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Source: *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, (Winter, 1980), pp. 15-47

Published by: The Society for Japanese Studies

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/131998>

Accessed: 04/06/2008 13:00

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EDWARD SEIDENSTICKER

Chiefly on Translating the *Genji*

It may be that “perfect translation” is not possible between two languages as remote from each other as English and Japanese. The no-smoking sign aboard the airplane flashes on in its several languages, and the two characters of Japanese seem subtly different from the two words of English. The injunction is the same, to be sure, but the two characters seem at once less peremptory and more concise, and of course they comprise a loan word, whereas the two words of English are native.

“Perfect translation” has thus been set off because it is difficult to know what the expression means. The translator has been likened to a counterfeiter, whose function it is to produce an imitation indistinguishable from the original. This definition will do as a touchstone, or characterization of the process, and yet one may imagine a kind of translator for whom it will not do at all. If, for instance, it is the translator’s intent to make explicit everything that is implicit in a difficult and complex literary text, then a translation that seeks to capture, or imitate, something of the compact, gem-like quality of the original will seem merely facile, perhaps the more so the more nearly it succeeds in the endeavor.

For the purposes of this article, the touchstone will serve. The article will be about literary translation, with principal reference to Heian literature, and translation which, because it wishes to pass the scrutiny of commercial editors and to attract the “general” reader, hopes to have literary grace in some measure, whether or not it is perfectly commensurate with that of the original.

Whatever “perfect translation” may mean, the sign on the airplane is not far from it. A good deal of literary translation, even when it gets past editors and attracts the general reader, must often seem imperfect, somewhat ramshackle and makeshift, to the reader who can compare translation and original. Some literary works

come through better than others. Prose generally does better than poetry, and modern writing better than old.

Yet the translator of a modern novel, as well as the translator of a poem from a thousand years ago, may find himself up against insoluble problems. That is why translations so often have that makeshift look. An insoluble problem is an insoluble problem, and the talents of the translator cannot in the end change the imperfect to the perfect.

In a general way, it is more difficult to translate an old poem than a modern novel, but the fundamental problems are the same, given similarity of purpose, for every language and every period. It is probably easier to translate from Portuguese into Spanish than from ancient Japanese into modern English, but the latter sort of translation does not present unique problems. They may not be as acute elsewhere, but they are there, elsewhere, all the same. The Japanese are wrong, though telling them so does no good, to think that translation from Japanese presents problems that do not occur in the other direction.

The most difficult stage in a literary translation is that of seeking to put the translation into acceptable language, by which is meant language that conveys in some measure the literary aptness of the original. It can be difficult to ascertain what the original means, and sometimes it can be quite impossible; but to conclude that a passage of Heian Japanese, for example, is incomprehensible takes less time and effort than to struggle with a modern English approximation. In my own translations the process of beating a literal version into what seems acceptable English has generally taken as long as all other stages combined, including ascertaining what the original means, putting it into a literal draft, and annotating.

No language is incomprehensible, though specific passages from it may be. Probably, and again the statement flies in the face of the common wisdom of the Japanese, the foreign student can come as close as most natives to apprehending subtle refinements in the native literature, although there may be exceptions, as when one is unable to join in idolatry of Mori Ōgai. In general, however, the diligent foreign student may under his own powers arrive at an understanding of the native consensus. It may be for different reasons than those of the native millions, but then of course they cannot be sure that their consensus has been reached for reasons identical among all the millions. What most foreigners cannot do is write in the language of the original with something like the grace of a graceful original.

It follows that the natural direction for translation is into one's native language and not out of it. The point would scarcely seem worth making were it not for the lamentations one hears—it may be that one used to hear them more frequently than one does now—that translation from Japanese should have been so carelessly left in the hands of insensitive foreigners. To be able to read a language with complete understanding of stylistic refinements is not the same thing as to be able to write that language with literary distinction. Writing a language well is more difficult than reading a language well, and the ability to write a foreign language in a manner which seems faultless to native speakers of the language is very rare.

This does not mean that it is impossible to translate into a foreign language. One can think of translations of Japanese literature by Japanese that are more than acceptable, and of original English works by Japanese that are interesting and even distinguished language. The point is that such talents are exceptional. If it may be granted that translation aimed at a non-specialized audience should not be made difficult by strained and unnatural language, then it follows that the direction to be recommended is into one's own language.

The essential problems of translation are the same, whatever the language or the period. A literal translation is likely to be cramped and awkward, and the hard work must go into making it more pleasing. Yet it is also true in general that old Japanese literature is more difficult to translate than recent Japanese literature. Some years ago at a conference on problems of translation I was startled when an eminent professor said that translation from the pre-modern language might be considered serious scholarly endeavor, but that translation from the modern language is not usually so regarded. This seemed unjust, an arbitrary relegating of the modern translator to an inferior status, a denying of equal space in the faculty directory.

Yet the statement has some truth behind it. No problem which occurs in classical translation does not also appear in modern; but there are more chronic and nagging problems in classical translation, and translation of a classical text can be a succession of almost insurmountable problems, or utterly insurmountable problems, from which the translator is not often granted surcease. Not all classical texts are alike, of course, and there are modern writers who seem more difficult to translate than an easy classic, some of which actually do exist.

