

their eyes bulge out of their sockets when they realize that one mere kilogram costs over ¥50,000 (about \$210). Of course tasty food is always expensive, and when you take into account all the work that was required to get such palatable chunks of meat—from the massages to the choice of proper music to entice satisfactory growth—you may think it a bargain. For those who prefer fish or foreign cuisine, Kobe is again a paradise. I must confess that I go readily for a nice meal of *sushi*. In spite of the fact that *edomae* originated in Tokyo, it is available in tasty abundance, and I praise myself for having discovered what I consider the best *sushi* shop in the country, a little back of the main street Tor Road. As for foreign food, there is an endless variety of the highest quality.

When you walk the streets of Kobe, you'll be surprised by the extraordinary number of fashion shops. Tradition has it that, soon after Kobe Port was opened, a French woman, appropriately enough, started a shop where she sold dresses and hats, this marking the beginning of the apparel industry in Kobe. The shop's superior techniques, handed down to present clothing manufacturers, have earned the city a reputation for elegance and creativity. The so-called Kitano district, which became famous after a popular television series almost ten years ago, attracts an ever-growing number of young people who throng to its bargain sales in renovated old houses. Fashion demands ornament, and pearls became an important sector in the city. Most likely for-

eigners fascinated by the "mysterious treasure of the Orient" urged pearl exports, making Kobe a world center for pearl trading.

To write about Kobe without mentioning the big ventures upon which the city has embarked in recent years would be to do it an injustice. In 15 years, at a cost of ¥530 billion (\$2.2 billion), an artificial island, called Port Island, was reclaimed from the sea. To celebrate the completion of this gigantic undertaking, in 1981 Kobe city held an international fair, which drew 16 million visitors from home and abroad. The earth and sand used for reclamation were taken from the mountains located in the western part of Kobe; this daring operation received much publicity from the press which described it as "the mountain that goes to the sea." The last stage of this complex process is right now being observed with the holding of the Universiade in Kobe. The park, used for the main events of the 1985 "Student Olympics," covers a space of 55 hectares, with an athletic stadium, tennis courts and so on. It was built on the spot where the earth was taken away. Furthermore, another artificial island called "Rokko Island" has been under construction since 1972. In short, Kobe is definitely a city that thinks for the future, while preserving its past. An interesting lesson to meditate.

André Brunet

Consul General of France  
for Osaka and Kobe

# Bookshelf

## Modern Japanese Literature in Translation

For a long time, Japan has run a seemingly unshakable deficit in its balance of publishing, far more books being translated into than out of Japanese. Recently, however, the situation has begun to change as people in other countries have become more interested in Japan and more receptive to Japanese writing. Yet where to start? Quite arbitrarily, I have selected some representative works which I would recommend on the basis of their universal appeal, translation readability, and retail availability.

Soseki Natsume, who studied in England early in the 20th century, was critical of his country's indiscriminate rush to modernize and attempted in his works to effectively combine Western individualism with traditional Japanese thought processes. Two of his major works are *Kokoro (Kokoro)* and *Grass on the Wayside (Michikusa)*.

With a critical eye trained on Western litera-



ture, Jun'ichiro Tanizaki attempted a critical study of traditional Japanese concepts of beauty. *The Makioka Sisters* (*Sasame-yuki*) portrays the life of a declining Osaka merchant family in the 1930s by focusing on the personalities of the family's four daughters, and it has a plot interwoven throughout with vivid scenes of flower viewing, firefly hunts, and moon viewing. In *A Portrait of Shunkin* (*Shunkin Sho*), a story of a man's sacrifices for love and beauty and the masochistic pleasure he derives from sadistic treatment, Tanizaki revives classical traditions within the context of the modern novel.

Yasunari Kawabata, the first Japanese author to receive the Nobel Prize in literature, is well known for such works as *Snow Country* (*Yukiguni*) and *House of the Sleeping Beauties* (*Nemureru Bijo*). *Snow Country* explores the beauty of woman with the juxtaposition of a geisha and a young girl in a small hot springs town as viewed through the nihilistic eyes of a man apparently patterned after the author. Deeply influenced by Buddhism, Kawabata is notable for his viewing life as prelude to death. This perspective is particularly apparent in the carnal corruption depicted in *House of the Sleeping Beauties*.

Naoya Shiga was a master of the self-exploratory, autobiographical fiction perfected in the I-novel (*shishosetsu*) genre which dominated Japanese literature in the early years of this century. In bringing the protagonist of *A Dark Night's Passing* (*An'ya Koro*) to maturation, Shiga creates a masterful portrait of human character that is an affirmation of the life that can yet emerge from nothingness.

