

As should be clear from the title, this presentation is about problems in translation, in particular literary translation.¹ I think it is an appropriate title for two reasons. First, it suggests that meaning can undergo change when something is translated from one language into another. This is, of course, the most commonly understood sense of "lost in translation." But I am also using the phrase to reflect the predicament of the translator himself, beset by the difficulty of finding a perfect match between target language and source language, and knowing from the start that he cannot succeed.

This is not to say that because every translator must compromise in devising solutions to the problems he faces, all translations end up being equally good (or, it may be, equally bad). In that direction lies the chaos of total relativism. Rather, I would like to show merely that the choices are not so clear-cut as one might think, that there is a grey area which makes it necessary for the reader of translated literature to be always on his guard and to judge carefully what he has read.

To approach the topic of translation, I have provided a number of materials arranged under four rather whimsical headings. The first heading, "When in Rome: The Problem of Form," contains examples of the formal violence done to Japanese originals presumably in the name of readability. The second heading, "You Say To-ma-to, I Say To-mah-to," is meant to signal a comparison between the two standard English translations of The Tale of Genji, one by an Englishman, the other by an American. The last two headings, "The Doctor is In" and "You Pays Your Money and You Takes Your Choice," cover translations of fiction by the Japanese romantic novelist Izumi Kyōka. Kyōka's fiction is my own area of academic interest, so in this case the material includes selections from translations I have made of his work.

Before moving on to an examination of the material itself, however, it will be convenient to go over the three basic categories of problems which we will find throughout, and which make any translation more or less an exercise in futility.

¹ Because of the change in format, material originally presented in the form of a separate, photocopied handout has been integrated into the body of the text. In the process, a certain amount of pruning and editing has been deemed necessary, and except for one case, the original Japanese versions have been omitted. Apology is made for any inconvenience.

The translator who would be faithful to the original (and this is surely one principle all translators can agree on) is first of all frustrated by differences in grammar and usage. Japanese listeners scarcely need reminding that their language follows an essentially S-O-V (subject, object, verb) syntax, while standard English grammar calls for S-V-O order. A literal-minded translator who translated boku wa gakkō e itta as "I to school went," would soon find his services no longer in demand by publishers. Or, to take the copula desu as another instance, imagine the potential for confusion if, in an English translation, a character were to enter a restaurant and pronounce "I am ice cream" (boku wa aisu kuriimu desu). Another very basic problem involves number, that is, whether a word is meant to be singular or plural. Japanese can, if necessary, indicate plurality with suffixes and the like; but more often it does not, and for a translator whose language requires the number to be specified, a certain amount of guesswork comes into play. Just how many frogs did jump into Matsuo Bashō's old pond in his famous haiku? How many cicadas produced the shrill sound that penetrated the rock (rocks?) in his poem on silence? The translators only guides in cases like these must be common sense and a knowledge of artistic convention, and of course these guides will occasionally fail him. It is clear that the term "literal translation" has little relevance in Japanese-to-English translation if it is taken to refer to a strict correspondence of word order or of the meanings and functions of individual words.²

A second category of problems is based on cultural differences. On the most elementary level, there is the question of what to do with objects that are unique to the culture of the source language. Tabi, for example. Does the translator adopt the relatively literal solution of calling them "split-toed socks," perhaps making the reader wonder why the toes are split and just how many splits there are anyway? Or, to avoid unnecessary confusion, does he just say "socks" and have done with it, making the object indistinguishable from its Western counterpart? Or does he attempt to have it both ways and opt for "tabi socks," hoping that the Western reader will understand these are not the same sort of things he wears on his feet, but keeping the precise

² This grammatical difficulty between languages is of course compounded by the wide range of diction and grammatical forms available to the translator in his own language. The result is that any two translators will almost inevitably produce differently worded translations, even, for example, in such short forms as the haiku. The original handout contained several examples illustrating this truth with respect to Bashō, Japan's most widely translated haiku poet.

nature of the difference a secret? Food, dress, and flora and fauna all fall into this category, as do such familiar expressions as greetings. Here it may be argued that translation can be based on function, so that you have "Good morning" corresponding to Ohayō gozaimasu and the like; but then the translator inevitably comes up against an expression like the Itadakimasu! used at the dinner table. Surely he cannot have the Japanese speaker say grace (for all that the Japanese like to get married in Christian churches), and so he mutters an oath under his breath and discretely omits the troublesome expression.

