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On *The Tale of Genji* and the Art of Translation

Charles De Wolf (須田狼庵)

טיו השמ והטמיתא קראילע מירצמ...

And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the Lord brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. (Exodus 10:13, Authorized Version of 1611)

“...so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief,...which constitutes poetic faith.” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge)

“The translation (1935) of *The Tale of Genji* by Arthur Waley is a classic of English literature.” So reads a recent entry in the Encyclopedia Britannica.

While some English-speaking and Japanese-speaking people may respond to that statement with a feeling of “well, yes, of course,” others may be surprised, either unaware of the impact of Waley’s monumental effort or skeptical about the ultimate trustworthiness of any translation. After all, it must be conceded, there are few works in English literature not originally written in the English tongue that are generally regarded as “classics,” the 1611 translation of the Bible being undoubtedly the most outstanding

example. Edward Fitzgerald's *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* comes much further down the list and is renowned (in its various versions) more for its cultural impact than for its faithfulness to the original text.¹⁾

My intent here, however, is not to discuss the status of translation but rather to digress for a moment, before coming to the substance of this essay, by posing the question: What does the term “classical” or “classic” mean? In English, we refer to the Greek spoken and written by Plato and Sophocles as Classical Greek, to the language of Confucius as Classical Chinese, to the language of Murasaki Shikibu as Classical Japanese, to the music of Haydn and Mozart as Classical Music, and to the works of Goethe and Schiller as Classical (German) Literature. We also refer to prized automobiles of at least three decades back as “classic cars,” as well as to classic films, and even to classic rock and roll and Classic Coke.

The Sino-Japanese term *koten* (古典) has a somewhat narrower range, so that while one can refer to Japan's postwar “classic films” as *koten-eiga* (古典映画), the phrase *koten-manga* (古典漫画) appears to refer not to the works of Tezuka Osamu (手塚治), for example, but rather to renditions of classical literary works in *manga* format.²⁾ For “classical French cuisine” one is more likely to say *furansu no teiban-ryōri* (フランスの定番料理) than *furansu no koten-ryōri*.

The first entry given in the *Nihon-kokugo-daijiten* (日本国語大辞典) for Sino-Japanese 古典 is from 1336, a chaotic year in which the emperor Go-Daigo fled the capital for the last time. It refers broadly to what in English we would call ‘scripture’ (経典) or ancient authority. The stern comment from the beginning of the Kenmu Code (建武式目) reads in Classical Chinese form: 古典曰、德是嘉政、政在安民云々」(‘The wisdom of old tells us that virtue lies in good government, and the essence of government is maintaining a peaceful populace.’)

It is only in modern times that *koten* has come to correspond to the Latin concept of *classicus*, roughly translatable as ‘the best’.³⁾ The second NKDJ entry, the citations dating from the beginning of the 20th century, reads: すぐれた著述や作品で、過去の長い年月にわたって多くの人々の模範となり、また愛好されてきたもの (‘Writings or works that over the years have become a much-loved model for many people’).

But, of course, the idea of preserving the best of the old is itself hardly new, for from the beginning of Japanese history, there has been both keen awareness of human life’s ephemeral nature and a strong desire to preserve in some form what is past. Such was, for example, the motivation behind the compilation of Japan’s oldest text, the *Kojiki* (古事記), Records of Ancient Matters, or in Yamato-kotoba: *Furu-koto-bumi*.

If the impulse to conserve were constant and even over time, the distinction between past and present might appear in our minds to be less intense, with our interest in it likewise dulled. In fact, however, we tend to neglect old works and then, with great excitement, rediscover them. Such is again true both East and West. The *Kojiki*, for example, was so nearly forgotten that it was at one time thought a forgery, and it was only in the Edo Period, with the work of the renowned Motoori Norinaga, who highly prized it, that it returned to prominence. In the English-speaking world, Anglo-Saxon literature was largely ignored for an even longer period of time; its most famous work, *Beowulf*, was rediscovered only in the 18th century and even then had to be translated, the first modern language edition—in Danish—being published in 1820.

Though *The Tale of Genji* has never fallen into such obscurity, it too is subject to the vicissitudes of fashion. Today it is, of course, known to all young people, thanks both to mandatory classes in Classical Japanese and to popular culture. One thinks of the manga version *Asaki-yumemishi*, the

music group Hikaru Genji, and more recently the film *Genji Monogatari: Sennen no Nazo* (源氏物語・千年の謎 The Tale of Genji: A Millennial Riddle). Unfortunately, instead of treating the Genji as a work of literature, the educational establishment uses a small number of excerpts for the sole purpose of testing grammatical fine points.

Similarly, *Beowulf* is known among English-speaking young people both as a work that is sometimes taught in school and as a pop-culture phenomenon. The significant difference is that they are most unlikely to read it in the original, as Anglo-Saxon is rarely learned by anyone but specialists and eccentric linguists such as myself, and even I did not take the plunge until I was nearly thirty. Unlike Modern English, Old English, as we linguists prefer to call it, is highly inflected, though less so than, for example, Latin and thus requires the memorization of numerous forms. Furthermore, the vocabulary is almost entirely West Germanic, and whereas I as a speaker of German recognize many words as cognate, most English speakers do not, as the modern language has been heavily influenced by North Germanic (Scandinavian), French, Latin, and Greek, resulting in the loss of many Anglo-Saxon words.

I have often compared the accessibility of early Middle Japanese to that of Early Middle English, and on the whole I think such is not misleading. And yet the fact remains that *Genji Monogatari* is for various reasons a particularly difficult work. Whereas even I, a non-native speaker of Japanese, can read excerpts from *Konjaku Monogatari* without constantly glancing at the notes and the modern translation, the language of Murasaki Shikibu remains for me quite daunting.

Moreover, only a few centuries after the work was completed, it had ceased to be readily accessible even among literate Japanese. Again unlike *Konjaku Monogatari*, the sentences are often complex, with subjects and

objects typically ellipted and pure Japanese (as opposed to Sinitic) words used in a bewilderingly wide range of meaning. Of the countless poetical allusions, which would have been known to those to whom Murasaki Shikibu first read her work, many or most have long since become obscure, and in the verses that the characters themselves exchange there are plays on words that are likewise lost on later readers.

Of course, as with Shakespeare, who also makes frequent use of puns, often obscured because of sound changes since his time, one can appreciate the overall story without grasping all the verbal details. The fact that, more than six hundred years after the composition of the *Genji*, Ihara Saikaku could write popular parodies of the work is proof enough of that. And yet we may well suppose that literate commoners of the Edo Period who encountered the story of those Heian-period nobles must have enjoyed seeing *Genji* turned into a country bumpkin, that is, someone, though beneath them in station, who was still more like them than those who “dwelt above the clouds.”

In the early Meiji period, Japan came to glimpse her culture, including, of course, her literature as it appeared in the mirror of the outside world, especially the Occident. While this no doubt had the effect of enabling the Japanese to appreciate their heritage from a fresh perspective, there was also considerable ambivalence, perhaps the most obvious example being that of *ukiyo-e*, which, while suddenly admired and prized in Europe, were seen in Japan as something from the rejected past. One might wish to think that the *Genji* would have suffered no such fate, but the fact is that even Suematsu Kenchō, who produced the first partial translation into English in 1882, covering less than one-third of the work, clearly seeks both to persuade his readers of the tale’s overall splendor and to preempt any harsh criticism, to

say nothing of outright dismissal, by, it would seem, taking on the perspective of a foreign observer.