Spotlighted by his dramatic suicide, Yukio Mishima was highly critical of postwar Japanese society and advocated a return to what he perceived as a manly and heroic society centered on the emperor. The weaknesses of postwar Japanese society are relentlessly revealed in *Confessions of a Mask* (*Kamen no Kokuhaku*), which tells of the perversion of a youth unable to maintain normal sexual relations. *The Temple of the Golden Pavilion* (*Kinkakuji*) takes advantage of a true incident to explore the complex psychology of a youthful monk and the process by which the artist's aesthetics are destroyed by reality.

While there are numerous critics and advocates of Mishima's peculiar philosophy, all agree that at the core of his work is a yearning for the perfection of the traditional samurai ideal. This is particularly clear in *On Hagakure—The Samurai Ethics and Modern Japan* (*Hagakure Nyumon*). Eiji Yoshikawa was another admirer of samurai perfection as is evident in his *Musashi* (*Miyamoto Musashi*), a novel with Miyamoto Musashi as its hero. Shusaku Endo also wrote about the samurai, but his approach is quite different. Hasekura Tsunenaga, the protagonist of his novel *Samurai* (*Samurai*), travels to seventeenth-century Rome to be both attracted and repelled by Catholicism. Endo explores this conflict more deeply in *Silence* (*Chinmoku*), a tale of apostate Jesuit missionaries during the Christian persecution in Japan.

Kobo Abe and Kenzaburo Oe go beyond the limitations of the Japanese experience to develop modern themes with universal relevance. More than exoticism or Eastern mysticism underlies their broad appeal. In Abe's *The Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no Onna*), a man out collecting insects is trapped in a sand pit in the midst of dunes where he is forced to live with a widow. The wall of sand stretching above him affords no avenue of escape and yet he finds new meaning in life.

Oe writes of a father's struggle to accept the deformity of his newly born child in *A Personal Matter* (*Kojinteki-na Taiken*) and how the father was finally able to accept the situation. Highly autobiographical, *A Personal Matter* ties together two themes—crisis of modern society and the dilemma of the individual—to explore the possibility of the emergence of a new breed of humanity.

Anti-war, anti-nuclear, and humanitarian themes are also prevalent in modern Japanese literature. Shigeharu Nakano sensitively portrays the humility and restraint of a war widow in *The Crest-painter of Hagi* (*Hagi no Monkakiya*), while Shohei Ooka describes the loneliness of and tragic choice forced upon soldiers of the defeated Japanese army on a remote island in *Fire on the Plain* (*Nobi*). Michio Takeyama's *Harp of Burma* (*Biruma no Tategoto*) bemoans the mass insanity of war and offers a prayer for peace.

The bombing of Hiroshima and its rejuvenation are the themes in Masuji Ibuse's *Black Rain* (*Kuroi Ame*), a tale about an old man's efforts to prove that his niece has not been affected by radiation sickness so that she can get married. To do this he goes through his niece's and his own diaries in an attempt to reconstruct the events surrounding the bombing. He discovers that though his niece was not in the city when the bomb was dropped, she had been exposed to the black rain that fell afterwards. Still, the old man continues in his endeavor, praying for a miracle even though he knows there is no hope for his niece.

The Japanese family and the relationships of its members, the individual and blood ties, and confrontation between generations are treated in such works as Toson Shimazaki's *The Family* (*Ie*). Shimazaki bases this study of the erosion of patriarchal authority and Confucian ethics through modernization on his own family during the Meiji era. Morio Kita, whose father, Mokichi Saito, was a famed *waka* poet and psychiatrist and whose father-in-law founded a well-known psychiatric hospital, presents a fictionalized account of three generations of psychiatrists in his own family in *The House of Nire* (*Nire-ke no Hitobito*). The childish conceit of the individual family members is etched in lively relief. In another powerful tale of family ties, *A View by the Sea* (*Umibe no Kokei*) by Shotaro Yasuoka, a son watches his mother go insane.

Several works by women writers have also been translated. There is *Masks* (*Onna Men*) by Fumiko Enchi, a parable comparing the suppressed ego of a woman to the expressionless face of a noh mask. In *The River Ki*

(*Ki no Kawa*), Sawako Ariyoshi depicts the intelligent and strong women of an old-fashioned country family as they make their way through the Meiji, Taisho, and Showa eras, clearly describing the life-style and customs of the traditional country household in the process.

Shichiro Fukazawa also takes a look at the prototype of the Japanese family in *The Song of Oak Mountain* (*Narayama-bushi Ko*). Based on legend, this story is about an old woman who gladly complies with a village custom dictating that she must be left to die on a mountain when she turns seventy. Her willing self-sacrifice and stoicism as her son carries her on his back to the mountain are the essential elements of the idealized Japanese family, though there is no evidence that such a practice ever existed in Japan.

