

“Out” |

Natsuo Kirino

Those of our readers who enjoy seeking refuge in the English section of Dutch book stores may have been struck already by the elusive cover of this Japanese novel. First published in 1997, “Out”, written by Natsuo Kirino and translated into English by Stephen Snyder, has been recently brought back to the store bookshelves in a special edition by Penguin Vintage Classics.

The novel is included in the publisher’s “Japanese Classics” collection, released last year. It is now embellished with a brand new, gritty, mysterious cover, depicting red skies filled with flying crows, beautifully illustrated by Yuko Shimizu. But is this a case in which we should judge a book by its cover?

Thankfully, yes. Those who decide to read the novel seeking the thrills this new artwork promises will not be disappointed. Kirino’s sharp commentary on the Japanese social and economic underbelly still rings as relevant nowadays as it did twenty-three years ago. “Out” is particularly concerned with exploring the pressures with which women are burdened as mothers, wives and individuals, by telling the story of a young factory worker who finally cracks and kills her cheating, gambling husband.

What follows is a bleak tale which touches upon secrecy, revenge, sex and even love. But mostly, “Out” is about four women who dream of escaping the treacherous world they have found themselves in - and, as you go through its pages, you’ll find yourself turning as frightened, desperate and angry as them.

It is for good reason this is Kirino’s most successful novel to date, as well as the first one of her books to appear in English. It is, simply said, unputdownable. If you manage to get your hands on this Edgar Award-nominated psychological thriller, don’t let it go.