Finally, there is the problem of the translator's own style, which can (for both conscious and unconscious reasons) be quite unlike the style of the original author. How much does it matter if the original is written in long sentences but the translator uses short ones? If the original was written hundreds of years ago but the translation is written in modern colloquial? If the original is obscure but the translator is charged with reaching a wide audience? If the translator has deliberately chosen not to observe the same formal conventions when producing his translation? The answer, I am afraid, is that it can matter considerably, and the how and the why should become more apparent as we look through the material in the handout.

Again, I do not want my built-in emphasis on the difficulty of translation to overshadow the fact that translation--good translation--is possible. It is just that even the best translation can never be a transparent reproduction of the original: any translation is itself an interpretation that alters the sense of an original work.

The first examples we will examine are taken from two relatively recent books, Sarada Kinenbi by Tawara Machi and Hitsuji o Meguru Bōken by Murakami Haruki. Let us start by comparing the Japanese and English for five of Tawara's modern tanka.³

³ The Japanese is taken from Tawara Machi, Sarada Kinenbi (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō, 1987); the English is from Juliet Winters Carpenter, trans., Salad Anniversary (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1990). Page numbers are indicated in brackets in the text.

Ookikereba
iyoiyo yutaka
naru kibun
Tookyuu Hanzu no
kaimonobukuro

[13]

So huge
it gladdens my heart--
this store's shopping bag

[14]

Wa ga Kaapu no
pinchi mo nanika
shiaiwase na
kibun de miori
kimi ni motarete

[15]

My team in a tight spot--
I look on somehow happy,
leaning against you

[16]

Kimi to ite
purasu mainasu
karakoroto
ugai no koe mo
onna narikeri

[29]

With you, for better or worse,
even when I'm gargling
I feel like a woman

[32]

Koharubi no
Wasedadoori no
chindonya
miru na miru na to
iu yoo ni yuku

[89]

Warm fall day
down Waseda Avenue trudges
a band of musical sandwichmen,
hoping no one will look

[98]

Yuki no ue
kakeyuku kora no
nagagutsu ga
maaburuchokono
yoo de furusato

[143]

In my hometown, children's boots
running in the snow
like a sprinkling of bright gumdrops

[154]

The reason for some of the omissions and substitutions in these poems--Tokyu Hands Department Store and baseball's Hiroshima Carp transformed into generic terms; chindonya and "marble chocolate" (basically giant M&Ms) becoming "musical sandwichmen" and "gumdrops"--is understandable enough. The translator does not want the reader to be held back by his lack of familiarity with the original names and objects (the second category of problems I have mentioned). Yet the subsequent gain in smoothness must be balanced against the loss of concreteness and specificity--the very substance of experience--and in a form as short as the tanka this is no minor loss.

Even more important from my point of view is the change in the form of the poems. The main interest of Tawara's tanka lies in the tension created between the classical 5-7-5-7-7 syllabic count and the poet's modern sensibility and syntax. I myself do not find that sensibility especially noteworthy, but even to a foreigner's ear the music is there--the traditional form has been

successfully adapted to a modern taste. And that is what is so clearly missing from the translation: the music, as can be seen especially in the third poem given above, with its effective use (in Japanese) of the onomatopoeic karakoro. Indeed, with the form typically reduced in English to three lines (sometimes, for no obvious reason, four), one could hardly blame the unsuspecting reader for thinking he was perusing haiku instead of tanka. And if in translation no distinction can be maintained between genres so clearly defined in Japanese, one seems justified in calling the whole operation into question.

Turning from poetry to prose, a similar gap between original and translation can be seen in Murakami's Hitsuji o Meguru Bōken (cleverly translated as A Wild Sheep Chase). The first selection comes from the opening pages, and in the Japanese I have underlined the sections for which I can find no English equivalents or the sense is different.⁴

I called the police department to track down her family's address and phone number, after which I gave them a call to get details of the funeral.

Her family lived in an old quarter of Tokyo. I got out my map and marked the block in red. There were subway and train and bus lines everywhere, overlapping like some misshapen spiderweb, the whole area a maze of narrow streets and drainage canals.

