

What do I like about Japanese Literature?

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I first encountered Japanese Literature when I was still a little girl. My father was a famous Hungarian poet, so we had a big library at home and I really liked reading, I enjoyed the world of Japanese short stories, I was especially fond of poems, of haikus. My childhood fell on the difficult era of the socialist dictatorship. We were very poor, if we could eat meat once a week, that was good. In kindergarten, instead of fairy tales, politicians' speeches were read every day. I longed for another, a better world from this world, which I found in Japan based on the books. Japan was the Heaven for me and now and I still think the same. In the *Genji monogatari*, I learned about the Heian period, which I really loved. I found beauty in this era, I wanted to live in it.

Later, I got to know Japanese literature more and more, and I started translating during my university years. At that time, Kyoko Hani, from the famous Hani family, taught me Japanese, and she said: translate, Judit. At the end of the 60s, she gave me *Kenzaburo Oe's* short stories. At the time, no one knew that a few decades later Kenzaburo Oe would be awarded the Nobel Prize. I translated the short stories *Ningen no hitsuji*, *Kimyo na shigoto*, the publication of which was received with great success by Hungarian readers. In 1997, I managed to get to know the writer personally, when he came to Budapest as the guest of honor at a conference. That's when I translated the novel *Mannen gannen no futtoru*.

To my great pleasure, I teach Japanese Literature and Literary Translation at two universities in Budapest. To help students learn, I wrote *A Brief History of Japanese Literature*. The students also really liked Japanese Literature. Among Japanese authors, young people especially like the works of *Kobo Abe* and *Shinichi Hoshi*. My favorite author, from whom I have translated the most, is *Ryonosuke Akutagawa*. I have translated many of his works, because I think he represents the human soul the best. I have translated *Yabu no naka*, *Uma no ashi*, *Jigokuhen* and other works. As a continuation of his style, *Osamu Dazai* could be mentioned, whose collection of short stories we are currently compiling in Hungarian. *Shinichi Hoshi*, whose short and humorous short stories with harsh social criticism mean a lot to young people and to me, is the most popular at Literary Translation seminars. Shinichi Hoshi's Japanese-Hungarian bilingual collection of short stories is also being prepared. This volume is also translated by university students majoring in Japanese. Two Japanese-Hungarian bilingual folktale books have already been published, entitled *Momotaro* and *Yamata no orochi*, which contain 50-50 wonderful Japanese folktales.

But I also really like the classics, I have also translated *Monzaemon Chikamatsu's* plays. The play

Shinju ten no Amijima, which was presented several times in the Hungarian radio, was a great success.

But I like haiku poetry the most. I translated *Matsuo Basho's* wonderful work, *Oku no hosomichi*, which is still considered modern today. Before I translated it, I went through the journey myself with the NHK film crew, together with an international company. At the end of the trip, an international haiku competition was held in Akita, where I was delighted to win the 1st prize in the haiku category in English.

Among modern writers, I really like *Genki Kawamura*, by whom I translated two novels, *Sekai kara neko ga kieta nara* and *Hyakka*. It presents the world and problems of people wonderfully in the 21st century. Moreover, the problems of the future also arise in his writings. The issue of dementia, for example, is now a global problem. The author describes all of this in a nuanced, intriguing style.

Another wonderful Japanese writer is *Masashi Matsuie*, whose novel *Kazan no fumoto de* I am currently translating. From the point of view of World Literature, the novel is also significant and includes the entire storehouse of today's knowledge.

Hungarian readers enjoy reading Japanese fiction and epic works. I see that many people have the same longing for a better, more beautiful world that I have. Those whose works are most read by the Hungarian public: *Ryunosuke Akutagawa*, *Yukio Mishima* (due to his special biography) and *Haruki Murakami*. But in Hungary, people really like all things Japanese. The Japanese are not maximalists, but perfectionists, that is, they strive for perfection. We Hungarians really like this. And this can also be seen in Japanese literary works.

Haiku is one of our favorite pieces of Japanese Literature. Since *Shiki Masaoka*, the genre of haiku has become popular all over the world, including in Hungary. Many haiku volumes appear not only on internet sites, but also in paper-based books, many people write haiku. Haiku is a genre of our time, a short poem, like a *shinju*. Despite its brevity, it can present an entire world in 17 syllables. It is also very important that the end of the haiku is open. The poet also involves the reader in the world of the haiku. The reader ends the haiku as he himself thinks. This is how the haiku becomes the reader's.

In 2010, the Pécs city was the cultural capital of the European Union. On this occasion, here, the Haiku club of the Hungarian-Japanese Friendship Society, founded in 2000, managed to organize an event called the World Haiku Festival Pécs. The festival was very successful. *Ban'ya Natsuishi*, director of the World Haiku Association, wrote: "2010. between August 6 and 8, 41 haiku poets from 11 different countries will gather in Pécs to celebrate our international haiku festival. This fact also proves that in the 21st century haiku writing will increasingly become a new and indispensable

genre for humanity.”

Since 2014, after the USA, in Hungary every year in the middle of April we hold the Hungarian Haiku Day. At that time, we organize many competitions and tenders with great success.

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