

# Ágnes Tótfalusi

Some people are just born to be translators and dedicate their whole life to their profession. In my opinion Ágnes Tótfalusi is one of them.

We met on a cold rainy afternoon in the famous Cafe Frei at the end of Váci street, Budapest. Before our first meeting, we had spoken on the phone and she sounded so friendly that I had no worries about the interview. I arrived first, and I sat near the window. When I looked outside I saw a woman chaining her bike to a fence and I just knew right away it was her because she had some kind of unique presence. She walked in, and although the place was really crowded, she found me quickly because I had one of her translations on the table: *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* by French Muriel Barbery. It is one of my favorite books, so it was a great honor for me to personally meet the one who translated it into Hungarian.

I had prepared questions but she had such an open personality (which I think is rare among translators) that she answered most of the questions before I actually asked them. When I wanted to buy her some coffee she only asked for some mineral water. She told me that she had been working on a translation for the better part of the day, so she already had had some “brain booster caffeine” at home. She told me that it took her more than forty minutes to get there but she enjoys riding a bike and avoids public transport, even cars. She told me she works at home but she exercises a lot because a translator must not neglect their health after many hours of work. I was really interested in how she became who she is now and she honestly told me about her life.

Ágnes Tótfalusi is a literature translator who translates French works (mostly contemporary) into Hungarian. She is the daughter of István Tótfalusi, who is also a translator but in English. Her passion for literature originates from her family who had a little library at home. When she was a schoolgirl she read many books by famous Hungarian authors, Kálmán Mikszáth for example. In grammar school she started studying French and participated in a translation contest. The task was to translate a difficult sentence by Proust which was an entire page long. Unfortunately, the jury did not believe it was her who translated it because it was almost perfect, but she was not sad because she knew that it was her own work.

At first her dream was to become a teacher, which is why she studied at ELTE pedagogic faculty as a French and Hungarian teacher. However, after few years of teaching she wanted to stay at home to translate literature. During the last twenty years she translated more than fifty French books. Today, she is the translator of almost all the works of Anna Gavalda, Guillame Musso, and Michel Houellebeque. Currently, she is working on a new novel by Muriel Barbery.

Thanks to the afternoon I spent with Ágnes Tótfalusi, I realized that translators might be hidden from the eyes of the readers, and most of the time their work is really difficult and tiresome, but they live in a world full of exciting mysteries: mysteries of language, and solving them is the most interesting and magical part of translation.