The day of the funeral, I took a streetcar from Waseda. I got off near the end of the line. The map proved about as helpful as a globe would have been. I ended up buying pack after pack of cigarettes, asking directions each time.

It was a wood-frame house with a brown board fence around it. A small yard, with an abandoned ceramic brazier filled with standing rainwater. The ground was dark and damp.

She'd left home when she was sixteen. Which may have been why the funeral was so somber. Only family present, nearly everyone older. It was presided over by her elder brother, barely thirty, or maybe it was her brother-in-law.

Her father, a shortish man in his mid-fifties, wore a black armband of mourning. He stood by the entrance and scarcely moved. Reminded me of a street washed clean after a downpour.

[3-4]

⁴ The translator is Alfred Birnbaum, and the translation was published by Kodansha International in 1989. The Japanese edition used is Murakami Haruki, Hitsuji o Meguru Bōken (Kōdansha Bunko, 1985).

僕はその日のうちに警察に電話をかけて彼女の実家の住所と電話番号を教えてもらい、それから実家に電話をかけて罪依の日取りを聞いた。誰かが言っているように、手間さえ惜しまなければ大抵のことはわかるものだ。

彼女の家に下町にあった。僕は東京都の区分地図を開き、彼女の家の番地に赤いボールペンでしるしをつけた。それはいかにも東京の下町的な町だった。地下鉄や国電やら路線バスやらがバランスを失った蜘蛛の糸のように入り乱れ、重なりあい、何本かのどぶ川が流れ、こてこてとした通りがメロンのしわみだりに地表にしがみついていた。

罪依の日、僕は早稲田から都電に乗った。終点近くの駅で降りて区分地図を広げてみたが、地図に地球儀と同じ程度にしか役に立たなかった。おかげで彼女の家に辿りつくまでに幾つも標章を買い、何度も道を訊ねねばならなかった。

彼女の家は茶色い板塀に囲まれた古い木造住宅だった。門をくぐると、左手には何かの役には立つかもしれないといった程度の狭い庭があった。庭の隅には使いみちのなくなった古い陶製の火鉢が放り出され、火鉢の中には十五センチも雨水がたまっていた。庭の土は黒く、じっとりどろどろしていた。

彼女が十六の歳に家を飛び出したとき、というせいもあって、罪依は身内だけのひっそりとしたものだった。参判者の殆んどが年寄りの親戚で、三十を過ぎたばかりの彼女の兄だか義理の兄だかが罪依をとりしきっていた。

父親は五十代半ばの小柄な男で、黒い背広の腕に聖堂を巻き、門のわきに立ったまま殆んど身動きひとつしなかった。彼の姿は洪水がひいた直後のアスファルト道路を思わせた。

This process of bold excision is to be found throughout the English version, extending in cases to whole paragraphs. But large-scale omission is not the only point of difference between the original and the translation. Notice the clipped syntax in the translation and the flippant tone of the narrator, both characteristic of Raymond Chandler-style detective fiction. Now, a non-native speaker has to be cautious in forming stylistic judgements, but to me Murakami hardly seems to command such a distinctive voice. Indeed, the English has a sparkle and stylistic verve that seem quite superior to the Japanese. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this stylistic difference can be seen in the following passage, from toward the end of the novel:

When the Sheep Man finished his whiskey, he seemed more at ease. He put out his cigarette and with both hands rubbed his eyes under his mask.

"Woolgetsinmyeyes," said the Sheep Man.

I didn't know how to respond and said nothing.

"Youcameheresyesterdayafternooneh?" said the Sheep Man, rubbing his eyes some more. "Beenwatchingyouthewholetime."

The Sheep Man stopped to pour a slug of whiskey over the half-melted ice and downed it in one gulp.

"Andthewomanleftalonethisafternoon."

"You watched that too, did you?"

"Watchedher?Wedroveheraway."

"Drove her away?"

"Surestuckourheadthroughthekitchendoorsaidyoubettergohome."

