

## Interview

## Nominated for the Akutagawa Prize twice- Insights from Professor Gregory Kheznejat

Professor Gregory Kheznejat has been teaching Japanese Literature at GIS for eight years. Among many writings, he has published four books to date. Two of his stories were nominated for the Akutagawa Prize. In this interview, he talks about his latest story, *Trajectory* (『トラジェクトリー』).

### Q1: Could you tell us about your latest story, *Trajectory*?

**Professor Kheznejat (hereafter Kheznejat):** It's a story about a young ESL teacher just out of college living in Nagoya. He's feeling lost, not really at home with where he is, but not eager to go back to where he came from either. In his classes he meets an older student, a retiree learning English out of an interest in the Apollo moon landings. The story loosely follows a brief connection between them.

### TRAJECTORY 『トラジェクトリー』



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### Q2: What inspired you to write this particular story?

**Kheznejat:** It's an amalgam of topics that I've been interested in over the past year or so. Most of what I write begins as an attempt to process some idea I keep coming back to.

### Q3: How did you choose the title for your story, and what significance does it hold for you?

**Kheznejat:** I went back and forth between a few different options – I was a bit concerned about overloading readers with possibly unfamiliar katakana from the very beginning. But this was the title that best encapsulated the novel.

### Q4: What scene would you like readers to pay attention to?

**Kheznejat:** That's hard to answer – they all connect. The first-person journal entries were enjoyable to write. I was also happy with the scenes of the protagonist wandering around a residential neighborhood.

### GREGORY KHEZRNEJAT

Associate Professor  
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His profile is on [教員詳細ページ](#).

## Q5: What themes or messages do you hope readers will take away from your story?

**Kheznejat:** One of the fascinating things about writing is that a text is not really finished until someone reads it and stamps it with their own interpretation. I've seen readers talk about the book as being about globalization, or urban loneliness, or the US in decline, or the commercialization of education, or the sort of existential state of always being "in-between" and never really arriving anywhere. I'm satisfied when readers have the space to decide on that for themselves.

## Q6: What was the biggest challenge you faced while writing this?

**Kheznejat:** Time management is always my biggest challenge. Today we are all encouraged to be "efficient" and "practical," but very little of substance comes out of that approach. Writing – or creating anything new – demands spending a great deal of time exploring, going down dead ends, retracing your steps. Hours of work that sometimes result in one new paragraph. Carving out those chunks of time takes effort.

## Q7: What makes you keep writing in Japanese instead of English?

**Kheznejat:** Part of it is that I simply enjoy writing in Japanese. And I think there's value in writing these kinds of stories in a way that's accessible to readers who might be less familiar with these segments of society. Also, I've lived here for nearly twenty years; unless I'm doing something specifically for GIS, I use Japanese almost exclusively in my daily life. It feels natural to write in the language that I live and think in.

## Q8: What are your plans for future writing projects?

**Kheznejat:** I'm working on two stories right now, one set in Tokyo and one set in the American South. Hopefully I'll be able to announce them both over the next six months to a year.

If you are interested in Japanese Literature, Professor Kheznejat offers several courses in the fall semester. Please check the [Webシラバス](#) for more information.

## PUBLISHED BOOKS (from left to right)

1. *Kamogawa Runner* 『鴨川ランナー』

2. *Kaikonchi* 『開墾地』

(Nominated for the Akutagawa Prize in 2022)

3. *Tangochō* 『単語帳』

4. *Trajectory* 『トラジェクトリー』

(Nominated for the Akutagawa Prize in 2025)



These books are available in the Reference Room.