

Out – Natsuo Kirino

Review by Kimberly Fujioka

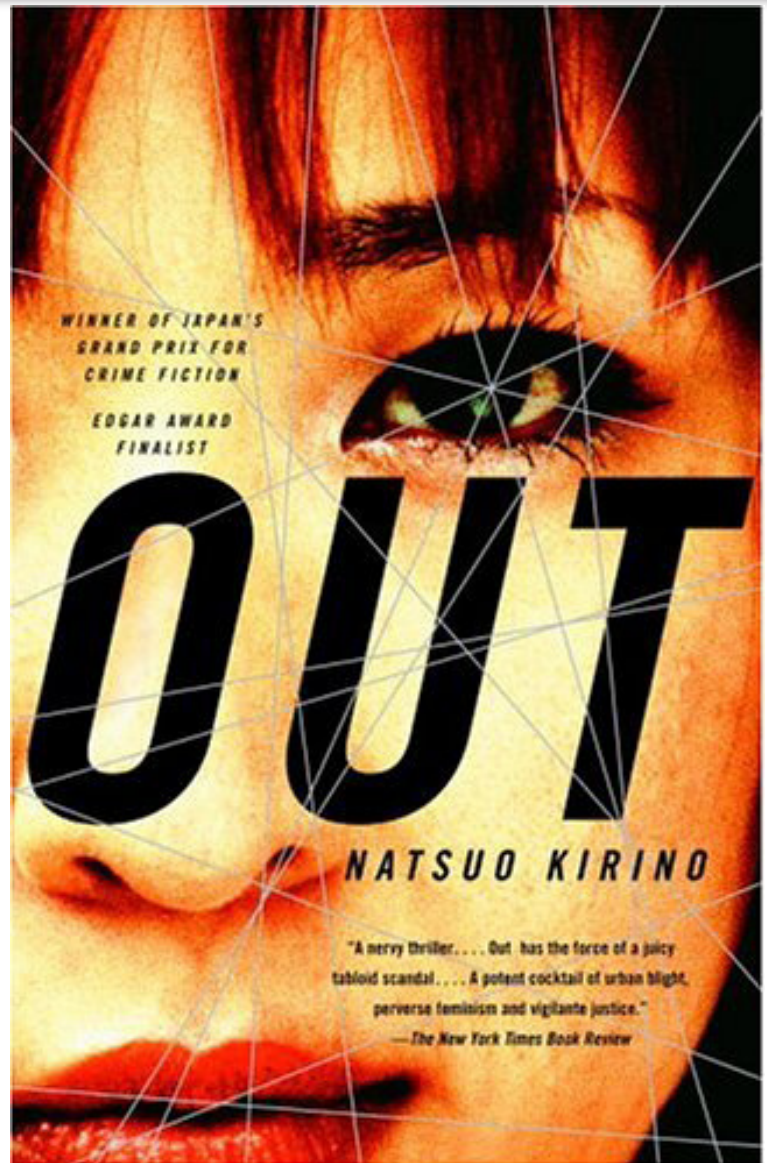
When you look in the mirror, what do you see? The Evil that is in you is also in me.

In Natsuo Kirino's *Out*, Yayoi has murdered her abusive husband, Kenji, and three of her co-workers, Masako, Kuniko and Yoshi, at the boxed lunch factory help her dispose of the body. While Yayoi and her co-workers get away with their crime, it's in the aftermath they suffer. During the dismemberment of the body and dumping, the characters perform rather coolly but that's not the point of this mystery-- it is the psychological ramifications of murder, of having handled a dead human body and cut it up like chicken. Getting caught or being recognized as evil by society is not important, Kirino is saying, but how one views oneself, is critical. After three of the women cut up Yayoi's husband's dead body in the bathroom, they argue:

"Will you shut up!" Masako bellowed. "It has nothing to do with us! It's between Yayoi and him, and anyway, it's over." "But I can't help thinking," Yoshi put in, her own voice growing emotional, "that he might even be glad that we did this to him. I mean, when I used to read about these dismemberings, I thought it sounded terrible. But it's not really like that, is it? There's something about taking somebody apart so neatly, so completely, that feels almost respectful." Here she goes again with her self-justification, thought Masako.

The four female co-workers in *Out* are not brought to justice by the legal system but by their own self-incriminating thoughts. Kirino's characters are normal people with a conscience, whom must live with their actions and the ones who survive, who get out, learn to acknowledge and integrate their evil side.

Kirino goes beyond the parameters of mystery in her novel, *Out* and enters the realm of philosophy, more specifically, evil. Through the characters inner self-questioning and the action in the plot, Kirino is asking: What is evil? How do we define it? Where is it? Can we protect ourselves from evil? Listening to the inner dialogue of one of the four female characters, Yoshi,



trying to come to terms with defining herself, after having participated in the dismembering of a human being, is chilling. Yoshi is trying to leave the house but her son keeps crying for her. She hands him to her mother and thinks to herself, “Will they ever stop, Yoshi wondered, clearing away the toys strewn across the tatami and lying down. She closed her eyes...She suddenly realized there were tears running down her cheeks, and the thing that made her saddest was the way she had parted with the money she’d taken from the poor, dead Kenji. She felt she had crossed a line and there was no going back—perhaps the same way Yayoi had felt when she’d killed the man.” (pg. 130) The reader can sense the tremendous weight of guilt involved in doing something one sees as inherently evil. Kirino’s main character Masako says in Out, “You never really knew your limits until you’d killed someone...there was nothing else quite like it.”

The novel is masterfully driven with the omniscient narrator entering the minds of all the players; each of the major characters is developed in detail, in all their psychological complexity. We can witness each of the four women go through her own private hell, in an attempt to come to terms with what she has participated in. In addition to the psychologically complex characters, the plot makes twists and turns that beguile a skilled reader.

Two unusual characters are introduced in the middle of the novel, Kazuo and Satake, who the authorities want to blame for Kenji’s murder. The narrator tells us that Kazuo is a lonely and innocent Brazilian immigrant to Japan. He travels two hours by bus, to go shopping in a town known as “Little Brazil” between Saitama and Gunma Prefectures. Kazuo is a foreigner, referred to as “gaijin” by Japanese, who like to blame for introducing evil to Japanese society. The other character the reader is introduced to is Mr. Satake, a gambling club owner with a violent past. Satake is a “yakuza” or gangster who lives outside of Japan’s social order. Why does Kirino bring in these characters, since we already know who committed the murder? Through how these characters are treated by the community, the author is showing society’s need to see “the other” as a social misfit, on the assumption that the one to name as evil is very different from oneself.

As the novel progresses we realize that Satake and Masako will meet one day. Their pasts are so similar in content yet the roles they play are so opposite, or should I say complementary? They meet and Masako appears to be the victim of Satake in a cat and mouse, sexually violent obsession. However, we don’t quite believe the intelligent and self-aware Masako would allow herself to be caught. Or would she? Masako is human, just like we all are, and has psychological blind spots where no rhyme or reason can alter her reaction to Satake. Along the same lines, Satake is subconsciously reacting to Masako. The sexual violence that results between them is like a dance to the death, where neither will give up until it’s over.

The message Kirino conveys through her characters is that the evil we see out there in the world exists inside ourselves. When we are not willing to look inside, but instead project our evil onto others, that is when we can be broken. In Out, Masako is the heroine because she survives. She survives because she is able to accept the capacity for evil in herself.





**Stretch
your comic
dollar...**

**SAVE
up to
75%
on new
subscriptions!**



Mailordercomics



Thank You



**don't get
STUCK
paying retail...**