うまで、一人で何かをぶつぶつとつぶやきつづけていた。羊男の鼻は体に比べて大きく、息をするたびに鼻腔が真のように左右に広がった。マスクの穴からのぞく二つの目は落っつかぬ気に僕のまわりの空間をきょろきょろとさまよっていた。

グラスを空けてしまおうと羊男は少し落ちついたようだった。彼は煙草を消し、マスクの下から両手の指を入れて目をこすった。

「毛が目に入るんだ」と羊男が言った。

どう言えはいいのかわからなかったので、僕は黙っていた。

「昨日の午前中にここに来ただろう？」と羊男は目をこすりながら言った。「ずっと見てたんだ」

羊男は半分溶けた氷の上にとくとくとウイスキーを注ぎ、かきまわすに一口飲んだ。

「で、午後には女が一人で出てった」

「それも見てたんだね？」

「見てたんじゃなくて、おいらが追い帰したんだ」

「追い帰した？」

「うん、台所のドアから顔を出して、あんな帰った方がいいって言ったんだ」

What justification can be found for having the sentences spoken by the Sheep Man run together like this? I have to confess that, much as I am taken with the technique, I can find none. Here the reader is clearly faced with the style of the translator and not the original author. And since this novel has shaped the American impression of contemporary Japanese literature as no other (selling far more copies and receiving much more critical attention), we are faced with the strange circumstance of an American translator having defined a unique style of modern Japanese literature. Actually, it is not so strange that the translator has defined the style (for that cannot be helped) as that he has defined an illusory style, one that never existed. And in doing this, I think the translator has overstepped an ethical boundary line; he is not longer a translator but an adaptor, and in claiming to be a translator he is misleading the reader.⁵

Both of the above examples, then, can be taken as extreme cases of what can happen when the translator gives himself a free hand (although even they would have their defenders). One can readily grant that literal translation has limits without also granting that those limits mean anything goes.

⁵ In this sense, it is significant that the same translator's Hard-Boiled Wonderland and the End of the World, also derived from Murakami, is acknowledged in the copyright statement to be a combined translation-adaptation.

Most cases, however, are not so extreme, or at least offer mitigating circumstances that seem to demand more flexibility from a critic. Perhaps the premier example in English is the difference between the Genji translations of Arthur Waley and Edward Seidensticker. I here offer two selections which conveniently illustrate the nature of the problem.⁶

The empress, his daughter, returned to court, leaving little Niou to keep him company. Niou remembered the instructions his "granny" had left and was most solicitous of the rose plum at the west wing. Genji thought it very kind of him, and completely charming. The Second Month had come, and plum trees in bloom and in bud receded into a delicate mist. Catching the bright song of a warbler in the rose plum that had been Murasaki's especial favorite, Genji went out to the veranda.

"The warbler has come again. It does not know
That the mistress of its tree is here no more."

It was high spring and the garden was as it had always been. He tried not to remember, but everything his eye fell on brought such trains of memory that he longed to be off in the mountains, where no birds sing. [ref. given] Tears darkened the yellow cascade of yamabuki. In most gardens the cherry blossoms had fallen. Here at Nijō the birch cherry [note given] followed the double cherries and presently it was time for the wisteria. Murasaki had brought all the spring trees, early and late, into her garden, and each came into bloom in turn.

[S:725]

The Akashi Princess was now back at the Imperial Palace; but Genji persuaded her to let Prince Niou stay with him for a while. The child showed a great interest in the red plum-tree in front of his room, constantly trotting out to see that no harm came to it. His granny, he said, had told him to. It was only the second month, and though the flowering trees were all in bloom, they were not fully out, so that the shimmer of the blossoms hung like a delicate mist along the boughs; and when a nightingale began to sing in full voice upon a branch of Niou's tree, Genji could not refrain from coming out to listen. 'Knows he that she who built this shining bower hears him no more -- the nightingale upon the red plum-tree?' So he murmured as he walked.

Spring advanced, and Murasaki's gardens took on their wonted splendour; but the sight of them gave him no pleasure, and indeed he longed to be in some far place far off among the mountains, so bare and desolate that neither sight of flower nor song of bird would sharpen his sorrow. First the globe-flower reached its glory in a tangle of dewy blossom. Then when the single cherry had fallen and

⁶ Selections taken from Arthur Waley, trans., The Tale of Genji (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1970), and Edward Seidensticker, trans., The Tale of Genji (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976). Page numbers are indicated in brackets in the text. The Japanese provided in the handout is omitted here.

the eight-fold giant cherry was almost over, the birch cherry began to open, while the wistaria was still but faintly coloring, and held all its treats in store. How skilfully she had contrived her planting, so that wherever one turned there were later flowers to follow those that were early over, and others and ever more to take their place.

