

Albania (Language of translation: Albanian)

OMBRA GVG Publishing House

Founded in 1998, this is one of Albania's leading publishing houses. For its publication of selected classical and contemporary works from around the world as well as its quality editing and design, OMBRA GVG has won many cultural awards, including the 2010 Lumo Skëndo award of the Albanian Ministry of Tourism, Culture, Youth and Sports and the National Library. In the realm of Japanese literature, the press is dedicated to translating and publishing works from the Meiji period to the present day, beginning with its 2015 publication of *Death by Water* (Oe Kenzaburo).

Website: <http://www.ombravgv.com/en/index.html>

■ Projects supported by Japan Foundation grants

2016 *Vdekje nga uji* (*Suishi; Death by Water*) by Oe Kenzaburo

2017 *Kokoro* by Natsume Soseki

2019 *Përtej* (*Out*) by Kirino Natsuo

2021 *Unë jam një maçok* (*Wagahai wa neko de aru; I Am a Cat*) by Natsume Soseki



We follow rigorous book publication practices and engage in unique marketing strategies to promote the appeal of Japanese literature in Albania and throughout the Balkan region.

Vasilika Tafa, Executive Director

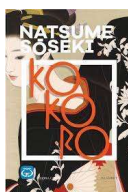
Interpreter: **Gejsi Tafa, International Project Manager**

When did you start focusing on translating and publishing Japanese literature?

My husband and I founded OMBRA GVG Publishing House in 1998, and we have published a number of the most important national and international works selected from classical and contemporary literature. These days, we are one of the most prominent publishing houses in Albania. In 2015, we were the first to start introducing Japanese literature, which is not well known in Albania, and we have since become a leader in this field. The first book we worked on was *Death by Water* by Nobel laureate Kenzaburo Oe. Since then, we have continued to translate and publish wonderful works of Japanese literature, including *Kokoro* (Soseki Natsume), *I Am a Cat* (Natsume Soseki), and *Out* (Kirino Natsuo).



Albanian translation of *Death by Water*
by Oe Kenzaburo



Albanian translation of *Kokoro* by
Natsume Soseki



Albanian translation of *Out* by
Kirino Natsuo

How did you become interested in Japanese literature in the first place?

One of the reasons we decided to focus on Japanese literature is that our research revealed that Japanese literature translated into English is very highly regarded. In addition, I am also personally, very interested in Asian cultures, especially Japanese culture. I am impressed by the high level of development that Japan has achieved to date, not only in terms of technology, but also in terms of culture and literature, as well as in many other areas such as society and education. During the 40 years of communism in Albania, we had very little in the way of cultural imports from Asia. It was only from the 1990s that Asian and Japanese culture began to be introduced, and that the significance and excellence of Japanese literature became better known. At the same time, since we were involved in many international publishing projects, we also heard about the reputation of Japanese literature from our partners in various countries.

You have mentioned that Japanese literature is rarely introduced in Albania. How do you gather information about such works? And can you tell us about the process of publishing them?

In our search for new authors and new works, we refer to numerous websites featuring literary works translated for the international market. We conduct careful research into works that have been translated from Japanese into European languages that are more familiar to us, such as Italian, English, French, or German. For Japanese literature, we also check the Japan Foundation website for recommended works, of course. We also constantly visit high schools and universities to learn what kinds of books young people are interested in and what kind of demand exists.

After gathering information, deciding on a project, and resolving the issues of translation rights and publishing rights, the biggest challenge we face is the lack of professional translators capable of directly translating Japanese literature into Albanian. For this reason, we translate into Albanian and publish Japanese literary works that have been skillfully translated from a second language (usually English) and that have a strong reputation. We published *Death by Water* (Oe Kenzaburo) and *Changeling* (Oe Kenzaburo) through this process.

In Albania, OMBRA GVG is known as a publisher with a strong message, and we conduct not only translation, but also editing and binding work with deep commitment and meticulous care. Readers have praised us as the best publishing house in terms of editing.

How have readers reacted to *I Am a Cat*?

We invested the greatest effort we have ever put into promoting a book in *I Am a Cat*, and it created a lot of buzz when it was introduced extensively at the book fair in the capital city of Tirana in 2021. Promoting a book is difficult if the book itself is not outstanding, but I was personally very impressed with the novel and became actively involved in marketing it myself. Our efforts resulted in extremely positive reviews from readers and critics, as well as authors and translators. I also introduced our edition of *I Am a Cat* to Albanian-speaking readers not only within Albania, but also across our borders in places such as Macedonia and Kosovo. I appeared on numerous TV and online programs to introduce Japanese literature and Japanese authors. And, I find I can't stop talking about Japanese literature (laughs), and have spoken at various literary circles or similar events. Our publication of *I Am a Cat* was recently presented to the Albanian Minister of Culture by the Japanese Ambassador to Albania.



Une Jam nje Macok (I Am a Cat) in the Librari Albania bookstore in Tirana, Albania's capital



I am a Cat was introduced on one of the most watched TV programs in Albania. The program video (in Albanian) can be viewed at the link below.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruU7ypMZKvo>



Vasilika Tafa at the OMBRA GVG exhibit at a book fair in the capital city of Tirana

What kind of works do you plan to translate and publish in the future?

This year we are working on the translation and publication of *A True Novel* (Mizumura Minae), and in the near future we plan to work on the works of Mishima Yukio. In terms of selecting specific works, we are currently in the process of selecting works that have been translated into a second language (English, French, Italian, German, etc.) and have been well received, as I mentioned earlier.

The selection of works needs to be rigorous. Since there are no translators available at this time capable of translating directly from Japanese into Albanian, we need to select works that have been translated from Japanese into European languages and are highly regarded in their own right. Then we find the best translator and translate the book into Albanian. Of course, many books are highly reviewed and they win many awards, but we have to choose books in strict consideration of our constraints on translators.

Albania is a small country, with a small population and small readership in comparison to other countries. With such a small market, it would be difficult to continue this work without having a passion for literature. I intend to continue introducing not only Japanese classic and contemporary literature, but also manga to Albanian readers.

I strongly believe that introducing Japanese books, especially to the younger generation of readers who are fascinated by Japanese manga and anime, is an opportunity to introduce literary works, and from there to open the door wide to more works of Japanese literature.



Vasilika with Gejsi Tafa, International Project Manager, OMBRA GVG.