Texts of few words are the hardest to translate. This does not

necessarily mean brief texts, though it can. It means texts that put the same word to multiple use, either by using one word to convey two or more things at once, or by using the same word in a wide variety of circumstances, so wide that no single English word can be put to all the same uses.

There recently appeared in a Japanese academic magazine an article by a Japanese academic gentleman examining the ways in which the verb *omou* had been accommodated in three of my Kawabata translations. His tabulation came to a total of forty-five translations of that one verb, separate and individual, if in some cases closely related. I thought at first that I was being chastised for a minor series of delinquencies. Then it came to seem that, whether or not the article was meant to be censorious, it presented a very interesting illustration of a very interesting problem. Kawabata is difficult to translate, and much of the difficulty has to do with the fact that he uses a small repertory of all-purpose words, and that, though I would not have thought of it myself, *omou* is among them. It is right that the choice should have been a verb and not a noun: not the *wabi* and *sabi* we keep hearing about, but a very ordinary verb.

In this respect Kawabata resembles a very difficult classical writer, Murasaki Shikibu. She too uses a small repertory of all-purpose words, and for her too they tend to be verbs or the closely related declensional adjectives. Much has been made of the influence of the *Genji* on the Tanizaki style, and there can be no doubt that it changed after his first period of intense concern with the *Genji*. In the Tanizaki instance the influence is on the configuration of the sentence, its tendency to go on for a very long time, and to have a complex pattern of subordination. In the case of Kawabata, there is a close affinity with Murasaki Shikibu, whether or not it can be called an influence, in the very difficult matter of word usage. Kawabata is much more difficult to translate than Tanizaki, and Murasaki Shikibu is more difficult to translate than a medieval text with a rich Chinese vocabulary.

The limited vocabulary runs strongly to agglutinative words, and the fact that the modern language is less elaborately agglutinative than the Heian language seems to present the chief difficulty for translators from Heian Japanese into modern Japanese. The difficulties are so considerable that the process *is* in fact one of translation. With its propensity for distinguishing between what the insider does and what the outsider does, despite the fact that they may be doing very much the same thing, the Japanese language has one word, *shinyaku*, for rendition into modern Japanese, and another, *hon-*

yaku, for rendition into a foreign language. What Tanizaki did was translate the *Genji*, however, just as much as any *gaijin* ever did.

The matter has to do not only with the small repertory of much-used words but with the fact that the agglutinative adjectives and verbs give a misty quality to the style of the Heian *monogatari*, which is not to be captured either in modern Japanese or in English. More of the work must be done by nouns in an English sentence, and so the tone, the "feel," is very different. Chinese also relies more heavily on nouns, and that is why when a translation is from a highly sinified text of the Middle Ages there is not the sense of abrupt and radical change that there is from a Heian *monogatari*.

The difference between a language in which the heavy work is done by agglutinative verbs and adjectives and a language in which a larger proportion of the work is done by nouns may be likened to the difference between a wall and a river. This is not to say that the one is good and beautiful and the other is bad and ugly. There are beautiful and ugly walls and there are beautiful and ugly rivers, but rivers are in certain respects different from walls. Nouns are piled one on another like bricks or stones, each one clearly defined and clearly joined to other members of the category, and the effect is of something firm, concrete, and precisely measurable. Agglutinative verbs and adjectives flow into one another. Sometimes it is even difficult to know when we have come to a full stop, and often the sentence seems to turn back upon itself and become, if not circular, at least penannular. The effect is as of a flow which cannot be clearly analyzed into its parts, and which does not, like a wall, come to a clear and definite end, but merges, rather, into the body from which it came. This is not to say that the Heian sentence cannot be analyzed; only that it feels like an indiscrete flow, and, when rendered into English, comes to feel like something very different.

More than one person who was kind enough to look at my *Genji* translation in manuscript form commented on the disconcerting frequency of the words "woman" and "lady" and their plurals, disconcerting both because it was so high and because there seemed to be no systematic and rational differentiation between the two categories. In the end it seemed possible to be consistent, at least, and so "lady" came to refer to a person at the very top level of society, and "woman" to a person of lesser status. It did not seem possible to reduce the frequency of the words. They were there because natural English style requires clear and overt statement as to who is doing what with what and to whom. The really interesting point was that very often no explicit equivalent existed in the Japanese original,

and the nouns were contained in a verb or adjective. Thus, not requiring explicit statement, they were by the lights of Heian prose better left unstated. If Murasaki Shikibu had had to introduce nouns as frequently as must be done in English, and if someone had taken her to task for the excessively frequent use of certain nouns, and if she had taken the charge seriously, then to overcome it she would have had to write a different sort of story. The translator, however, is not at liberty to do this and must be resigned to the fact that in his noun-ridden prose certain of his nouns risk becoming mannerisms.

This is but one illustration of an insoluble problem. Walls and rivers are not alike, and there is no way of transforming a river into a wall. Someone with a flair for paradox might say that an insoluble problem is no problem at all, and if nothing can be done about it then it can be ignored. It is still there, however, an unhappy fact to be aware of, and want to wish away.

This may be the easier kind of insurmountable problem, because the only thing that can be done is to let the English nouns fall where they may. Other problems, also insurmountable, are more difficult because there is a choice between more than one partial solution, all of which are but partial.