[W:738]

* * * *

Evening mists came drifting over the garden, which was very beautiful indeed.

He went to look in on the Akashi lady. She was startled to see him after such a long absence, but she received him with calm dignity. Yes, she was a superior lady. And Murasaki's superiority had been of a different sort. He talked quietly of the old years.

[S:727]

One evening when a faint haze mingled with the fading light, Genji at last set out to visit the Lady of Akashi. His visit took her completely by surprise; for it was a very long while since he had been near her. But she managed all the same to receive him in good style, and to make so agreeable an impression that he found himself wondering whether she were not after all the most charming person in the world. But then there came into his face an expression, the meaning of which she was perfectly well able to decipher: he was thinking how little she had ever interested him compared with Murasaki, and how useless it was to seek consolation in this or any other quarter.

[W:738-39]

On the whole, Seidensticker is the more meticulous and correct, making clear formal distinctions between poetry and prose, declining to add explanatory description, preferring the more precise "warbler" to "nightingale," leaving yamabuki untranslated rather than providing a substitute term with no taxonomic correspondence, even providing the Japanese name for "birch cherry" in a footnote. One should note as well that between the two above selections comes more than half a page of English (in Seidensticker) that Waley has simply, and without notice, left translated. There seems little doubt that Waley is open to the charge of unethical translation,⁷ and if accuracy were the only criterion of good translation, one would certainly feel no hesitation in consigning his work to some obscure corner of the library. But Seidensticker

⁷ The case against Waley is best summarized by Seidensticker himself, both in the introduction to his translation and in two articles on translation reprinted in his book This Country, Japan (Tokyo, New York, San Francisco: Kodansha International, 1984), pages 64-82.

has his problems, too. He is, for example, a poor translator of the many waka contained in the Genji, which he simply renders as couplets. He is concise to the point of being cryptic at times. Above all, he lacks the rhythm of the original, which for all his cutting and embroidering Waley succeeds magnificently in conveying. I would like to provide one more selection in which accuracy is not at issue for either translator to show this difference in rhythm and tone.

Among his papers were letters which he had put aside over the years but which he would not wish others to see. Now, as he got his affairs in order, he would come upon them and burn them. There was a bundle of letters from Murasaki among those he had received at Suma from his various ladies. Though a great many years had passed, the ink was as fresh as if it had been set down yesterday. They seemed meant to last a thousand years. But they had been for him, and he was finished with them.

[S:733]

One task that now devolved upon him was the destruction of letters such as it would be embarrassing to leave behind. Many he had torn up long ago; but often he had put a letter aside meaning to destroy it, and then had never brought himself to do so. Now, as opportunity offered, he took them out a few at a time, and went through them carefully. Among those that he had received at Suma, most of which he now tore up or threw away, there were a lot of Murasaki's letters carefully tied up in a bundle. It must indeed have been he himself who did up the packet, though so long a time had passed that he had no recollection of doing so. The ink was as fresh as on the day when they were written, and looked as if it would remain so for hundreds of years. But what was the use of such a keepsake? He could not take it with him.

[W:742]

Waley's masterly touch in passages like this is why, despite his accuracy and readability, Seidensticker cannot claim to have completely supplanted Waley in the reader's esteem. The lesson in this case would seem to be that even if style is not everything in a good translation, its role is by no means unimportant.

So that I do not stand accused of exposing only others to criticism, I would now like to turn to several examples of my own translations from Japanese. The first is a translation of one of Izumi Kyōka's earliest stories, "The Operating Room." After examining a few selections from this story to establish some of the concrete obstacles presented by the work of this difficult author,

we can then compare two different sets of translations taken from Kyōka's masterpiece, Kōya Hijiri, to demonstrate that the problems we have been discussing so far are encountered in every translation.

The story opens with a very long Japanese sentence that I feel must be broken up to make sense in English:⁸

My dear friend Takamine, a Bachelor of Medicine, was to operate that day on Countess Kifune at a certain hospital on the outskirts of Tokyo. Using my position as the countess's drawing instructor as a pretext, I had arranged to be present when Takamine performed the operation. Curiosity, however, was my true motivation for going.