As if anticipating those who might be scandalized by the amorality of Genji's behavior, he comments:

The period to which her story relates is supposed to be the earlier part of the tenth century after Christ, a time contemporary with her own life. For some centuries before this period, our country had made a signal progress in civilization by its own internal development, and by the external influence of the enlightenment of China, with whom we had had for some time considerable intercourse. No country could have been happier than was ours at this epoch. It enjoyed perfect tranquillity, being alike free from all fears of foreign invasion and domestic commotions. Such a state of things, however, could not continue long without producing some evils; and we can hardly be surprised to find that the Imperial capital became a sort of centre of comparative luxury and idleness. Society lost sight, to a great extent, of true morality, and the effeminacy of the people constituted the chief feature of the age. Men were ever ready to carry on sentimental adventures whenever they found opportunities, and the ladies of the time were not disposed to discourage them altogether.

And then, as though to head off criticism that the work is unwieldy and incoherent, he says:

. . . It is true that within the last sixty or seventy years numerous works of fiction of different schools have been produced, mostly in the native language, and that these, when judged as stories, generally excel in their

plots those of the classical period. The status, however, of these writers has never been recognized by the public, nor have they enjoyed the same degree of honor as scholars of a different description. Their style of composition, moreover, has never reached the same degree of refinement which distinguished the ancient works. This last is a strong reason for our appreciation of true classical works such as that of our authoress.

Again, the concise description of scenery, the elegance of which it is almost impossible to render with due force in another language, and the true and delicate touches of human nature which everywhere abound in the work, especially in the long dialogue in Chapter II, are almost marvellous when we consider the sex of the writer, and the early period when she wrote.

Yet this work affords fair ground for criticism. The thread of her story is often diffuse and somewhat disjointed, a fault probably due to the fact that she had more flights of imagination than power of equal and systematic condensation: she having been often carried away by that imagination from points where she ought to have rested. But, on the other hand, in most parts the dialogue is scanty, which might have been prolonged to considerable advantage, if it had been framed on models of modern composition. The work, also, is too voluminous.

No doubt concerned about Occidental sensibilities, Suematsu bowdlerizes. Whereas in the original of the second chapter (*Hahakigi*, 帚木 The Broom Tree) Genji picks up the startled and stunned Utsusemi and carries her off to his room, Suematsu has him “gently taking her hand.” An even more striking example can be seen at the end of the chapter, where

Genji, having for the moment given up on the lady known to us as Utsusemi, takes her younger brother to bed.

小君、いといとほしさに眠たくもあらでまどひ歩くを、人あやしと見るらむ、とわびたまふ。

例の、人々はいぎたなきに、一所すずろにすさまじく思し続けられるれど、人に似ぬ心ぎまの、なほ消えず立ち上れりける、とねたく、かかるにつけてこそ心もとまれと、かつは思しながら、めざましくつらければ、さばれと思せども、さも思し果つまじく、

「隠れたらむ所に、なほ率て行け」とのたまへど、「いとむつかしげにさし籠められて、人あまちはべるめれば、かしこげに」と聞こゆ。いとほしと思へり。

「よし、あこだに、な捨てそ」

とのたまひて、御かたはらに臥せたまへり。若くなつかしき御ありさまを、うれしくめでたしと思ひたれば、つれなき人よりは、なかなかあはれに思さるとぞ。

Suematsu first abridges the passage and then provides, so to speak, a soft landing:

[Genji] was agitated. At one moment he cried, "Well, then!" at another, However!" "Still!" At last, turning to the boy, he passionately exclaimed, "Lead me to her at once!"

Kokimi calmly replied, "It is impossible, too many eyes are around us!" Genji with a sigh then threw himself back on the cushion, saying to Kokimi, "You, at least, will be my friend, and shall share my apartment!"

When Arthur Waley, an Englishman of German-Jewish origin, with connections to the Bloomsbury Group, made known his high regard of the *Genji*, he was initially regarded as eccentric. Although he never learned Modern Japanese and, indeed, never visited Japan, he taught himself Classical Japanese, along with Classical Chinese and eventually translated nearly all of the tale, leaving out only those parts that he presumably found distasteful or superfluous. Unlike Suematsu, however, he apparently did not feel compelled to protect his English-speaking readers from the work's sexuality. "(Genji) took her up in his arms (for she was very small) was carrying her through the ante-room when suddenly Chujo, the servant for whom she had sent before, entered the bedroom." Again in contrast to Suematsu, Waley boldly renders the conclusion of the chapter as follows:

The boy was terribly sorry for Genji and did not feel sleepy at all, but he was afraid people would think his continual excursions very strange. By this time, however, everyone else in the house was sound asleep. Genji alone lay plunged in the blackest melancholy. But even while he was raging at the inhuman stubbornness of her new-found and incomprehensible resolve, he found that he could not but admire her the more for this invincible tenacity. At last he grew tired of lying awake; there was no more to be done. A moment later he had changed his mind again, and suddenly whispered to the boy, 'Take me to where she is hiding!' 'It is too difficult,' he said, 'she is locked in and there are so many people there. I am afraid to go with you.' 'So be it,' said Genji, 'but you at least must not abandon me,' and he laid the boy beside him on his bed. He was well content to find himself lying by this handsome young Prince's side, and Genji, we must record, found the boy no bad substitute for his ungracious sister.

Japanese reaction to the internationalization of the *Genji* was not universally positive. Yosano Akiko, for one, was horrified, arguing in remarkably nationalistic tones that *Genji Monogatari* could only be appreciated in Japanese. On the other hand, whatever Tanizaki's ultimate view of the Waley translation, the fact remains that its publication was a significant stimulus for his own endeavor. It was also the source for numerous renditions into other European languages, including German, French, Spanish, and Italian. It is only in recent years that translations based on the original have been produced.

As a long-time translator, I am, of course, a staunch partisan of the art. Moreover, particularly as a linguist, I see how we come to rediscover and reinterpret a text by submitting it to the process of transformation into another tongue. I must confess, however, that even I am hardly consistent in my view of the endeavor. Royall Tyler, professor emeritus of Australia National University and a highly distinguished scholar and translator, has said with remarkable candor that it was in part his very inability to read the original without considerable effort that motivated him so strongly to translate it.⁴⁾

In theory, I would say that as a translator I enjoy the linguistic challenge for its own sake, regardless of the ease with which I can read the original. But in practice, that is hardly the case, for while I have dabbled occasionally in the translation of German and French literature, I quickly find my interest lagging, for the original texts have their way of ringing in my ears. Such, I readily admit, is not the case with Classical Japanese. Though I have translated dozens of stories from *Konjaku Monogatari*, I cannot reel off a single line from any of them in the original. More than once the alarming

thought has occurred to me that if I had to struggle to read Goethe, for example, many of whose words I have memorized without really intending to, I might be ever so slightly inclined to render his words into English. As it is, I have never attempted it.