It has been argued above that all of the problems present in classical translation are also present in modern translation. It may be, however, that there are few modern works in which they are all present. There are few modern works that mingle poetry and prose as do most Heian *monogatari*. It may be too that not all poetry is untranslatable, and that for the straightforward kind without exotic imagery something very near a perfect equivalent may be found. The poetry of the early *chokusenshū*, however, which covers the period of the *Genji*, must rank high on the list of untranslatable poetry. It is a poetry replete with decorations and contrivances, and the translator finds himself in a dilemma, "a situation offering choice between equally unsatisfactory alternatives," as Webster has it.

In brief, the two unsatisfactory alternatives are these: to convey all the details of all the decorations and contrivances, at the expense of expanding upon the original and therefore sacrificing the brevity that is so essential a part of the effect; or to seek brevity and apt imitation of the rhythm of the original, but sacrifice many of the verbal refinements. A choice must be made, and when it has been made it means sacrificing something of importance.

The dilemma may be illustrated by comparing several translations of the same poems. Though they are not of the *Kokinshū-Genji* period, translations from the *Manyōshū* provide excellent examples,

because relatively straightforward poetry and highly contrived poetry may be seen side by side, and several translations of famous poems may also be put side by side. In translating Hitomaro, Professors Robert Brower and Earl Miner, in *Japanese Court Poetry*, sometimes use more words than there are syllables in the original. Professor Geoffrey Bownas and Mr. Anthony Thwaite, in *The Penguin Book of Japanese Verse*, perform the somewhat virtuoso feat of keeping the syllable count of the translation not far from that of the original. The Gakujutsu Shinkōkai translations occupy middle ground, and are in every instance briefer than Brower-Miner and less brief than Bownas-Thwaite.

The three translations occupy similar ground in their translations of Okura, with the Bownas-Thwaite being the briefest and Brower-Miner the longest, but the spread is by no means as wide. The reason is clearly that Okura is a plain and direct sort of poet who makes but spare use of decorative language and sometimes uses none at all. It is clear that the dimensions of the problem are not the same with all poets, and that something not far from "perfect translation" of a certain kind of poetry may not be an impossibility. The possibility is probably greater between closely related languages that have similar rhythmic patterns, and it is certainly greater for poets who eschew decoration, word play, and verbal dexterity in general.

All three of the translations are good in the sense that they are in pleasant, fluent English. For some the Gakujutsu Shinkōkai Hitomaro, seeking to capture the verbal dexterity and the rhythm of the original as well, may seem the best, and to some it may seem to fall between two stools, to take the worst of both worlds. It is not possible, in any event, to offer a verdict as to which of the three sets is the best unless one has first decided what element of the original is the most important, and therefore to be preserved at the expense of something else.

The three translations are certainly very different from one another, even though each has transmitted the abstractable content of the poems—their "meaning." In the Brower-Miner translations the meaning, not the synoptic or abstractable meaning but the complete body of statement and suggestion and overtone, is taken to be the most important thing, and certainly they have conveyed the meaning in this more difficult sense with great ingenuity. In at least two important respects, however, they have changed the original: what was implicit in the original often becomes explicit, not because, as in the poetry of the *Kokinshū* and the *Genji*, there are double entendres, but because the workings of the very elaborate language cannot be

imitated but must be explained; and the brisk rhythm of the original has been changed into something much slower. Having chosen to preserve one thing, they have had to sacrifice another.

The opposite choice was made for the Bownas-Thwaite translation. Though the translators do not attempt to imitate the syllable count of the original or to find a more familiar equivalent, they move along in the same brisk fashion. They give the impression of a simple, direct sort of poetry even when the original language has the complexity of Hitomaro's, and they have done away almost entirely with its decoration. The rhythm seems to have been considered the important thing, and in the interests of preserving it the verbal complexity was dispensed with.

The Gakujutsu Shinkōkai translations do sometimes the one thing and sometimes the other. They may be praised for giving the reader a bit of the virtuosity and a bit of the rhythm too, and they may be condemned for doing neither with any thoroughness.

Each of the three sets of translations doubtless has its following, but none is a perfect imitation of the original. All the explicit and implicit meanings of the original are important, but the rhythm is also a part of the meaning. If it is impossible to have both, as it probably is with this complex sort of poetry and with the equally complex poetry of the *Kokinshū* and *Genji* periods, then perfect translation is not possible.

In the introduction to my translation of the *Genji* I offered some remarks by way of comparing the new translation with the Waley translation. They conclude: "If it should be the aim of a translation to imitate the original in all important matters, including the matter of rhythm, then it may be said that the translation offered here has set itself a fuller set of aims than did that of Waley." The statement has been carefully examined by reviewers, and some have found it to be of dubious validity. It is indeed vulnerable, and prudence should have required either the shoring up of its defenses or discarding it. By way of tardy defense, a description may be offered of the circumstances of composition, and an explanation of what the key word, "rhythm," was meant to convey, and failed to convey adequately.

The remarks about the Waley translation were not a part of the original introduction and were added reluctantly. They would seem, I feared, an attempt to anticipate and turn away attacks on the new translation. That sort of endeavor is self-defeating, because it strengthens critics in their intuitive judgments. Those who take an immediate dislike to a piece of writing are stimulated by advance

attempts at justification to think up new reasons for that initial dislike. It seemed best to let the translation be its own defense.