[6]

Here is a problem (initially of the grammatical sort, although it finally merges with the problem of style) that reappears frequently with Kyōka-- finding it necessary to give up the cadence of the original in order to maintain a logical structure encompassing all the elements of the Japanese sentence. What is lost is rhythm, together with a certain associative evocativeness, but the alternative (at least for a translator with my talents) is near-incoherence. The following example also appears in the Japanese as a mere three sentences:

The countess herself, the cause of worry and concern to the people both inside and outside the operating room, lay on an operating table in the center of the room. One might have counted the specks of dust floating in the bright light that bathed the area around the operating table, giving it an aspect that was somehow frightening and inviolable. The countess was covered with a pure white hospital gown, like a corpse. Her complexion was perfectly white, her nose well formed, her chin slender, and her limbs so delicate that even the finest material would have seemed a crushing burden. Her lips had lost some of their color; faintly visible between them were teeth as white as pearls. The eyes were tightly closed, the brow almost imperceptibly contracted. The countess's loosely bundled hair fell in disarray over her pillow and onto the operating table.

[7-8]

Even here, with various appositives, participles, relative pronouns, and a semicolon, I have found it necessary to double the number of sentences. (Although an affected nineteenth-century style might reduce that number, it is

⁸ My complete English translation, taken from the (Waseda University) School of Political Science and Economics' Kyōyōshogaku no Kenkyū, volume 83-84, March 1988, pages 1-18, was presented in the handout, along with the entire Japanese text. Only certain sections of the English are reproduced here, with page numbers again given in brackets after the quoted passage.

not my natural style and I would not feel confident using it.) Kyōka always seems to end up being more easily comprehensible in English than in Japanese.

Cultural artifacts, which appear with maddening frequency in Kyōka's stories, also present a problem. Consider the following examples:

The women, I noticed, formed an escort for a girl of seven or eight wearing a silk smock over her kimono, although it did not appear that they were seeing her off.

[6-7]

The maid was quick to grasp her meaning and went over to the operating table. Executing a deep, graceful bow, she said, "My lady, I'm going to give you some medicine now. Please breathe in deeply and begin counting or reciting your kana."

[8]

"Three of them, each as pretty as the next!"

"Didn't one of them have a marumage?"

"Well, they certainly wouldn't be interested in the likes of us, no matter what hairstyles they were wearing."

[14]

In the first of these selections, I have translated the Japanese hifu as "smock," based on the shape and protective function of this garment, although "cloak" might be a more appropriate translation because of the unfortunate workaday connotations of "smock" and the fact that cloaks are what Westerners wear when they leave the house. In the second selection, I have let the Japanese kana stand as it is, although another translator might replace it with "alphabet" or omit it altogether. And in the last selection, I have again used the Japanese for the name of one kind of hairstyle, but have passed over the names of several others that exist in the Japanese. In each case, I have provided a footnote to inform the reader of my method, but the hard truth remains that I am not sure I did the right thing, nor are the choices I have made necessarily consistent.

Finally, with regard to style, let us look at two more examples, the first continuing immediately following mention of the marumage hairstyle.

"Speaking of which, you'd expect something a little less stylish from those other two. What do they think they're doing?"

"I guess they just don't want anyone to know who they are. Hey, the one in the middle was really something, wasn't she? The other one was just an understudy."

"Tell me, how would you describe her kimono?"

"I made it out to be purple."

"What, just purple? I thought you read books. That isn't like you."

"The sight was so dazzling I couldn't raise my head."

[15]

"What a terrible thing to say! But it's the truth. Me, too, whenever a girl's been pretty enough to catch my eye, I've let myself get carried away. I remember causing you a lot of trouble, too, when we've been out walking together, but now I've got it all out of my system. I feel like a new man, and I'm not going to have anything to do with women again."

"In that case you're going to end up a bachelor for the rest of your life. After all, I hardly think that lovely young thing is going to come up and offer herself to you."

"No way, worse luck."

