

Despite these failings, Strauss deserves the gratitude of everyone connected with modern Japanese literature. He commissioned the translation of *Kikyō* (*Homecoming*) by Osaragi Jirō, the first Japanese novel published in twenty-five years by an American company. This novel describes the rediscovery by a Japanese of his country's culture. But for most American readers, unfamiliar with that culture, the novel brought a discovery rather than a rediscovery. The next novel in the Knopf series, Tanizaki's *Tade kuu mushi* (*Some Prefer Nettles*), also describes a rediscovery of traditional Japan.

Other American publishers followed Knopf's example, some preferring less traditional works. This was perhaps the most lasting result of the "Japan boom" of the 1950s.



When I left Japan in 1955, I wept in the airplane at the thought I might never again have enough money to return. As a matter of fact, however, I have managed to spend at least a month in Japan every year since then. When the purchase of airplane tickets was beyond my means, I generally succeeded in obtaining the necessary funds from some organization. In 1956, for example, I received travel expenses from *Newsweek*, in return for which I wrote five or six articles about events in Japan. Only one of these articles was ever printed.

In 1957 I was chosen as a delegate to the PEN Club Congress held in Tokyo and Kyoto. I owed this honor to being the only member of the American PEN Club who could speak Japanese. It was my first such experience, and I was excited to meet and even to converse with writers whose works I had long known. It was an unusually brilliant congress. Famous writers who normally avoided such gatherings gladly accepted the invitation to

attend, mainly because the site was Japan. Although many American writers had lived in Paris or London in the 1920s and 1930s and had published nostalgic accounts of their experiences, probably not one writer of importance had ever visited Tokyo. "Going abroad" meant going to Europe, so this made Japan, because of its unfamiliarity, an alluring destination.

The American delegation included John Steinbeck (who received the Nobel Prize a few years later), Ralph Ellison (the best-known African American novelist), John Dos Passos (whose novel *USA* was a great favorite of mine), and John Hersey (who had published a celebrated book on the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima). The British delegation, equally distinguished, included Stephen Spender, Angus Wilson, and Kathleen Raine. There were delegates from many countries, including refugees who described with bitterness what it meant to be exiles, forbidden to return to their own countries.

The Japanese delegation, naturally the most numerous, was headed by Kawabata Yasunari, the president of PEN. The Japanese had every reason to be proud of the congress's success, the first major cultural event staged in Japan after the war. Even schoolchildren had contributed money to support it.

Although I was one of the least distinguished delegates, I was a favorite with Japanese newspaper reporters because I could speak Japanese. Each of them was eager to ask such penetrating questions as "What do foreign writers think of Japan?" "Who are their favorite Japanese authors?" "Is it true that the delegates, not satisfied with the Japanese banquet last night, went afterward to a restaurant for a steak?" I quickly grew tired of such questions, but the professional writers, accustomed to being interviewed, replied patiently to each reporter, never saying, "I've already answered that question ten times!"

I knew one of the reporters, Takahashi Tan, a former prisoner. Takahashi had been a *Dōmei* reporter on Guam where he was captured, close to starvation. I had interrogated him in Hawaii

and, years later, saw him occasionally in Japan. We shared one unforgettable experience. A prisoner I interrogated in Hawaii had told me how much he missed hearing classical music. Accordingly, I decided, without obtaining authorization from anyone, to take a phonograph and records to the prisoner-of-war camp. Aware that not all the prisoners would enjoy classical music, I bought in Honolulu some records of Japanese popular music that I played first. Then I put on Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony. The place was the camp's shower room, and the records sounded marvelous. At first as I listened to the music, I could not help but observe the expressions on the prisoners' faces. I felt that the music had created a bond between us, overriding differences in nationality and the war. But before long, I was so carried away by the music that I could not think of anything else. Even now, if asked which my favorite symphony is, I invariably answer "the *Eroica*."

After the war ended, I wrote an essay describing the concert, but the *New Yorker* turned it down. By coincidence, Takahashi wrote an article with the same title as mine, but his appeared in a Japanese magazine. In it he related that he had at first wondered why I had chosen to play the *Eroica*. Was it because I wanted to indoctrinate the prisoners with Beethoven's ideals of freedom? Or was I trying to catch the prisoners off guard while they listened to the music? In the end, however, Takahashi decided that my only intent was to share the music.

At the PEN Congress Takahashi drew me aside to ask me some questions, hoping that our old acquaintance would induce me to reveal the contents of confidential discussions among the delegates. In fact, there were hardly any such discussions, but those I knew about I gladly leaked to him.

The PEN Club Congress was my initiation into the world of writers. In Tokyo we all stayed at the (old) Imperial Hotel and had breakfast together. But the conversations over the breakfast table were disappointing. Although this was the first visit to

Japan for almost all the delegates, they seemed to have made little effort to acquaint themselves beforehand with Japanese culture and tended to mock what they could not understand.

The one cultural event that impressed everyone was a performance of *nō*. However, no sooner had the performance ended than reporters clustered around the delegates to ask, "You were bored, weren't you?" They found it inconceivable that foreigners could appreciate an art that they themselves found tedious.

After a few days, the congress moved from Tokyo to Kyoto. Because I had lived in Kyoto for two years, I took it upon myself to guide some delegates to notable places. I remember especially a visit to Koke-dera (Moss Temple) with Stephen Spender, Angus Wilson, and Alberto Moravia. The only person I knew in Kyoto who owned a car was a priest at Shōren-in, who gladly agreed to drive us wherever we wished. The car was very small, but we (and the driver) squeezed in. At the Koke-dera, each one of us wrote a poem describing his impressions of the celebrated moss garden. I seldom met these writers in later years, but Spender's stay in Japan awakened his interest in Japanese literature, and he published in *Encounter*, the magazine he edited, my translation of Mishima's modern *nō* play *Hanjo*.

The PEN Congress was one factor that led to the acceptance of Japanese works as an integral part of the world's literature. Another factor, though I hesitate to mention it, was the publication of the two volumes of my anthology of Japanese literature in 1955 and 1956. Although the translations by Arthur Waley of *The Tale of Genji*, *The Pillow-Book of Sei Shōnagon*, and a selection of *nō* plays had attracted discriminating readers, most of Waley's books were printed in editions of only three thousand copies, half for England and half for America. Even those who recognized that his translations were masterpieces thought of them as isolated peaks rising from a void. The only history of Japanese literature in English was published in 1899 and was hopelessly out of date. My anthology thus served to satisfy a real need.

Now when I examine the contents of the two volumes of the anthology, I am surprised by the aptness of the works chosen for inclusion. Perhaps it was beginner's luck. I had begun studying Japanese literature only ten years earlier and still was ignorant of many major works. Even though I was helped by the translations by Waley and by friends who made new translations, the responsibility was ultimately mine. I surely would have done a better job if I had spent four or five years (instead of two) on the anthologies, but fifty years later, they still are used at universities in the West wherever Japanese literature is taught.