This view was not acceptable to the editors, who argued that such rashness as attempting to take over even a part of the following which that classic, the Waley translation, had acquired must explain itself. A compromise was reached, and something was said, more than I would have preferred, and less than the editors wished.

The sentence quoted above follows upon an expression of admiration for Waley, and was meant to suggest that many of Waley's felicities are not justified by the original. It is often said that Waley was a lover of simplicity, but his *Genji* translation does not support the statement. It is a highly ornate piece of work, adding much that may seem very nice but represents elaboration upon the original. If it is the translator's duty to imitate, then he should not replace sparseness of detail by a rich profusion. An editor may suggest additions and deletions and improve by these devices, but they probably lie beyond the realm of translation.

That is what it was all about. The word "rhythm" was meant to suggest the movement of details and incidents, more straightforward and unadorned than in the Waley translation. Perhaps there is a better word than "rhythm." "Periodicity" or "pace" might do, and the former would have the advantage of confusing the issue. Or perhaps no single word will do.

Reviewers had every right to take the word in its ordinary sense, referring to the pulse and flow not of details and incidents but of words—to an abstract realm which music and writing share. It was in this sense that the word was used above in the discussion of poetry, and certainly it is the sense that comes most readily to mind.

The new translation may not, in this sense, justify the claim made for it—even though that was not quite the claim intended. The problem may again be insoluble. If the expansion and adornment with which the Waley translation is so replete were devices for imitating the rhythm of the original in this most ordinary sense, and if they are devices which may be permitted an editor but which a translator should deny himself, then it may be that we are faced with another dilemma. On either horn is imperfect imitation.

With no attempt at reproducing Heian pronunciation, the opening sentences of the *Genji* may be romanized thus:

Izure no ontoki ni ka nyōgo kōi amata saburaitamaikeru naka ni
yamu goto naki kiwa ni wa aranu ga sugurete tokimekitamau arikeri.
Hajime yori ware wa to omoigaritamaeru onkatagata mezamashiki

mono ni otoshimesonemitamau. Onaji hodo sore yori gerō no
kōitachi wa mashite yasukarazu.

This takes not far from a half minute to read aloud, and it may have taken longer in the Heian Period. Even today the speech of Kyoto seems to proceed at a more leisurely pace than standard Tokyo speech, and modern readings of the *Genji* which purport to give it as it was tend to take on an elegant drawl. There is evidence in the *Genji* itself that slow speech was more proper than rapid. The chief thing wrong with the speech of the comical Omi lady is that it is too fast. Everything considered, thirty seconds might be a reasonable estimate of the time it took a Heian reader to get through these opening sentences.

Read however slowly, in the most extremely elegant of drawls, the same passage in the new translation takes no more than half as much time. It could have been made to take longer, and perhaps should have, in view of the importance of opening passages. (One might offer it as a piece of practical advice to be especially careful about opening and closing passages, since they are subjected to closer scrutiny than anything between.) It may not be as particular as the original in distinguishing among ranks of ladies and women, but it does give the significant details much as they are given in the original. Yet Murasaki Shikibu's original readers or listeners must have been kept hanging more than twice as long on each word as are readers of the translation.

There are more than twice as many words in the Waley translation of the same passage, and it can, with some effort, be stretched out to a half minute. Already we have in it, however, instances of the sort of thing he does so frequently. *Mezamashiki mono* is rendered as "the upstart who had dispelled their dreams." This is very ingenious and not at all displeasing, but it is a literal rendition of an expression whose sense had departed rather far from those literal origins. "Still less were her former companions, the minor ladies of the Wardrobe, content to see her raised so far above them," says Waley's second sentence. Again the translation is marked by an ingenious and not unpleasant and yet misleading sort of literalness. *Kōi* may originally, as the word suggests, have had to do with the royal wardrobe, but by the period of the *Genji* they were lesser concubines, ladies not of sufficiently good family to be major consorts. In his first sentence Waley seems to render *kōi* as "gentlewomen of the Chamber," which indeed they were, and the higher-

ranking *nyōgo* seem to be called “women of the Wardrobe,” which they were not.

This may sound like something very closely akin to flinging stones from a glass house. The new translation does not attempt, in these opening sentences, to distinguish among the ranks of consorts and concubines. The point to be made, however, is that Waley achieves his leisurely rhythms, holding the reader upon his words almost as long as does Murasaki Shikibu, by ingenious embellishment. It may be that the new translation goes too far in the other direction, but when the preserving of distinctions quite obvious to readers of the original means explanation that obstructs the mustering of details, then it may seem the better course to leave them implicit in statements that are quite clear, in this case the statement that the lady with whom we are chiefly concerned is not of the highest rank.

Perhaps Waley was right, if we may assume that the ingenious embellishment was for purposes of imitating the rhythm of the original. Whether or not that was his intention is by no means clear, and his willingness to make radical deletions may suggest that no consistent principle was operative. It may be that what did operate was rather more the matter of what “sounded good”—and what interested him.

If the assumption may be made, however, then perhaps it is not true after all that such liberties are beyond the province of the translator. If he believes the most important thing to be imitation of the rhythm in the commonest sense of the word, having to do with beats and cadences, then probably explanation and commentary and amplification must be resorted to for conveying the slow passage of agglutinative verbs and adjectives. Merely to convey the meaning cannot achieve this purpose.

