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Various Shades of Fury: Criticism of the 'System' and Society in Japanese Post-Fukushima Literature

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Post-Fukushima Japanese Literature, or literature after the earthquake catastrophe (*shinsai bungaku*; already discussed by Kimura, Kawamura, Kuroko, Komori), reflects recent contemporary history. The genre – which is five years old – already reveals distinctive patterns: On the one hand, there is the genre of 'trauma and healing literature' (key word *iyashi* 癒), such as the work of Yoshimoto Banana. On the other hand, we find that literature written after 11 March, 2011, tends to be franker and has developed in the direction of a renaissance of what was formally known as political literature. Works or statements by some authors show astonishing courage as they disclose disagreeable tendencies in contemporary Japanese society; insofar they perhaps fulfil the role of an ethical corrective. Whether a new genre of 'committed literature' has evolved within the so called *Heisei bungaku* (Urata Kenji 2015) and whether, if viewed as an authentic trend, this genre will continue to develop and will prove itself to be substantial, remains to be seen. It might become increasingly difficult to publish texts on the problematic issue of '3.11', taking into account that according to the official language of the government, the three-fold catastrophe is over. There is a desire to maintain the illusion of a 'normal Japan' and to avoid the question of whether the country has a promising future, given the unpredictability of radiation effects. Various campaigns and initiatives ignore "Fukushima" and aim to present a positive image of Japan, especially for the upcoming Olympic Games in Tokyo 2020.

In this transitional situation Kirino Natsuo's "Baraka" (2011-2016), a novel that was published in its entirety at the end of February 2016, plays an important role. While it could be read as an immigrant saga as well as a portrait of a global labour market, it is also a kind of dark, slightly futuristic adventure novel, depicting a child's struggle to survive in a cold and deprived society. On a higher level, "Baraka" expresses severe doubts regarding the government, major corporations and power hierarchies in Japan. The protagonists articulate pain, frustration, anger and hatred before they finally succumb to their fate – in a hyper-savage and somber way, specific to the writing of Kirino. Kirino's representation of '3.11' within the context of survival, precarity and collective agency highlights a number of painful areas and touches on taboo subjects in Japanese society. The author claims that the Fukushima incident was essentially off limits and that no TV network would even mention "Baraka" - a reaction that is representative of the Japanese mass media's willingness to censor itself. A typical facet of Kirino's writing style is a confrontational and malicious attitude.

Thus, her post-nuclear disaster novel is probably the work that most significantly highlights the deep discontent of the Japanese people with the current state of things, as well as their doubts as to whether “Fukushima” could be the caesura that marks the transition of Japan towards a more open, democratic country. While focusing on Kirino's contribution, the presentation will touch on other prominent literary responses (Takahashi, Ikezawa, Kawakami, Kanehara) to '3.11' and aim to show how common critical arguments about the Japanese system can be identified within an established *shinsai bungaku* canon.