Kirino Natsuo’s Poritikon

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Abstract

Kirino Natsuo, arguably one of the most popular contemporary Japanese authors in Western markets (a number of her novels having been translated into English, German, French, Italian, Dutch or Spanish, among other languages) who is often being recognised as a mystery writer, only enjoys limited acknowledgment for the thematic breadth and genre diversity of her work. Such description is not only inaccurate (Kirino published her last true mystery novel in 2002), but also manifests itself in the limited and underdeveloped treatment of her work in Western academic writing. This paper deals with Kirino Natsuo’s 2011 novel Poritikon (Politikon) and its analysis within the greater context of Kirino’s work. A focus is put upon introducing the novel as utopian fiction with the aim to illustrate ways in which Kirino Natsuo utilises utopian genre patterns as well as how her utopia works to provide a commentary on contemporary Japan. The utopian theme present in Poritikon makes the novel a rather untypical entry in Kirino’s oeuvre (although not a unique one, since her novels Tōkyō-jima [Tokyo Island, 2008] and Yasashii otona [Gentle Adults, 2010] also work with elements of utopian/dystopian fiction) as well as within the Japanese literary scene in general, and provides an interesting argument for Kirino Natsuo as more than ‘just’ a mystery writer.

Keywords: Utopia; Dystopia; Kirino Natsuo; Japanese Literature; Atarashiki mura

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Grotesque (2003) by Kirino Natsuo, is based on the true story of a single woman who carries a double life: during the day she is a business woman in a prestigious consultancy firm, but in the nights she wills to be a prostitute. She will end up murdered, strangled at the age of thirty-nine by a client, a young Chinese illegal immigrant, escaped from his rural village and dazzled by the artificial and deceptive lights of the hyper-modern metropolis. The focus of this thesis is an analysis of Kirino Natsuo’s novel Poritikon (“Politikon”, 2011). The thesis follows two major threads: Poritikon as a Kirino Natsuo novel and a presence of motifs present in her prior work (such as more. The focus of this thesis is an analysis of Kirino Natsuo’s novel Poritikon (“Politikon”, 2011). However, this is a Kirino Natsuo book through and through: dark and selfish characters, bleakness, pain, sexuality, gender relations. From page 1 it is easy to see that her style permeates the pages of the book, and, for good or bad, some of the plot and character developments can be seen from a mile away. This does not stop this first volume from being a good work, but it also makes it a little bit repetitive, and kind of heavy/boring, in its constant depiction of human desire for selfishness, narcissism and violence. Maybe things take a turn for the surprising on the second volume (which I Natsuo Kirino (桐野 夏生, Kirino Natsuo) (born October 7, 1951, in Kanazawa, Ishikawa Prefecture) is the pen name of Mariko Hashioka, a Japanese novelist and a leading figure in the recent boom of female writers of Japanese detective fiction. Kirino is the middle child of three. She has two brothers, one who is six years older and one who is five years younger. Her father was an architect. Kirino has lived in many different cities, including her current residence, Tokyo. Kirino married in 1975 and had a OUT. Natsuo Kirino. Translated by Stephen Snyder. "The way to despair is to refuse
to have any kind of experience . . ." They set off through the summer darkness along the unpaved, ill-lit road. On the right was a ragged line of apartment blocks and farmhouses with large gardens - not particularly appealing but at least a sign of life in the area. On the left, beyond an overgrown ditch, was a lonely row of abandoned buildings: an older boxed-lunch factory, a derelict bowling alley. The victims said that their attacker had dragged them between the deserted buildings, and so Masako kept careful watch as she and Kuniko hurried along. From one of the apartment houses on the right, they could hear a man and woman arguing. But what had been waiting for her on the other side? Nothing, that's what. She stared down at her white hands still gripping the sofa. If they came now and arrested her, they'd never be able to find out why she'd done it; they'd find no trace of what had spurred her on. She could hear the sound of doors closing behind her, leaving her utterly alone." —from OUT (1997). (Posted by the author's publisher).