The problem is the reverse of that encountered in translating the poetry of the *Kokinshū-Genji* period. Details must be omitted if the major concern is to capture the brevity of a poem. There are no elaborately agglutinative endings to slow things down, and words and details are often made to perform double duty. In *monogatari* prose the verbs and adjectives go on at such length that an English verb can seldom be made to fill the same expanse of time. *Omoiagaritamaeru*, *otoshimesonemitamau*—they are splendid verbs, and it would be impossible to think of English verbs similarly splendid. It might just occasionally be possible, but not over the very long run that is the *Genji*.

They are honorific verbs. In both the classical language and the modern, honorifics may be listed among the problems that are insoluble and therefore no problems at all. They can be ignored. Because honorifics are less elaborate in the modern language than the old, they seem to be among the problems that most especially bother translators into modern Japanese. Differences among translators and differences among translations by the same translator have to do largely with honorifics. In a sense the translator into a foreign language is at an advantage, because the insoluble problem is none at all.

There is a delicate and very effective sort of rhythm in Heian prose that is a function of honorific usage. Waley did not succeed in conveying it (if we may assume that he tried to convey it), for all the solemn and deliberate cadences of his prose, and it is doubtful that any translator could capture it in working from an agglutinative language into one that is not. Regretful mention must be made of its existence all the same.

When persons of the highest rank come upon the scene, the elaborate verbs cause the tempo to slow down. When they depart and the actions of lesser persons are being described, it speeds up again, as if a slow and stately minuet had given way to a waltz. There is something grand in the sentences themselves, in their tempo and cadence, when grand persons are being described. It is a fine, subtle effect, and regrets for its disappearance must be considerable.

Because we have such trouble reading a Heian *monogatari*, and because over the centuries the Heian language has become a "literary language," separated from the spoken language by an increasing distance, we lose sight of an important matter that is called to mind by the problem of the honorifics. It is this: that works like the *Genji* are highly colloquial, of a most extremely colloquial nature, it might even be said. Honorific forms not only in conversational passages but in descriptive and narrative passages as well make it seem as if a narrator were there before us, establishing honorific levels as one would when speaking.

The modern Japanese novelist follows Western convention in this regard. A moment's thought about the difference it would make to use Murasaki Shikibu's techniques in a modern novel should make it clear that most modern novels, though in a kind of colloquial language, are less colloquial than the courtly *monogatari* of Heian. Honorific distinctions are for the most part introduced only in conversation. The rest of the novel tends to be neutral in matters of deference and humility. There are exceptions. A fictionalized biog-

raphy of the present empress is much freer in its use of honorifics than most fictional narrative. It follows the curious practice of the pinkish journalism that has been dominant since the San Francisco Treaty, and does not fail to use honorifics in describing the smallest doing or utterance of a royal person. In general, however, modern prose does not use honorifics as frequently as does modern speech. Though of course there is no "scientific" way of checking upon the matter, it seems likely that *monogatari* prose does just that, uses honorifics for narrative purposes much as they were used in conversation; and so it is a very colloquial language, more so than any English style that is likely to present itself as a possible equivalent.

There are instances of modern first-person fiction that have something like the colloquial quality of the *Genji*. Thus there is Tanizaki Junichirō's *Manji*. It is in Osaka speech, which Tanizaki sought to keep very near that speech as it would emerge from an Osaka mouth. In American literature, *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Catcher in the Rye* are of a similarly colloquial nature. It is important to notice, however, that all these works are in the first person, and the *Genji* is not. All are in dialect, moreover, or at any rate the highly idiosyncratic speech of a small corner of society. The Kyoto court may have been a very small corner of Japan, but for Murasaki Shikibu and her original audience it was the world, and the standard colloquial language of the court can have sounded neither regional nor idiosyncratic. To imitate any of the modern novels that come to mind as unusually colloquial would be immediately ludicrous and presently tiresome. It may be added that the two American instances noted above are both humorous and the Japanese instance is highly baroque. The *Genji*, through most of its length, is neither of these things.

The *Genji* is a difficult text. The difficulty comes in large measure from precisely this colloquial quality, and not, as students introduced to a smattering of old literature may think, from literary contrivance. The honorific level shifts as if the narrator were talking and not writing of her characters, and one feels that the very intimacy of the language causes obscurities. It is as if the non-verbal devices that supplement the meaning of words might have been a part of the initial "publication" process, and the subtleties thus conveyed did not find their way into the text.

I was often asked whether I meant to give the *Genji* translation an archaic flavor. Some readers have professed to find just such an antiquarian element in the finished translation, and asked whether it was intentional. It was not, if in fact it is there. At no time did

purposeful archaism seem a good idea. The best equivalent of a highly colloquial original seemed to be the standard literary language of the time and place, less colloquial, perhaps, than the original, but the best thing of that sort to be had. A reason for undertaking the translation, indeed, was that the Waley translation seemed so much of its time and place, England in the first half of the twentieth century, and a translation of another time and place, America in the second half of the twentieth century, might not seem superfluous.

Professor René Sieffert's French translation is said to be (my French is not good enough for me to judge whether or not it is) in a mannered style with strongly archaic overtones. It would be interesting to know why so individual a style was chosen, and the likelihood is certainly very considerable that it was a conscious choice.