[15-16]

These two selections represent an attempt to convey the colloquial side of Kyōka that acts as a complement to the sort of formal elegance found at the opening of "The Operating Room." I am not quite satisfied with the result--it does not strike me as natural enough--but it is essential to make the reader aware of the existence of both because this elegant-vulgar duality forms an essential aspect of Kyōka's style that, in his best work, has important thematic implications. Even in "The Operating Room," it is precisely this sort of vulgarity that plays against and ultimately helps inform the apparent refinement of the story's main character. A translation that did not at least attempt to retain the colloquial flavor would fail in an even more important respect than one that risked being slightly stilted (although, of course, a translation that was both natural and colloquial would be the best of all).

As the final items I would like to use to discuss some of the problems encountered in translated literature, again with special reference to Izumi Kyōka, I have placed two different translations of several passages from Kōya Hijiri side by side in the handout.⁹ The first two sets of examples are meant

⁹ The first item in each pair is taken from Stephen W. Kohl, The Saint of Mt. Koya and The Song of the Troubadour (Tokyo: The Committee of the Translation of the Works of Izumi Kyōka, 1990), with page numbers indicated in brackets. The second item is my own version, written as an appendix to my doctoral dissertation (and hence not given page numbers here) some five years before Kohl's translation. Once again the Japanese, presented in the original handout, has been omitted here.

to show a general stylistic difference between two translators, neither of whom could be accused of mistranslating.

"The peddler knocked the dottle from his pipe and said, 'What's the matter, man? Don't hold back; go ahead, drink up. Drink your fill. What does it matter if you get sick, I have plenty of medicine for you. Surely fate brought me here for this purpose, don't you think so, Miss? Oh, but don't get me wrong, the medicine won't be free. I have some Mankintan pills here, but out of respect for the medicine I give you, you will have to pay three sen a pack for them. You'll have to pay for them alright. I have never yet committed such a sin that I had to atone for it by giving something free to a priest. And how about you, Miss? I wouldn't mind committing a few sins with you.' With these words he poked the tea house maid suggestively in the ribs.

"Shocked by the man's lewd behavior, I hurried away down the road.

"An elderly priest like myself has no business telling you indecent stories about poking tea house maids, or about pinching them either, but I guess it will be all right this time since that is the subject of my story."

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"The medicine peddler gave his pipe a rap and said, 'Come on! Don't be afraid, drink all you want! If it looks like you're going to die, I'll be happy to give you some medicine. That's what I'm here for -- isn't it, honey? Not for free, of course. Miraculous Mankintan, three coppers a packet. If you want it, you have to pay for it. I haven't committed the sin that would persuade me to donate it too you. Unless -- how about it? Are you willing to give it a try?' And with that he slapped the teahouse girl on the back.

"I fled from the scene.

"I suppose it's not proper for a respectable priest like myself to talk about snuggling and girls' backs and such, but it's part of the story, so I beg your indulgence."

* * * *

"At the point where the path appeared to lead down the slope there stood a slim pine tree of extraordinary height. The trunk was slender and it had no branches up to some fifteen or twenty feet above the ground. I paused to look up as I passed under this tree, and there, through the uppermost branches of the tree, I could see the silver moon. It was the thirteenth night of the new moon, and though it appeared to be the same moon I had always seen, tonight it made me realize how far away I was from the world of ordinary human habitation. The woman, having led me down the slope, suddenly disappeared from sight. Presently, by clinging to the trunk of the tree and searching the slope below, I caught sight of her.

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"There was a tall, slender pine at the point we began our descent, completely bare until thirty feet above ground. Passing by, I looked up and saw the white shape of the moon among the top branches, nearly full. The moon looked the same as it would have anywhere else, but who was there here to admire it?

"I had lost sight of the woman, who had gone down ahead of me, so I held on to the trunk of the pine and looked down. She was just below me.

The major difference here is that the second translation in each set (mine) is much shorter, a tendency that exists throughout the text. The first translation tends to be slightly more explanatory (the phrase "shocked by the man's behavior," for instance, is an addition), slightly less precise (the peddler does slap the girl rather than poke her; mine is the more accurate distance to the branches of the pine tree). As a curious result, the reader is faced with the same contrast between conciseness and prolixity noted in the Seidensticker and Waley translations (although I am by no means saying my translation is on the same level as Seidensticker's). Which makes for the better translation? I think it is very hard to say in this case, because although I consider the second more briskly colloquial, the first has a rhythm that does fit in with the narrator's function as a storytelling priest. There is a nagging doubt that my translation may be somewhat too abrupt. Ultimately, the decision must rest with the reader, for this is a translator's blind spot: he has done his best and it seems decent enough, but he may well have missed something important another translator has caught and successfully conveyed. This is why, for the best literary works, it is probably true (as Seidensticker himself has had occasion to state) that the more translations, the better.