All that having been said, I wish now to turn to specific translation issues and illustrate them with examples from the *Genji* original. Here I would offer seven general (though, of course, not exhaustive) categories of what I will call translation hurdles.

1. The Meaning of the Text

First of all, there is the immediate matter of factual interpretation. Simply put, what does a phrase, sentence, or passage mean? Here I am neither raising issues of subtle nuance nor engaging in abstract subjectivism or abstruse literary theory but rather asking who or what is doing this or that. Let us take, for example, the following passage from *Wakana-jō* [若菜上] (Young Herbs 1), Chapter 34, where *Genji*'s new wife fatefully lets down her guard and allows herself to be seen by an amorous young man. Here is the original, including a Romanized version, followed by a modern translation, the relevant clauses appearing in bold:

御几帳どもしどけなく引きやりつつ、人氣近く世づきてぞ見ゆるに、
唐猫のいと小さくをかしげなるを、すこし大きな猫追ひ続き、に
はかに御簾のつまより走り出づるに、人々おびえ騒ぎて、そよそよと
身じろきさまよふけはひども、衣の音なひ、耳かしこましく心地す。
猫は、まだよく人にもなつかぬにや、綱いと長く付きたりけるを、物

にひきかけまつはれにけるを、逃げむとひこしろふほどに、御簾の側いとあらはに引き開けられたるを、とみにひき直す人もなし。この柱のもとにありつる人々も、心あわたたしげにて、もの懼ぢしたるけはひどもなり。

御几帳類をだらしなく方寄せ方寄せして、女房がすぐ側にて世間ずれしているように思われるところに、唐猫でとても小さくてかわいらしいのを、ちょっと大きめの猫が追いかけて、急に御簾の端から走り出すと、女房たちは恐がって騒ぎ立て、ざわざわと身じろぎし、動き回る様子や、衣ずれの音がやかましいほどに思われる。

猫は、まだよく人に馴れていないのであろうか、綱がたいそう長く付けてあったが、物に引っかけまつわりついてしまったので、逃げようとして引っぱるうちに、御簾の端がたいそうはっきりと中が見えるほど引き開けられたのを、すぐに直す女房もいない。この柱の側にいた人々も慌てているらしい様子で、誰も手が出ないでいるのである。

Here is Waley's rendition:

The screens-of-state were carelessly arranged; she was not in the least protected on the side from which she was most likely to be seen. Still less was she adequately prepared for such an accident as now occurred; for suddenly a large cat leapt between the curtains in pursuit of a very small and pretty Chinese kitten. Immediately there was a shuffling and scuffling behind the screens, figures could be seen darting to and fro, and there was a great rustling of skirts and sound of objects being moved. **The big cat, it soon appeared, was a stranger in the house, and lest it should escape it had been provided with a leash,** which was unfortunately a very long one, and had now got entangled in every object in the room. During its wild plunges (for it now made

violent efforts to get free) the creature hopelessly disarrayed the already somewhat disorderly curtains, and so busy were those within disentangling themselves from the leash that no one closed the gap. In the foreground was plainly visible a group of ladies in a state of wild excitement and commotion.

The passage is, as English, superb, but as a translation it is flawed, notably in Waley's putting the leash on the wrong cat. The original, it might be argued, is not absolutely clear, in that the phrase *neko fa* 'the cat' at the beginning of what we may call the second paragraph does not specifically identify *which* cat. What linguists call the "discourse topic" is nonetheless unmistakable, and that is the *kara-neko*, the "very small and pretty Chinese cat."

As with all ancient texts, there are, of course, passages for which a single "correct" interpretation appears to be impossible. In Chapter 30 (藤袴 *Fujibakama*, translated by Seidensticker as "Purple Trousers" and by Tyler as *Thoroughwort Flowers*), for example, Genji's son, known to us as Yūgiri, has the following thought, as he meets his cousin Tamakazura, whom his father would like to send to serve in the Palace:

御返り、おほどかなるものから、いとめやすき聞こえなしたまふけは
 ひの、らうらうじくなつかしきにつけても、かの野分の朝の御朝顔は、
 心にかかりて恋しきを、うたてある筋に思ひし、聞き明らめて後は、
 なほもあらぬ心地添ひて、「この宮仕ひを、おほかたにしも思し放た
 じかし。さばかり見所ある御あはひどもにて、をかしきさまなること
 のわづらはしき、はた、かならず出で来なむかし」と思ふに、ただな
 らず、胸ふたがる心地すれど、つれなくすくよかにて、「人に聞かす
 まじとはべりつることを聞こえさせむに、いかがはべるべき」とけし

き立てば、近くさぶらふ人も、すこし退きつつ、御几帳のうしろなどにそばみあへり。

What is undisputed here is that Tamakazura is a beauty who, through no fault of her own, is quite likely to stir up jealousy among other women. The question is whether Yūgiri is thinking of his father's household or of the ladies who serve the Emperor, who is, though unknown to the world at large, his half-brother.

Here is a concise summarization of the controversy by the Italian translator of the *Genji*, Maria Teresa Orsi. (My translation)

Commentators are divided on the interpretation of the sentence: according to one hypothesis, the more correct reading suggests that Genji's ties with the lady in the west wing [Tamakazura] could create serious problems at the time of her introduction to the Court; according to other interpretations, the same sentence could be read as: "taking into account the perfect accord that exists (between Genji and the other ladies of Rokujō), the charm of the girl would surely have created serious problems," or "taking into account the perfect accord existing (between his Majesty and his consort) the beauty of the girl would certainly create serious problems."

Orsi's own interpretation appears to suggest that Genji would be far more reluctant to hand his one-time lover's daughter over to his son, the emperor, were it not for his concern about the rancor her ongoing presence might cause among his other ladies. Such is consistent with the Modern Japanese translation included in the *Shōgakkan* edition, as well as with the renditions of both Seidensticker and Royall Tyler into English and of René

Sieffert into French respectively. Oscar Benl's German translation, on the other hand, assumes that the problem lies in the Palace. Of the other Modern Japanese translations I have seen, by Yosano Akiko, Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, Enchi Fumiko, Setouchi Jakuchō, and Hayashi Nozomu, all but Setouchi appear to assume this second theory. Here, for example, is Yosano Akiko's version:

尚侍の職をお勤めさせになるだけで帝は御満足をあそばすまい、この世で第一の美貌^{びぼう}をお持ちになる帝との間に恋愛関係は必ずできてくることであろうと思うと、中將は胸を何かでおさえつけられる気もするのであったが自制していた。

[It was surely unlikely that His Majesty would be content with having her performing ordinary duties. In this world, where the Sovereign acquires the most beautiful of creatures, a love relationship, the captain knew all too well, was sure to blossom, but though the thought weighed down heavily upon him, he was able to control himself.]

Setouchi's version, by way of contrast, reads:

「父大臣は、この姫君をととてもあっさりとは宮仕えにはお出しにならないだろう。あれほどすばらしい六条の院の女君たちとの深い間柄がおありなのだから、この姫君のために、必ず、何か色めいたことでいざこざが起ってくるにちがいない」と、思うと平静ではいられなく、胸のふさがるような気持ちになるのですた。

["My father the Minister," he thought restlessly, strained with emotion, "will certainly not be happy about handing over the princess to Palace service. (But) given his deep ties to the splendid ladies of his Sixth

Avenue estate, her presence would be bound to create amatory turmoil.”]