One may think of possible reasons for archaism in a translation. If an original is consciously archaic, as, for instance, certain parts of *Ulysses*, then there would be every reason to attempt an archaic translation. When a language never spoken becomes a literary vehicle, as in some Japanese versions of Chinese or in Japanese strongly under the influence of direct translation from Chinese, then an argument might be made for translation into a kind of English never spoken, such as that of the King James Bible, another language invented for purposes of translation.

Another argument for putting the *Genji* into archaic prose might be that it so affects the modern reader, whether Japanese or foreign. The *Genji* today, it might be argued, is in a remote language, and a remote language therefore best conveys the effect of the *Genji* as we have it.

And yet another is that Murasaki Shikibu thought of her *monogatari* as being set in a period earlier than her own. The language does not seem to harken back to that earlier day, however, any more than does that of Thackeray in his historical novels. The point of view remains that of Murasaki Shikibu herself, looking back to the earlier day. Although she was very good at reproducing fusty, old-fashioned language in brief passages, it is to be doubted that she would have thought the composition of a long *monogatari* in antique language a very sensible endeavor.

None of these arguments seem very persuasive, and some of them seem far-fetched, as applied to the *Genji*. It would be interesting to hear of Professor Sieffert's reasons for writing in pre-modern French (if indeed that is what it is), but on the whole the best way to imitate a document that was highly colloquial in its time would seem

to be by seeking an approximation in the colloquial speech of our day. The main difficulty, if this view is accepted, is that we cannot be colloquial enough.

In translating into English there is a particular difficulty that makes this last inadequacy worse: there is no single standard English language. In a sense everyone speaks a dialect, since even the language of the queen is not what Americans advance as a model, and we translators who have been reviewed in British publications know how emphatically our American quirks can put off the British reader. Most translators have sought to be neutral between the two main forms of English—to write Midatlantic, as it has been put. When a truck looms upon the scene, one must call it a truck, if one is an American, and not a lorry, but there are a great many Americanisms that can be avoided, and the effort to avoid them is a wise one if the aim is to attract readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

This means, however, formalization of a language already less colloquial than that of the *Genji*. It is another reason why *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Huckleberry Finn* will not do as models. Both seem to be widely read and much admired in England, but the language of the New World is not acceptable, the reviewers inform us very clearly, in translations meant to convey the flavor of writing from a very old part of the Old World.

The British audience would probably not be alone in rejecting a translation of a Heian *monogatari* into highly colloquial American. An American audience too would find it ludicrous to have Genji speaking the language of Hannibal, Missouri. The problem of colloquial speech is essentially the problem of dialect, of any time and place. Dialect is for the most part to be avoided in translation, because it is too much of its own time and place. It is very much like slang, which has a way of jarring when it comes from the mouth of someone for whom it was not intended. A false note is struck when a foreigner interrupts the flow of his precise and formal speech with a reference to the wife and kids, and if the note is false in speech it is all the more so on the printed page. Dialect and slang are so much of their own time and place that they seem incongruous elsewhere.

At work on *The Makioka Sisters*, I thought that I could see a not at all distant American equivalent of the Osaka dialect. The speech of the American South is like that of Osaka in that it is not standard but in some of its forms it is refined and elegant. The departure from standard American is more a matter of pronunciation than of syntax or diction, but a few locutions might have served to convey the effect of the sisters' refined but non-standard Japanese. Obviously it

would not do, however. Sachiko and Yukiko would have produced hearty laughter had they been made to sound like Scarlett O'Hara.

It may be that the problem is not wholly insurmountable. Perhaps there is some hope when translating into the language of a homogeneous people that has learned to accept eccentricities in translation. I have seen at least one instance of translation from foreign dialect into Japanese dialect that has seemed very successful: the Japanese version of *My Fair Lady*, in which the heroine is made to speak the language of the Tokyo flatlands. It might not have seemed as successful if it had had only the printed page to go by. The exuberance of Miss Eri Chiemi certainly had a great deal to do with the effect.

Other instances, which involved only the printed word, have not seemed as successful. There is, for instance, a translation of Lewis Carroll in which the lizards, who speak an Irish brogue in the original, are made to speak the dialect of the Tōhoku. From the mouths of lizards, one language ought to do quite as well as another, and yet the effect seemed as ridiculous as if Sachiko were made to talk like an Atlanta belle.

It does not matter what the chance foreign reader may think of such a device. The effect on the Japanese reader is the important thing, and it may be that, given the homogeneity of the Japanese and their long tolerance of somewhat mannered translations, the possibilities of translating foreign dialect into native dialect are greater than with most languages.

In translating *The Makioka Sisters*, I did finally decide to have a try at indicating the presence of dialect, without attempting to offer English dialect as an equivalent. I sought, in rendering conversation, to put standard Tokyo Japanese into English as it is spoken, with numerous contractions, and to put Osaka speech into more formal language. I decided upon these measures because the speech of the Kansai seems generally slower than the standard speech of the Kantō, but it might be argued that the reverse would have been better, because the Osaka dialect is more a speech of ellipses and omissions than is standard Japanese. The attempt must be counted a failure, however, because almost no one even noticed that it had been made.

Vladimir Nabokov had harsh things to say about translation, amounting in sum to an exhortation that we stay away from it (although he himself was a translator of some eminence). He seemed very near saying that we should learn a language before we undertake to read its literature.