There is one point, however, in which I believe my translation of Kōya Hijiri to be decidedly more faithful to Kyōka's style, and that is in establishing a close link between narrator and listener, author and reader. The last three sets of examples are meant to illustrate that claim.

"It occurred to me that these frightful leeches had been here since the beginning of time waiting for travelers to come along. How much blood, I wondered, had they sucked from travelers over the long years of time? It seemed to me that once they had reached their fill, the leeches would vomit up their store of human blood in such vast quantities that the whole earth would be turned to mud; whole mountains would sink beneath an enormous swamp of mud and blood. Here in this dark, dank, and dismal place where the sun never penetrated, even the trees would topple over and be transformed into leeches. Such was the terrible vision that came to me in my distraught condition.

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"These fearsome mountain leeches had assembled here since the time of the gods, I thought, lying in wait for passers-by. After drinking untold quantities of blood over the ages, their wishes would be granted and they would disgorge every drop of blood they had ever taken from human beings. The earth and all of the mountains, one by one, would dissolve into a huge swamp of blood and mire. And in the same instant each of these giant, gloomy trees that blocked out the sun at midday would transform itself into a monstrous leech. Upon my word!"

* * * *

"I heard the sound of rushing water at the bottom of the hill where I found a stream spanned by a short, earthen bridge. As soon as I heard the sound of the stream, I wanted to throw myself into the water to cleanse my body of the effects of the swarms of leeches. Thinking only of how nice it would be to immerse myself in the water, I did not even worry about the bridge collapsing under me. I went straight across without regard for the danger, and although it trembled a little, I passed on without difficulty. On the other side, the slope started upwards again and I gathered my resolve to meet the challenge of the climb.

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"As I listened to the water, I thought of how pleasant it would be to cast my leech-drained shell of a body headlong into it. If the bridge were to give way when I set foot upon it, I would have gladly accepted my fate.

"I quickly started across, not minding any danger there might have been. The bridge wobbled a little, but I was soon safely on the other side. From there the road sloped again, this time upward. What an ordeal!"

* * * *

"Holding back one of her long sleeves with her teeth, she placed both her beautiful hands on my back, but seeing the condition it was in, she hesitated, saying, 'My goodness, what's this?'

"'What's the matter?' I asked.

"'It looks like bruises all over your back.'

"'Oh yes, those. I had a very difficult trip.' As I spoke I relived the horror of the leeches.

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"She placed her bare, white arm on my back and gazed at me in amazement.

"'Well!'

"'Is something the matter?'

"'It's like one huge bruise.'

"'Yes, that's the terrible experience I mentioned.'

"'The memory still sends a chill up my spine.'"

It will be noted that the second example in each set contains an expression associated with the narrative setting of the story: the priest telling his tale to our own narrator. He is not describing his feelings at the time, but attempting to increase the dramatic tension in the present. This is a common strategy with Kyōka, who thereby attempts to draw not only the narrator but also the reader into the experience. It is, in other words, a technique for making possible the reader's imaginative participation in the story, and in my view, the experience is diminished if this technique is not duplicated by the translator. Something essential is missing. One word of warning, however. There is no guarantee my own translation has not left out something equally essential.

All right, we have now covered all of the material in the handout. The question remains, Where does that leave us with respect to the problems of translating Kyōka, and Japanese literature in general? Pretty much back where we started, I am sorry to say. The principle of fidelity--preserving as much of the original as possible in a form as close to the original as practicable--is intact, one supposes; and yet enough cautions regarding style have been attached to make a convincing argument, I feel, that no two "faithful" translations could ever turn out exactly the same. This was, of course, the very task I set out to accomplish, and I hope I will not be considered too unreliable a guide if I therefore leave the listener in a state of doubt very much like my own.