2. Linguistic and Cultural Issues

In *A Linguistic Theory of Translation: an Essay in Applied Linguistics* (1965), the Scottish linguist J.C. Catford drew a still oft-cited distinction between linguistic untranslatability and cultural untranslatability. The dichotomy is not unproblematic and has indeed been frequently challenged, and yet it remains useful at least as a point of departure. One obvious example of the former involves grammatical differences between languages. Consider, for example, the following Japanese sentence and its English translation:

- a. 私たちが昨日駅で会った男の方は、本当に俳優さんですか。

Watashi-tachi ga kinō eki de atta otoko no kata wa, hontō ni haiyū-san desu ka?

Is the man we met at the station yesterday really an actor?

The Japanese particles (助詞) ga, de, no, wa, and ni have no equivalents in English, just as in Japanese there is no equivalent for the definite and indefinite articles the and a(n). In translating the sentence into English, we can safely ignore structural differences between the two languages, even in regard to the deferential -san suffixed to the word for ‘actor’.

On the other hand, the following Japanese sentence contains words that because of cultural differences are not easily rendered into English:

- b. 隆史が入学試験に受かったことを聞いたときに、母は火燵で蜜柑

を食べながら文庫本を読んでいました。

Takashi ga nyūgaku-shiken ni ukatta koto wo kiita toki ni, haha wa kotatsu de mikan wo tabe-nagara bunkobon wo yonde imashita.

My mother heard the news that Takashi had passed the entrance examination, as she sat at the foot-warmer, eating mandarin oranges⁵⁾ and reading a paperback book.

A Japanese speaker will know from this: (1) that Takashi, a male, must be closely related to the speaker, as there is no deferential marking on his name, such as -san or -kun; (2) that the entrance examination would have been taken in early winter; (3) that in using *haha* the speaker is referring to his or her own mother, (4) that a *kotatsu* is a blanketed foot-warmer, (5) that *bunkobon* are small paperback books, typically literary, (6) that the *mikan* is a small, easily peeled citrus fruit, somewhat less sweet than an orange and that Japanese consume many dozens of them during the winter months, and (7) that the speaker is speaking deferentially, either to a social superior or to a non-intimate acquaintance. Conveying all of the information in English is a somewhat difficult, though not entirely impossible task.

Note that in regard to (a) one can alter the speech level without significant change in the English version:

俺たちが昨日駅で会った男は、本当に俳優なの？

Ore-tachi ga kinō eki de atta otoko wa, hontō hayū na no?

Is the guy we met yesterday at the station really an actor?

Here it might be argued that already we are seeing how linguistic

untranslatability overlaps with cultural untranslatability.

In general, as I implied above, strictly linguistic differences between languages do not pose an obstacle to translation, as transforming a text from Language A into Language B necessarily involves altering the form while preserving the content. It is when the content is enmeshed with the form that difficulty arises. A good example of this is plays on words, which in the *Tale of Genji* are innumerable. The second verse to appear in the first chapter already offers an example:

宮城野の露吹きむすぶ風の音に
小萩がもとを思ひこそやれ

Miyagino no tuyu fuki-musubu kaze no oto ni
Ko-fagi ga moto wo omofi koso yare

I yearn for a sign
Of the tender moor clover
Now drenched in the dew
That, borne by the wailing wind,
Falls upon Miyagi Plain.

The Kiritsubo emperor is writing to Genji's maternal grandmother to express how much he misses his son. The small bush clover frond symbolizes the vulnerable boy, and though the plant is frequently associated in poetry with Miyagi Plain, *miya* here hints at the Palace, where the emperor himself is sorrowing, still thinking of Genji's deceased mother.

And there are, of course, cultural implications as well: The poem echoes a poem from the *Kokin-wakashū* (古今和歌集):

宮城野の本あらの小萩露を重み
風を待つごと君をこそ待て

Miyagino moto ara no ko-fagi wo omomi
Kaze wo matu goto kimi wo koso mate (694)

Heavy with the dew
The tender bush clover yearns
For the autumn wind
To free it from its burden,
Even as I pine for thee.

Plant names offer a particularly frequent source of cultural untranslatability. While *hagi* is not unknown outside of Japan and, in fact, has both scientific (*lespedeza bicolor*) and common names, e.g. bush clover in English, *der Beifuß* in German, *la lespédèze* in French, the problem is not botanical but rather literary and associative. In Japanese, *hagi* is a simple and high-frequency word, appearing not only in verse but also in place names, family names, and even personal names.

“Moor clover” may not be botanically correct, but I must confess that the English phrase “bush clover” has no romantic appeal for me, and from what I have learned, the plant is regarded as an ecological threat in part of the southwestern United States. The English word clover, as in the idiom “in the clover,” symbolizes prosperity and affluence, and “a roll in the clover” is a slightly risqué expression for a sexual adventure. The irony and loneliness suggested by Matsuo Bashō’s verse from his travel diary may thus be lost on English-speaking readers, even if we resort to using the Japanese term:

一家に遊女も寝たり萩と月

Hito-ie ni yūjo mo netari hagi to tsuki

Women of the night

Sleeping under the same roof:

Hagi and the moon.

3. Allusions and Images

A common saying heard among specialists in historical phonology is that every word has its own history. (一語に歴史がある *ichigo ni rekishi ga aru*) That is, even though there are general sound laws, such are sometimes in conflict with each other, producing different results.⁶⁾

Every word likewise has its own semantic history. The better we know our language, the more aware we are of how rich and complex lexical associations can be. An example I hesitate to mention, if only because it may seem cliché-ridden, is Japanese semi (蟬), which occurs dozens of times in the *Genji*, as well is in poetry before and since, beginning with the *Man'yōshū*. Bashō's famous verse from his travel diary *Narrow Road to the Far North* (奥の細道 *Oku no Hosomichi*) is known to millions of Japanese, old and young.

The English word cicada, cf. French *cigale*, German *Zikade*, comes from Latin, and, in fact, the ancient Romans, like the ancient Greeks, who called the insect τέττιξ (*téttiks*), perhaps in imitation of the shrill chirp it produces, appreciated the sound. (The Modern Greek word is even more onomatopoeic: *tzitzikas*.) The cicada appears, for example, in Plato's *Phaedrus*, in which Socrates describes the insect as a quasi-supernatural being. In English, cicada does not make an uncontested appearance until the

19th century and even then in a strictly non-literary context. Japanese semi is sometimes translated as ‘locust’, a word that has ominous associations for those English speakers who still know their Bible.⁷⁾

The name that Genji assigns to the elusive lady known as Utsusemi would have resonated with the ancient Greeks, who saw in the cicada a symbol of immortality. I suspect that for many modern Westerners, however, the image is not necessarily appealing, particularly if it is rendered, as in Edward Seidensticker’s translation, as *The Shell of the Locust*.⁸⁾

4. Form and Content

The possibility of translation presupposes that there is a fundamental linguistic distinction between form and content, as reflected in the well-known statement by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary. That is, there is nothing “mountain-like” about the English word for ‘mountain’, any more than there is about the Japanese word for the same: *yamá*. That does not mean, however, that translators need concern themselves only with meaning, for language is not simply a functional tool. It is also, as it were, a musical instrument, lovingly played by literary artists.

