery,” he
notes that “the prose was unremarkable, as were the plots and characters, but there was an icy
current running under her words, and I found myself wanting to plunge into it again and
again” (Ogawa 148). This seems like an accurate review of her collection, since, as
mentioned previously, each story resurfaces at some point in the reader’s mind and keeps
evolving, by answering or raising questions but also confusing the audience. Ogawa
encourages the reader to pay attention to every word, even incites him to reconsider what he
has read previously or at least re-read previous passages and stories. One reading is not
enough to fully comprehend the complexity of Ogawa’s work. However, because each story
keeps evolving within others, it only becomes whole as part of the collection. Therefore, the
real strength of each story becomes dependent on the work as a whole. But then, what happens to the individual story? Even though some work as stand-alones—three have been published in prestigious American literary journals—does each story matter the way the overall collection matters? Does each story in Revenge matter the way each story matters in Who I Was Supposed to Be? The overall collection is a unity, but does the individual story remain a unity unto itself? In the case of Revenge, it seems as though the act of crafting such an intricate and interconnected collection became more important than the stories themselves.

VI. Conclusion

This analysis of Who I Was Supposed to Be and Revenge using Jauss’ essay “Stacking Stones: Building a Unified Short Story Collection” illustrates the diversity and infinity of techniques and structural principles available to a writer in order to build a cohesive, unified and linked short-story collection.

All the unifying techniques Jauss studied in his essay appear in one or both collections, thereby linking two or a group of stories, adjacent or not. Liaisons, especially the repetition of key words, are the techniques most commonly used in both collections in order to heighten inherent relationships between stories. Furthermore, both works include the repetition of an image—death associated to silence—but whereas it serves as a liaison in Who I Was Supposed to Be, it becomes a motif in Revenge. However both collections also experiment with devices not mentioned in Jauss’ essay, for instance the repetition of similar sentence structures, but also the recurrence of smells and even scenes. Both works include recurring settings, and whereas Revenge relies heavily on recurring characters as a unifying device, Who I Was Supposed to Be favors recurring subject matter in order to expand and elaborate the stories’ meanings. The diversity of unifying techniques in Revenge mostly
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brings out narrative connections between stories; however, the links in Perabo’s collection help establish conceptual relationships.

Moreover, both collections offer examples of devices whose effects are not only to link stories but also to change the audience’s response towards a piece. In Perabo’s collection, parallels and frames reveal thematic relationships between stories and also heighten the emotions of connected stories. In Revenge, devices such as contrasts and mirrors complicate, alter and even reverse the reader’s response towards a story.

These diverse techniques also convey the importance of story placement within a collection. Indeed, both collections rely on different principles in terms of organization. Who I Was Supposed to Be exemplifies Jauss’ assumption that the principle of variety—a flowing collection—can be detrimental to unity and cohesiveness, and favors instead a thematic structure, thereby ensuring that stories build on each other, each story is enriched by the whole work. However Revenge contradicts Jauss’ opinion that this same principle of variety is the most reader-centered approach available to a writer, since the structure applied to her book completely involves the reader, up to the point that the collection, and perhaps also the art of crafting, becomes more important than the stories themselves. And once again, Revenge expands the list of existing devices by establishing another configurational principle, one that resembles a spider web and incorporates elements of Jauss’ ring and mimesis structure. Through this technique, previous stories keep evolving and resurfacing within others, at the same time infusing varied and shifting emotions in the reader’s mind, even forcing him to reconsider the truth of what has been read previously.

Ultimately, though both collections offer different perspectives in terms of techniques and principles, they are assembled successfully, in the sense that their stories are connected and organized in such a way that unity is created out of diversity, assuming readers follow a linear reading instead of redesigning the collections by reading the stories out of order.
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