Since no one is going to learn all the languages in which good writing is to be found, Nabokov's views, if we share his suspicion of translation, mean applying to translation a celebrated dictum on the nature of criticism, that it is forever necessary and forever impossible.

Von Herder once said that it was worth one's while to spend ten years learning Hebrew in order to read Psalm 104 in the original. Ten years per poem does not allow the enjoyment of many poems in a lifetime, and so our readings would have to be very limited, or we would have to resign ourselves to reading a great deal in unsatisfactory translation. There is of course another possibility, not to read foreign literature at all—but it would be apparent to students of Japanese literature what a stifling effect that sort of thing could have. It was largely because of the stimulus provided by foreign literature in translation that the riches of Meiji literature followed upon the stagnation of the late Tokugawa.

Literatures need stimulation from outside. Left to themselves they do seem to have a way of stagnating, and yet writers are too busy writing to learn all the languages from which stimuli can come. Sometimes they can come from unexpected and improbable quarters. Drama in the English language was very stagnant through much of the nineteenth century, and probably the most important stimulus to something new—to a breakthrough, it might be said—came from the Norwegian, a language which very few English-language writers could have known, and very few, if any, bothered to learn even after they came to recognize the importance of Ibsen. A Norwegian might say that Ibsen is untranslatable, and if this is the case then we have a fine instance of impossible work that performs a necessary and important service.

Much that has been said above might be taken to support not the argument that all translation is impossible, but that a great deal of it is. Between languages with similar origins and similar structures and rhythms, like English and German or Spanish and Portuguese, something like perfect translation may be possible, even of subtle and complicated literary works. The possibility diminishes between distant languages like Japanese and English, but it probably does not disappear completely. There are probably things, on the other hand, that cannot be translated perfectly even from Portuguese into Spanish.

Much that has been said has had to do with general arguments on the difficulty and in many cases the impossibility of translation. These are not, however, the problems with which the translator is chiefly concerned as he works on a translation. He is concerned with

more concrete and down-to-earth matters. Having undertaken to do a translation, he must accept its general limitations, and does himself no good by fretting over problems that cannot be solved. Many of the problems over which he must necessarily fret and is well advised to fret, on the other hand, are problems which would not occur to a reader of the original.

People seem to have a somewhat unreal notion of the problems that seriously discommode the translator. This is most natural, for many of them come as surprises. A reading of the original may not suggest that they are going to be problems at all, and then suddenly there they are. Some of the matters which people are prone to think difficult, or perhaps wish to think difficult, are not really of much consequence.

One is always being asked by Japanese whether Japanese literature is *really* translatable. An answer is at hand: that there are untranslatable things in any literature, and that the weight of the untranslatable is probably no greater in Japanese than in most other literatures. It is not at all difficult to think of untranslatable things in English and American literature. *Huckleberry Finn*, so popular among the young of the land, if one is to judge from *bunkobon* sales, might head the list.

One knows what the next question is going to be, and is wise to have an answer ready: "But what about *wabi* and *sabi*?" They are essentially critical terms, and do not often ask for specific translation except when one is translating criticism. The Heian *monogatari* happens to be not very well supplied with the commodities to which they refer, but that is beside the point. *Wabi* and *sabi* are abstractions from something that tends to be very specific in the best of medieval literature, in which it is most prevalent. One translates the specifics, and, being a product of the Western tradition oneself, does not doubt that a fair number of Western readers will get the point.

The notion of purposeful restraint is certainly not alien to Western culture. In its obituary for a famous fashion designer, the *New York Times* quoted her as being of the view that well-dressed women do not wear fuchsia, and it used to be said of the best tailoring establishments in London that they carried only gray and black materials. These seem excellent examples of Western *sabi*. To translate the word itself one may have to resort to explanation and circumlocution, but to translate the situations which are its concrete and practical embodiment, one musters the details and lets the reader take over.

Shibumi, a closely allied concept which has had considerably

more vogue in voguish circles than either *wabi* or *sabi*, presents even fewer problems because there happens to be an English adjective, "austere," that covers virtually the same range of meanings as *shibui*. "Austere" and *shibui* first referred to flavor or the act of tasting, and spread to include color and deportment. It is rare for two complex words to cover almost exactly the same spectrum of meanings, and that these two should do so tells us that austerity and restraint are by no means uniquely Japanese. They may be more central to the medieval Japanese tradition than they are to most traditions, but this does not make them incomprehensible.

Abstract words present difficulties when the translation is of a critical or a philosophical tract. The border between these realms and literature is by no means clear, but it may be said that literature generally tends to the concrete. The difficult problems, therefore, do not have to do with ethereal matters like the nature of the *shibui* and the austere, but with down-to-earth, concrete matters.

There is the very concrete and quotidian matter of the names people are to be called by. It has been said above that all the problems of translating Japanese into English are also present in the reverse direction, but this may be an exception. One can think of names in English and American literature that quite lose their flavor when put into *katakana*. Dickens and Trollope are full of them, and there is the list in *The Great Gatsby* of the people who came to Gatsby's in the summer. One suspects that most Japanese readers make mental note of the first *kana* syllable against the possibility that the name will occur again, and forget about the rest, and translators into Japanese might well consider the possibility of translating "Pecksniff" rather than merely transliterating.