Poetry, which differs from prose most conspicuously in its form, offers translators a particularly interesting challenge. In regard to the translation of Japanese verse, there is much debate about how to render it. All agree that in some way it should be marked as such, at least typographically. Here are nine different renditions of the above-cited verse composed by Genji’s father. The languages are English, German, French, Italian, and Dutch.⁹⁾

Suematsu Kenchō

The sound of the wind is dull and drear
 Across Miyagi's dewy lea,
 And makes me mourn for the motherless deer¹⁰⁾
 That sleeps beneath the Hagi tree."

Arthur Waley

*At the sound of the wind that binds the cold dew on Takagi moor, my
 heart goes out to the tender lilac stems.¹¹⁾*

Oscar Benl

Lausch' ich dem Winde
 Der auf dem Miyagi-Feld
 Den Tau zusammenfegt
 So gedenke besorgt
 Der jungen Hagi-Blüte dort.

Edward Seidensticker

At the sound of the wind, bringing dew to Miyagi Plain
 I think of the tender hagi upon the moor.

Helen Craig McCullough

miyagi no	At the sound of the wind
tsuyu fukimusubu	blowing to summon the dew
kaze no oto ni	of Miyagino
kohagi	it is the small bush-clover
omoi koso yare	to which my thoughts turn.

René Sieffert

Au bruit du vent
Qui des champs de Miyagi
Répand la rosée
c'est au jeune lespédèze
que vont toutes mes pensées.

Royall Tyler

*Hearing the wind sigh, burdening with the drops of dew all Miyagi
Moor, my heart helplessly goes out to the little hagi frond.*

Maria Teresa Orsi

Al suono del vento
Che nella piana di Miyagi
Porta con sé la rugiada
Il mio penisero va
Alla giovane pianticella di *hagi*.

Jos Vos

Als ik hoor hoe de wind
De dauw bijeenblaast
Op de vlakte van Miyagi
Moet ik denken
Aan de kleine *hagi*.

Seidensticker and Tyler follow the Japanese practice of dividing verses into two centered lines. Tyler also follows the 5–7–5–7–7 syllable count, as does Sieffert, though he uses five lines. Benl's syllable count is less exact,

though, like McCullough, he at least tends to make the second, fourth, and fifth lines longer than first and third. Suematsu resorts to rhyme, as did other early translators, though this device is nowadays quite out of fashion. My own preference is for 5-7-5-7-7, though I am also convinced that some sort of rhythm, which is the one central and common feature throughout the history of English poetry, beginning in Anglo-Saxon times, is at least as important.¹²⁾

5. Context

As noted above, old texts tend to contain numerous problematic passages for the simple reason that modern readers cannot fully share in the culture they reflect and obviously cannot consult with the authors. The *Genji* is particularly difficult in this regard in that it was originally composed for a small number of “insiders,” notably ladies of the Court. Thus, it contains much more controversial material than, for example, the Greek New Testament, which, though nearly twice as old, was deliberately written to be accessible to a wide audience, including non-Jews, many with very little knowledge of Jewish thought and tradition.

Particularly puzzling is the tendency of Murasaki Shikibu to speak of a character who, though without previous mention, is somehow assumed to be known to the reader. There are various theories offered to explain this. Some reason that Murasaki Shikibu does this quite deliberately. Waley, for example, suggests that in this regard she is similar to a French author with whom she has often been compared: Marcel Proust. Others argue that the text as we have it has been considerably edited, with revision, reorganization, additions, and deletions. It seems highly unlikely that the issue will ever be resolved, but whatever one’s preferred theory, the question for the translator

is the same: Should one faithfully “replicate” the problem, perhaps adding a footnote, or should one “pad” the passage with material that will make for a smooth transition?

At the beginning of the fourth chapter (夕顔 Yūgao Flower of the Evening) for example, we find Genji described as paying visits to a lady in the Sixth Avenue, as though she were already known. His servant Koremitsu is likewise mentioned for the first time, as if he too were a known character:

六条わたりの御忍び歩きのころ、内裏よりまかでたまふ中宿に、大弐の乳母のいたくわづらひて尼になりける、とぶらはむとて、五条なる家尋ねておはしたり。

Here is how the first clauses are variously translated:

Suematsu Kenchō

It happened that when Genji was driving about in the Rokjiō quarter, he was informed that his old nurse Daini, was ill, and had become a nun.

Arthur Waley

It was at the time when he was secretly visiting the lady of the Sixth Ward.

Yosano Akiko

源氏が六条に恋人を持っていたころ、御所からそこへ通う途中で、だ
いぶ重い病氣をし^い尼になった大弐^{だい に}の乳母^{めのと}を訪ねようとして、五条辺の
その家へ来た。

[At a/the time Genji was keeping a lover in the Sixth Avenue, he

decided to pay a visit on his way from the Palace to his wet-nurse Daini, who now gravely ill had become a nun, and so went to her residence in the vicinity of the Fifth Avenue.]

Tanizaki Jun'ichirō

六条あたりに人目を忍んでお通いの頃、内裏^うからそちらへお出ましになる中宿りに、大式^{めのと}の乳母が重い病気で尼になったのを見舞っておろうとおお思いになって、

[At a/the time when he was secretly meeting someone in the vicinity of the Sixth Avenue, he stopped on his way from the Palace, thinking that he would look in on his wet-nurse, Daini, who had fallen gravely ill and become a nun.]

Oscar Benl

Es war die Zeit, als Genji heimlich die Dame in der Rokujō-Straße besuchte.

[It was the time when Genji was secretly visiting the lady in the Sixth Avenue.]

Enchi Fumiko

六条のあたりに、源氏の君がお忍びでお通いになっている夏の頃のことであった。

[It was at a/the time in the summer months when, in the vicinity of the Sixth Avenue, Lord Genji was secretly making calls.]

Edward Seidensticker

On his way from court to pay one of his calls at Rokujō, Genji stopped

to inquire after his old nurse, Koremitsu's mother, at her house in Gojō.

René Sieffert

Au temps que discrètement il fréquentait les alentours de la Sixième Avenue, pour faire une pause sur le chemin qui le ramenait du Palais, et désirant saluer sa nourrice Daīni qui, fort souffrante, était devenue nonne, il se rendit à sa demeure, aux environs de la Cinquième Avenue.

[In order to pause on the way that brought him from the Palace, at the time he was discreetly frequenting the vicinity of the Sixth Avenue, and to pay a courtesy call on his nurse Daini, who, gravely ill, had become a nun, he went to her abode in the area of the Fifth Avenue.]

Helen Craig McCullough

It happened around the time when he was making secret visits to a lady in the vicinity of Rokujō Avenue.

Royall Tyler

In the days when Genji was calling secretly at Rokujō, he decided to visit his old nurse, the Dazaifu Deputy's wife, on the way there, since she was seriously ill and had become a nun.

