

Library Journal

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Kurumatani, Choukitsu. *The Paradise Bird Tattoo*. Counterpoint. 2011. c.208p. tr. from Japanese by Kenneth J. Bryson. ISBN 9781582437033. \$25; pap. ISBN 9781582437040. \$14.95. F □ A major Japanese prize-winning book (Naoki, 1998) and film (*Akame shiju-ya-taki shinju misui*, 2003; in English, *Akame 48 Waterfalls*), *Paradise* is an unflinching meditation on late-20th-century disconnection. Middle-aged Ikushima, once again a self-described “corpse” in shoes and suit, recalls his drifting life 12 years ago: after abandoning his meaningless advertising job, he eventually settled in a squalid apartment in an industrial town, “eking out a living sticking bits of animal organs and chicken meat onto skewers.” He initially observes his fellow inhabitants—prostitutes and johns, a volatile tattoo artist and his young son, the artist’s enigmatic lover, various gang members—with a detachment that gradually fades. A surprise liaison proves dangerous and sends him on the run again. That Kurumatani’s reputation is defined by his *shisho setsu* (a Japanese literary genre of realistic, autobiographic novels, translated as the “I-novel”) adds poignancy to his protagonist Ikushima’s desperation.

VERDICT Gen-Xers with nihilistic literary preferences (“There’s no fundamental meaning or value in human existence,” Ikushima repeatedly insists) looking for a fast, gritty read need look no further.—**Terry Hong, Smithsonian BookDragon, Washington, DC**

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