Prevailing social conditions and the loneliness and insecurity of the modern Japanese are the themes of Junnosuke Yoshiyuki's *The Dark Room* (*Anshitsu*). In this work, Yoshiyuki questions the significance of sex in contemporary society and explores the concept of sex without emotional attachment and the rejection of sex's role in procreation. Social mores among the youths living near an American military base in Japan are the subject of *Almost Transparent Blue* (*Kagirinaku Tomei-ni Chikai Buru*) by Ryu Murakami.

Another extremely popular work is Sakyo Komatsu's science fiction *Japan Sinks* (*Nihon Chinbotsu*). Shaken by a massive earthquake, the Japanese islands disappear into the sea, forcing the Japanese people into a nomadic existence.

Howard Hibbett's *Contemporary Japanese Literature* presents works at the forefront of contemporary Japanese literature. Included, among others, are *Child of Fortune* (*Choji*) by Yuko Tsushima, depicting the internalized universe of an urban intellect, *The Adventures of Sumiyakisuto Q* (*Sumiyakisuto Q no Boken*), an account full of irony and cynical humor by Yumiko Kurahashi, and *Wedlock* (*Tsumagomi*), Yoshikichi Furui's study of alienation.

## Suggested Reading

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**Shimazaki, Toson**

*The Family*, Tr. C.S. Seigle; University of Tokyo Press (1976).

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*The Makioka Sisters*, Tr. E.G. Seidensticker; Tuttle (1958), Grosset Press (1966), Picador (1983).

*A Portrait of Shunkin*, in *Seven Japanese Tales*, Tr. H. Hibbett; Knopf (1963).

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**Yasuoka, Shotaro**

*A View by the Sea*, Tr. K.W. Lewis; Columbia University Press (1984).

**Yoshikawa, Eiji**

*Musashi*, Tr. C.S. Terry; Harper and Row (1981).

**Yoshiyuki, Junnosuke**

*The Dark Room*, Tr. J. Bester; Kodansha International (1975).

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# Taste of Tokyo

## Restaurant Le Coupe Chou

Assuming you are neither a professional restaurant critic nor someone who gets invited out on other people's expense accounts, what kind of restaurant are you looking for? Most likely it is a restaurant where the food has been prepared with tender loving care, the prices are reasonable, and the atmosphere is pleasant.

"But," you might say, "that does nothing to narrow the field. That is what every restaurant should be." Unfortunately, however, there are very few restaurants that fit this description. Le Coupe Chou does.

Located in Nishi-Shinjuku, close to the famous discount camera shops in the shadow of the high-rise buildings on the west side of Shinjuku Station, Le Coupe Chou serves southern French cuisine. It seats, at most, about 40 guests. The shop has no use for elaborate interior decoration on either floor, nor does it display crockery made in famous European kilns. Instead, hanging on the simple walls are cooking utensils such as ladles, frying pans, pots, and kettles. The nostalgic background music is chansons sung by Edith Piaf, Georges Brassens, and the like tape-recorded off the radio.

Owner and chef Yasuo Sugita started this restaurant eight years ago at the age of 30. His philosophy is "to have customers enjoy tasty food and go home satisfied." True to this philosophy, when the waiter takes an order he makes sure that it contains no ingredients or flavorings the customer is averse to. Both

ingredients and quantity are adjusted to suit the individual customer. "We want the customer to enjoy what he eats," says Sugita. As you might expect, most of the customers are regulars, including many foreigners.

The chef's recommendations are: *Crabe en Cocote* (¥750), *Moules à la Bourgogne* (¥1,200), *Oursin gratiné sauce l'Île de France* (¥1,200), *Fillet de Boef à la Wellington* (¥1,800), and *Poisson du jour notre façon* (¥1,650). The seven-item dessert menu includes "sherbet flavored with green perilla," which has an exquisitely delicate flavor.

There are three table d'hôte courses, priced at ¥4,000 (about \$17), ¥5,000 and ¥7,000. These are the full prices, and nothing is added, neither tax nor service charge. As Sugita explains, "To make the customer pay a tax after

he has enjoyed a fine meal, that is the doing of a bad law."

The ¥1,300 lunch menu consists of hors d'œuvre, soup, salad, a main dish, and coffee.

Try this restaurant when you feel like relaxing and enjoying a pleasant meal after a hard week's work, either by yourself or with a friend.

### Business hours:

Seven days a week

5:30 p.m.–10:00 p.m. (last order)

Lunch menu—11:30 a.m.–2:30 p.m.

Mon. through Sat. (Closed during lunch-time on Sundays and holidays)

Reservations recommended for weekends.

Address: 1-15-7, Nishi-Shinjuku, Shinjuku-ku

Tel: (03) 348-1610

(Yoshimichi Hori, editor-in-chief)