Setouchi Jakuchō

源氏の君が六条のあたりに住む恋人のところに、ひそかにお通いになっている頃のことでした。

[It was at the time Lord Genji was accustomed to visiting his lover/a lover of his in the Sixth Avenue.]

Hayashi Nozomu

六条のあたりのさる女のところへお忍びで通っていた時分のことであった。

[It was at the time that he was secretly seeing a certain woman in the vicinity of the Sixth Avenue.]

Maria Teresa Orsi

Era il tempo in cui era solito recarsi in segreto a Rokujō, quando lungo la via pensò di far visita alla sua nutrice—sapeva che, molto malata, si era fatta monaca...

[It was during the time he was in the habit of begetting himself secretly to Rokujō, when along the way he thought of paying a visit to his nurse whom he knew was gravely ill and had become a nun...]

Jos Vos

In de dagen dat Genji stiekem uitstapjes maakte naar de Zesde Laan, hield hij op de terugweg aan het paleis een keer stil bij de Vijfde Laan, om een bezoekje te brengen an zijn vroegere min, Daini, die vanwege haar zware ziekte non was geworden.

[In the days when Genji was making clandestine visits to the Sixth Avenue, he once stopped by the Fifth Avenue on the way back to the Palace in order to pay a visit to his one-time wet-nurse, Daini, who, as she was gravely ill, had become a nun.]

The preemptive provision of a setting is an attention-seizing device common to fiction writers, as can be seen, for example, in the first sentence

of Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*: "In the late summer of that year, we lived in a house in a village that looked across the river and the plain to the mountains." Of which year, of which river, of which plain, and of which mountains is the narrator speaking?

In English, as in German, French, Italian, and Dutch, nouns are typically marked for definiteness or indefiniteness, and in the case of the opening sentence of the Yūgao chapter, that more or less obligatory distinction is reflected in the translations. Of the translators into Modern Japanese, all but Yosano Akiko employ a cleft construction, i.e. an equational sentence without an overt topic, the implied topic being "what I am about to relate was..." This captures the "in-medias-res" effect of the original but does not necessarily suggest a temporal framework presumed to be already known to the reader. Waley, Benl, McCullough, Sieffert, Tyler, Orsi, and Vos, on the other hand, use phrases that include the definite article and a time word.

I hasten to say that I am not implying that differences in degree of specificity are "right" or "wrong" or that the supposed "vagueness" of Japanese works to the translator's advantage. As it happens, Hayashi's rendition points no less clearly to the Rokujō lady than does that of Benl. My own is as follows:

His Lordship had been making secret visits to the Sixth Avenue when one day on his way from the palace he stopped to call on his old nurse in the Fifth Avenue. The widow of a former deputy administrator in Chikuzen, she had fallen gravely ill and become a nun.

6. Register and Speech Level

All languages, it may be reasonably supposed, differentiate styles and levels of speech according to occasion, situation, and hierarchical social relations, but, not surprisingly, they vary considerably in the manner and degree to which distinctions are marked. As is often remarked, most European languages, for example, have more than one second-person pronominal form. In German, one addresses a relative, a close friend, or a child with *du* but non-intimates with *Sie*. English speakers, on the other hand, address everyone, from one's children to royalty with *you*, originally a plural/polite form. In such languages as Japanese, Javanese, Korean, and Thai it is much more complicated.

To return to Catford's dichotomy, linguistic vs. cultural untranslatability, one may say that here the two categories overlap, though with the following caveat: To the extent that the rules of discourse are normally observed, register distinctions are, in principle, no more an obstacle to translation than are ordinary grammatical differences.

This may seem to fly in the face of our intuitions. If rendering a text from Language A into Language B results in the neutralization of speech-level distinctions, it might be argued that something is "lost in translation." In fact, however, social relationships typically require no more "grammatical" marking than do case relationships.

It must be conceded, however, that the overlap remains. After all, Murasaki Shikibu does not treat her protagonist in the same way that, let us say, Henry Fielding treats his (in some ways strangely similar) hero in the early English novel *Tom Jones*. While both authors alternate between praise and criticism of their characters, Murasaki Shikibu, by portraying the life of an emperor's son, must necessarily show great deference to her creation and,

by extension, to most of those around him. With few exceptions, no personal names are given, so that even the wife (and subsequent widow) of a provincial deputy governor is known to us only by nicknames derived from poems that Genji writes to her: かの帚木 ‘that (lady of the) broom tree’ and 空蟬の尼衣 ‘the nun’s robe of the cicada shell’.

In the original text, there are subtle distinctions in honorific usage that serve in part to differentiate otherwise unspecified characters, while also suggesting the attitude and state of mind of the speakers. The above-mentioned deputy governor, for example, speaks of his wife in deferential language, as her original social rank is higher than his.

For translators whose target language is Modern Japanese, the question is to what extent the register system of the original should be replicated. Yosano Akiko clearly prioritizes the need for modernity and accessibility, in contrast to Tanizaki Jun’ichirō, whose nouns and verbs are far more elaborately marked. Here, for example, is the opening sentence of Chapter 31 (真木柱 Makibashira, translated by Seidensticker as “The Cypress Pillar”):

「内裏に聞こし召さむこともかしこし。しばし人にあまねく漏らさじ」と諫めきこえたまへど、さしもえつつみあへたまはず。

Yosano:

「帝^{みかど}お耳にはいって、御不快に思^{おぼしめ}し召すようなことがあってもおそれおおい。当分世間へ知らせないようにしたい」と源氏からの注意はあっても、右大将は、恋の勝利者である誇りをいつまでも蔭^{かげ}のことはしておかれないふうであった。

[“I am filled with apprehension at the thought that news of the matter

might reach His Majesty and thus wish that for the time being it not be made known,” said Genji by way of warning. But the Commander of the Imperial Guards of the Right was so full of pride at his love conquest that he could not conceal it.]

Tanizaki:

「内裏でお聞きになりましても恐れ多いことです。しばらく世間一般には内密にしておくように」と、大臣はお制しになるのですが、とてもそうは我慢していられしません。

[“I am filled with apprehension at the thought that news of the matter might reach His Majesty,” remarked the Chancellor by way of advice. “For the moment, I would refrain from letting it be known to the greater world.” But his listener was quite incapable of containing himself.]

Genji is urging the new husband of Lady Tamakazura to keep the marriage a secret for the time being, but he is much too smitten to heed the advice. The cousin of the retired emperor, Suzaku, Genji’s half-brother, he is traditionally known by his sobriquet Hige-kuro (‘blackbeard’). In the original, he is nameless; indeed, the sole noun in the entire sentence is *uti* ‘inside’, referring to the Imperial Palace. We know only from context that Genji is the speaker and that Hige-kuro is the addressee. Yosano refers to Genji as Genji, though even that is not really a name, while Tanizaki resorts to his current title: *otodo* (大臣) ‘Chancellor’. Though hardly portrayed in a positive light here, Hige-kuro’s inability to control his pride in having acquired his bride is marked with honorific (*shite-irassharenasen*). Yosano uses three honorifics in Genji’s reference to the emperor but otherwise dispenses with deferential forms.

