



Kaitan-shi jokei [Sketches of Kaitan City]

By Satō Yasushi

Shōgakukan (Shōgakukan Bunko), 2010. 315 pp. ¥619. ISBN 978-4-09-408556-3.

海炭市叙景 佐藤 泰志

小学館 (小学館文庫) / 2010年 / 315ページ / 本体619円 / ISBN 978-4-09-408556-3

This novel is set in a town surrounded by the ocean, apparently Hakodate, in Hokkaidō. On the edge of the town is a small mountain that attracts many tourists with the night view from its summit, accessible via aerial tram. In the late 1980s, however, unable to find its way out of a structural depression, the town quickly began to lose its vitality and its vision for the future. With a deeply sympathetic touch, the novel successively depicts the figures of 18 “ordinary people” doing their best to survive in this environment and links them together in a large chain.

The young man who is laid off from the coal mine. The junior high school student who skips school and wanders around town alone. The streetcar operator nearing retirement age. The bare-chested sailor who bursts into a bar late one night in the middle of winter. The office worker addicted to horse racing. Through the figures of such people, who have no connection to each other apart from living in the same town, this novel makes us clearly aware of the smell of the ocean and the light of the northern country that pervades their lives, and it brings into bold relief the truth of life’s preciousness.

The author committed suicide before this book was published. Although this is a novel that uncovers the profound sadness and despair held by common people, it is also a tale in which signs of hope shine brightly in many places—just like the “diamond dust” that breathes luminous life into the mountains in winter. Additionally, the 2010 film adaptation, directed by Kumakiri Kazuyoshi, has been praised as a masterpiece that preserves the flavor of the original work. (NK)

Satō Yasushi

Satō Yasushi Born in Hokkaidō Prefecture in 1949. Was nominated for the Akutagawa Prize five times, including for “Kimi no tori wa utaeru” [Your Bird Can Sing]. *Soko nomi ni te hikari kagayaku* [The Light Shines Only There] was nominated for the Mishima Yukio Prize. He took his own life in 1990. His works have been adapted to film: *Kaitan-shi jokei* in 2010, *Soko nomi ni te hikari kagayaku* in 2014, and a story from the collection *Ōgon no fuku* [Golden Clothes] in 2016. Also, *Mō hitotsu no asa: Satō Yasushi shoki sakuhin-shū* [One More Morning: The Early Works of Satō Yasushi] was published in 2011.

佐藤 泰志 (サトウ ヤスシ)

1949年北海道生まれ。「きみの鳥はうたえる」他で5度の芥川賞候補となる。『そのみにて光輝く』で第2回三島由紀夫賞候補。1990年、自ら命を絶つ。『海炭市叙景』は2010年に、『そのみにて光輝く』が2014年に、「オーバー・フェンス」(『黄金の服』所蔵)が2016年に映画化。また、2011年には『もうひとつの朝 佐藤泰志初期作品集』刊行。

舞台は北海道、函館とおぼしき海に囲まれた町。町の先端には小高い山があり、ロープウェイで登っていった頂上から眺める夜景は多くの観光客を集めている。だが1980年代後半、町は構造的な不況から抜け出す姿を見出せないまま、みるみる活気を失い、未来へのビジョンを失いつつあった。その中で懸命に生きる「普通の人びと」のべ18人の姿が、共感あふれる筆遣いで次々と描き出され、ひとつの大きな連鎖を作り上げていく。

炭鉱を解雇された青年。学校をさぼって一人、町をさまよう中学生。定年間近の路面電車運転手。真冬の真夜中のバーに上半身裸で飛び込んできた船乗り。競馬に夢中のサラリーマン。同じ町で暮らすという以外、相互に接点をもたない人物たちの姿を通して、彼らの生活を浸す海の匂いと北国の光がまざまざと感知され、かけがえのない人生の真実が浮き彫りになる。

作者は本書刊行を待たずして自殺した。しかしこれは、庶民の抱える深い悲しみや絶望をあぶり出す小説であると同時に、ところどころに希望の兆しがまばゆく輝き出す物語でもある——まるで冬の山を息づかせ、発光させる「ダイヤモンドダスト」のように。なお熊切和嘉監督による映画化作品(2010年)が、原作の味わいを裏切らない傑作として評価されていることも付記しておこう。(NK)

Also published in: n/a

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Publisher:
Shōgakukan Inc.
Fax: +81-3-3234-5108

翻訳出版に関する連絡先:
株式会社小学館
コミュニケーション編集部