The question in the English-speaking world concerning the overall issue of register has been confined to whether sobriquets are appropriate. Waley takes them for granted; Seidensticker sees them as unavoidable; Tyler rejects them, arguing that they suggest “offensive familiarity.”¹³ In his translation, as in the original, titles shift, as the narrative moves on, though not at quite the same pace, as Genji remains “Genji” until rather late in life, even after, in the original, he has come to be designated by ever more exalted titles.

Yūgiri (“Evening Mist”), the sobriquet by which Genji’s elder son is known, derives from Chapter 39, by which time he has long been identified by that name in Japanese commentaries and in translations that include those of Waley, Seidensticker, Benl, and Vos. In passage towards the beginning of Chapter 32 (梅枝 Umegae, translated by Seidensticker as “Plum Branch” and by Tyler as “The Plum Tree Branch”), we find described a musical performance, in which six men take part: Genji, his half-brother, his son, his former brother-in-law, and two sons of the latter, though by different mothers. Here is first the original, followed by four translations:

藏人所の方にも、明日の御遊びのうちならしに、御琴どもの装束などして、殿上人などあまた参りて、をかしき笛の音ども聞こゆ。内の大殿の頭中将、弁少将なども、見参ばかりにてまかづるを、とどめさせたまひて、御琴ども召す。

宮の御前に琵琶、大臣に 箏の御琴参りて、頭中将、和琴賜はりて、はなやかに掻きたてたるほど、いとおもしろく聞こゆ。宰相中将、横笛吹きたまふ。折にあひたる調子、雲居とほるばかり吹きたてたり。

Benl:

In dem Aufenthaltsraum der Kurōdo im Palast hatte man, um für den

am nächsten Tag stattfindenden Musikabend zu proben, verschiedene Instrumente prächtig hergerichtet; es waren sehr viele Denjōbito erschienen, und es erklang herrliche Flötenmusik.

Die Söhne des Naidaijin, Kashiwagi und Ben no Shōshō waren zur Begrüßung erschienen und wollten sich sofort wieder zurückziehen; aber man hielt sie zurück und brachte die verschiedensten Instrumente herbei. Vor den Prinzen Hotaru Hyōbu no Kyō legte man die Biwa-Laute, Genji reichte man das Sō no Koto, Tō no Chūjō erhielt das Wagon. Es war ein unbeschreiblicher Genuß, wie alle zusammen spielten. Yūgiri blies die Querflöte, er spielte eine Melodie, die zum Frühling paßte und rein und heiter zum Himmel aufklang.

[In the common room of the Kurōdo in the palace various instruments had been magnificently provided to test for the next day's music evening. large number of Denjōbito had appeared, so that there was splendid flute music to be heard. The sons of the Naidaijin, Kashiwagi and Ben no Shōshō, appeared to present their compliments and wanted to withdraw immediately; but they were retained them, and a great variety of instruments were produced. Before the Prince Hotaru no Hyōbu Kyō was laid a biwa lute; to Genji was given a sō no koto, Tō no Chūjō received a wagon. It was an indescribable pleasure to have them playing together. Yugiri played on the flute a melody that matched the spring, resounding in both purity and jocularity to the heavens.]

Seidensticker:

It was the eve of the ceremony. The stewards' offices had brought musical instruments for a rehearsal. Guests had gathered in large numbers and flute and koto echoed through all the galleries. Kashiwagi,

Kōbai, and Tō no Chūjō's other sons stopped by with formal greetings. Genji insisted that they join the concert. For Prince Hotaru there was a lute, for Genji a thirteen-stringed koto, for Kashiwagi, who had a quick, lively touch, a Japanese koto. Yūgiri took up a flute, and the high, clear strains, appropriate to the season, could scarcely have been improved upon.

Tyler: In the stall office, people were stringing instruments to rehearse tomorrow's music, and with so many privy gentlemen about, flutes could be heard playing prettily here and there. His Excellency's sons, the Secretary Captain and the Controller Lieutenant, had come from the palace to look in, but Genji detained them and called for several stringed instruments. His Highness got a *biwa*, Genji a *sō no koto*, and the Secretary Captain a *wagon*, on which they played spirited music to delightful effect. The Consultant Captain's flute sent the mode, one perfect for the season, resounding throughout the heavens.

Sieffert:

Du côté des communs, l'on s'exerçait pour le concert du lendemain, l'on accordait les instruments à corde, et les gens de Cour étant venus en grande nombre, l'on entendait de plaisants airs de flûte. Les fils du Ministre du Dedans, le Commandant Chef du Secrétariat, le Capitaine Référendaire, vinrent présenter leurs devoirs; le Grand Ministre les retint et fit apporter des cithares. Au Prince l'on porta un luth, au Ministre une cithara à treize cordes; au Commandant échut une cithare de Yamato qu'il pinça avec un brio que n'eût point désavoué son père. Le Commandant Conseiller joua de la flûte traversière. Il joua un air en harmonie avec la saison, dont la musique devait s'élever au-delà des nuages.

[On the outbuildings, stringed instruments were being tuned for the concert of the morrow, and the courtiers having come in numbers, one could hear pleasant flute tunes. The sons of the minister of the interior, the secretary captain and referendary captain, came to pay their respects. The grand minister retained them and had zithers brought. To the prince a lute was brought, to the minister a thirteen-string zither, to the secretary captain a Yamato zither, which he plucked with such zeal that it would not have put his father to shame. The captain adviser played on the traverse flute a tune in harmony with the season, one that must have risen to the clouds.]

Seidensticker relies exclusively on sobriquets, while Benl resorts to both sobriquets and quasi-sobriquets, the latter being Japanese titles (Naidaijin ‘Minister of the Interior’ and Ben no Shōshō ‘Controller Lieutenant’). Sieffert translates all of the titles into French, including that of Genji, who, as noted above, now holds the rank of *otodo* (大臣).

In the original, it must be conceded, the titles appear appreciably less onerous than in the translations. For one thing, though the subject of the main clause of the second sentence is Genji, there is no overt noun, the honorific forms and the context making it clear he is the one who persuades the young men to remain. For another thing, there are simply fewer syllables involved.

Here one can only pity the poor Occidental translator. As persuasive as the argument against sobriquets may be, the alternatives cannot be said to be entirely pleasing. If “Ben no Shōshō” sounds to the uninitiated like a character from a sequel to *The Mikado*, “Controller Lieutenant” may smack more of a Darth Vader minion than of a courtly flute player.

7. Temporal and Stylistic Congruity

The enjoyment of a literary translation, it may be argued, depends on its ability both to elucidate and to beguile. That is, it must be linguistically accessible to readers, even as it lulls them into forgetting that what they have before their eyes is a story transposed from another language and, in the case of the *Genji*, another time.

To avoid incongruity, Occidental translators must strive to avoid terminology that is closely identified with their own cultural time and place. If, for example, one accepts the theory that the flower name *asagao* (朝顔), lit. ‘morning face’, is to be identified as *hibiscus syriacus*, also known in Japanese as *mukuge* (木槿), the appropriate translation will not allow for “the Rose of Sharon,” much less “California rose.”¹⁴⁾

The problem is that cultural associations are neither static nor collective but are rather highly individualistic and subjective, dependent on the reader’s knowledge and awareness. Place names are particularly irksome, in that the price paid for avoiding anachronism may be obscurity. In the first chapter of the *Genji* (Kiritsubo), there is reference to Koma (高麗) and Koma-udo (高麗人), which Seidensticker renders as “Korea” and “Korean,” whereas Sieffert and Tyler rely on the original: Koma/l’homme de Koma and Koma/the man from Koma.¹⁵⁾ In the Hahakigi chapter, on the other hand, Tyler translates Kara-kuni (唐国) as “China,” in contrast to Sieffert, who again uses the original term, which, though written with the character for the Tang Dynasty, was a general designation for both China and Korea, the context in this case clearly suggesting the former.

In the introduction to his translation, Sieffert speaks of the “double distance” between modern readers and the women of the Heian Court and poses the question: “Quelle langue fallait-il choisir, en effet, pour s’en

rapprocher le plus possible?” (“What language was it necessary to choose, in effect, in order to approach [that setting].”) His solution is to reject both extreme archaizing and modernizing and instead to settle on a style and range of vocabulary suitable for the French language between the 16th and 18th centuries. Ever concerned about avoiding glaring anachronisms, Sieffert also declares his intention to approximate the language of the original, consisting overwhelmingly of native Japanese vocabulary, with only a sprinkling of Chinese, by avoiding the use of Greek words borrowed from Greek.

Opinion regarding the wisdom of his judgments and the ultimate success of his translation is hardly unanimous among French-speaking readers of the *Genji*. Particularly his use in dialogue of verb forms, notably the past indicative and past subjunctive, which have long since passed out of modern French speech, offers a striking contrast to the style of Seidensticker and Tyler’s English renditions, which include everyday colloquialisms. Again in the Hahakigi Chapter, for example, a horse-guards officer describes his tempestuous relationship with a one-time lover:

など、言ひしろひはべりしかど、まことには変るべきこととも思ひたまへずながら、日ごろ経るまで消息も遣はさず、あくがれまかり歩くに、

Nado, ifi-sirofi-faberi-sikado, makoto ni fa kafaru beki koto tomo omofi-tamafezu nagara, fi-goro feru made seusoku mo tukafasazu, akugare-makari ariku ni,

In Sieffert’s translation, in which *ifi-sirofi-faberi-sikado* ‘and so although we quarreled’ is omitted, the speaker is made to use the simple past

form (*le passé simple*), preceded by the imperfective subjunctive (*l'imparfait du subjonctif*).

“Mais, à la vérité, je ne croyais pas que nos relations **dussent** en rester là; cependant, je m’**abstins** quelque temps de lui donner de mes nouvelles.”

[“But in reality I did not think that our relations should end there; still, I refrained for some time to give her word of my latest circumstances.”]

Even Benl’s somewhat archaic German seems relatively modern by comparison.¹⁶⁾

“So stritten wir mit einander, aber ich war nicht überzeugt, daß wir uns wirklich trennen würden. Ich schrieb ihr lange nicht mehr, und besuchte da und dort andere Frauen.”¹⁷⁾ (Benl)

[“So we quarreled, but I was not convinced that we would really part. I did not write to her for some time and visited other women hither and yon.”]

The language of the Heian courtier in Tyler’s rendition could well be taken for that of a 21st-century college lad on the basketball court:

“She and I had a good fight and although I still did not actually mean to leave her, I wandered here and there for several days without sending her a line.”

Such, it might be argued, is all to the good. Shakespeare’s Gregory asks

“Do you quarrel sir?” (*Romeo and Juliet*), not “are you trying to start a fight?” But then, one may say, an English-language Genji should be in the idiom of our time and not that of the late 16th century.

My own overall preference, I freely confess, is for Sieffert’s “distance,” though perhaps without the past subjunctive. In the end, the question is whether the reader is both beguiled and happy, and for that there cannot be a single answer.

Notes

- 1) On October 12, 2003, The Observer’s Robert McCrum published a list of “The 100 Greatest Novels.” Of these, I count fifteen that are translations: from Spanish, French, German, and Russian. Not one work originally written in Japanese is included, not even *The Tale of Genji*, often described as the world’s first novel.
- 2) In America, there was a series of comic books, published from 1941 to 1971 called *Classics Illustrated*.
- 3) The etymology of Latin *classis* is obscure. It may be of Etruscan origin.
- 4) <http://www.csse.monash.edu.au/~jwb/tylerlecture.html>
- 5) Mikan are, strictly speaking, distinct from mandarin oranges, but that is arguably their closest relative. Akutagawa Ryūnosoku’s short story *Mikan* has been translated as Tangerines, but the tangerine is again a different fruit, with different cultural associations. My own translation (2007) renders the term as mandarins.
- 6) Thus, for example, *road* and *broad*, which were *rad* and *brad* in Old English, “ought” to have the same vowel, but clearly, at least in most dialects, they do not.
- 7) Hebrew *hā’arbeh* ‘locust’ is rendered in Japanese translations of the Bible as *inago* (蝗).
- 8) Interestingly enough, the translation of Aesop’s well-known fable Τέττιξ καὶ μύρμηκες, known in French as La Cigale et la Fourmi, is translated into Japanese as キリギリスとアリ (Kirigirisu to Ari), the kirigirisu referring to the katydid or long-horned grasshopper. The Disney animated film is entitled *The Grasshopper and the Ants*.

- 9) I have not translated into English the German, French, Italian, and Dutch here, as my point here concerns form, not content.
- 10) In a footnote, Suematsu explains the association of the hagi plant with deer, even though there is no mention of such in the verse itself.
- 11) Waley marks the translation of the verse in italics.
- 12) It might be noted that the verse in original is slightly irregular, as the line *kaze no oto ni* ‘at the sound of the wind’ contains six rather than five syllables.
- 13) Tyler (2001), *The Tale of Genji*, xviii
- 14) Seidensticker renders the flower name as “morning glory,” Tyler as “bluebell.” The term “rose of Sharon” dates back to the 1611 translation of the Bible and the (possibly incorrect) rendition of Hebrew *chabatstseleth hasharon* (תלצבה וורשה) in The Song of Solomon. R.H. Blyth is among those who resort to the phrase to translate Bashō’s well-known verse: 道のべの木槿は馬にくはれけり “The Rose of Sharon by the roadside was eaten by the horse.” I must admit that when years ago I first read his rendition, it struck me as more evocative than incongruous, reminding me of the Plain of Sharon in faraway Israel. That was, of course, hardly the intention of the poet. For other readers, the rose of Sharon has countless other associations.
- 15) In a footnote, Tyler somewhat misleadingly identifies Koma as “the ancient kingdom of Koguryō,” when in fact by the time of the story, that kingdom had long ceased to exist. The foreign delegation described in the first chapter would have been from Palhae (渤海), Japanese Bokkai, which, in the non-fictional world, exchanged envoys with Japan until its demise in 926.
- 16) Benl uses *ihr*, which in modern German is an exclusively the second-person plural familiar form, as a polite singular/plural form, as was still possible in, for example, the language of Goethe and Schiller.
- 17) The last phrase is a possible but less than probable interpretation of *akugare-makari ariku ni*, which suggests that he simply went on his merry way. That he would have behaved in the interim as Benl would have him confess is, of course, not at all improbable.

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