This is not the problem, however, that occurs in translating a Heian *monogatari*. It is rather that there are scarcely any personal names. There are shifting designations, but, save for a few underlings, there are no names. It is a problem that does not exist in translating among the languages of the West. Even Kafka's "K." is a name, of sorts. It is one of those problems that are not anticipated until suddenly they are there.

It might be possible to translate the shifting designations literally. That is what translators into modern Japanese do, for the most part, and it is what Sadler did in his translation of the *Heike Monogatari*. It has, however, always seemed one of the less satisfactory aspects of the translation. One has great trouble opening it in the middle and knowing who is the actor and who is being acted upon. The problem is far more difficult in a Heian *monogatari* both because it would

have been quite simple for Sadler to use personal names, which, except perhaps for some of the sad women, are perfectly well known, and because there are in Heian prose such numbers of subjectless verbs that demand subjects in English.

The *Genji* has never ceased to be popular, and a vast body of writing has grown up about it. In the course of the centuries it became necessary to give "names" to the characters, though numbers would have done just as well—something for quick reference, immediately recognizable to all readers. So it was that Genji's first wife came to be known as Aoi no Ue, "the lady of the *Aoi* chapter," and Genji's greatest love as Murasaki no Ue, "the lady of the poem about the *Lithospermum erythrorhizon*." The easy and sensible thing, obviously, would be to use these traditional names.

But in practice it is not at all easy. A question immediately arises: when are the names to be introduced? There are no great difficulties with Genji's mother or Murasaki or Genji. The names by which they have traditionally been known are introduced almost as early as the characters themselves, and can be assigned on the spot. But what of Aoi, Kashiwagi, and Yūgiri?

Yūgiri takes his traditional name from a poem in the last chapter in which he figures prominently. The Uji chapters show him but fleetingly, in pompous middle age. The other two, Aoi and Kashiwagi, die in the chapters from which have come the names. Aoi presents a particularly difficult case because the title of the chapter comes from an exchange of poems in which she does not figure, and so, if the significance of the name is to be conveyed in translation, she must be "the lady of the *Aoi* chapter." The problem of finding an equivalent for, or approximation of, the chapter title will be touched upon in a moment, for it proved to be among the more recalcitrant ones. "Heartsease" came to mind as a possible translation for *aoi*, a vine with heart-shaped leaves that was the emblem of the Kamo Festival. It was suggested by the shape of the leaves and by the pun which *aoi* almost always is, and would have brought with it the very considerable recommendation that Aoi, the lady, could then be called Pansy, as Murasaki was called Violet in the Suematsu translation.

The use of the traditional designations is probably the only reasonable solution, but it is unsatisfactory. It means rudely forcing names upon Aoi and Kashiwagi, even though they have nothing even resembling names until after they are dead. It may seem strange to say that this is difficult to do, but it is. In a not very thickly populated work, like one of the Heian diaries, it is possible to re-

spect the practices of the original by not using names at all, and this is really much more comfortable than forcing names upon characters—and sometimes, insofar as they can be considered names at all, they are posthumous. In trying to imagine what Murasaki Shikibu would think of her English translations, I first of all see her as distressed at the very grave impropriety, the very bad taste, of constantly attaching proper nouns to well-bred people, when “the lady in the north wing” and “the middle councillor” would do quite as well.

Presently the poem from which the name Aoi derives does come along, and it seems necessary to explain what has happened, though it might be simpler to pretend that nothing at all has happened. To call Aoi and Kashiwagi by those names from the start and then finally come upon and explain the poems from which they derive gives the tale a prophetic, anticipatory look, even though it may have been noted in advance that there is nothing of the sort in the original. Not many people remember what they have read in introductions and notes, even among the few who read them with attention.

There is a widespread view that the *Genji*, like *Remembrance of Things Past*, with which it is so frequently compared, is a tightly organized piece of fiction, carefully worked out in advance, and carrying its end already in its beginning. This is a false view, however, arising perhaps from the much more appropriate comparison of the two works as exercises in psychological fiction. If the assigning of names in a way that can seem prophetic contributes to the impression that Murasaki Shikibu laid her plans well in advance, then it contributes to distortion and falsification. The *Genji* is very loosely organized. It builds up by a process akin to agglutination. At the end of the vast *monogatari*, with the Ukifune story, one can look back and see how beautifully the earlier sections have emphasized the tragedy, but it is very difficult indeed to imagine that Murasaki Shikibu had the tragedy in mind when she commenced writing, and indeed it is not possible to be certain whether or not “the end” was meant to be the end.

The translator can defer to the original in the cases of minor characters, and not assign them names. Such traditional designations as Suetsumuhana, Utsusemi, Nokiba no Ogi, and Hanachirusato will not be found in the new translation as proper nouns. They are translated, after a fashion, and so the ladies in question are referred to, as in the original, by indirection. Hanachirusato becomes “the lady of the orange blossoms,” that

being the blossom in question. "The lady of the village of falling blossoms" seemed altogether too cumbersome, and too poetic under the circumstances.

It is possible, and indeed expedient, to translate designations indicating place within the royal family, so that Hachinomiya becomes "the Eighth Prince," and Onna Sannomiya "the Third Princess," and this sort of thing can be made to do for lesser characters. It is not wholly satisfactory, however, because it has an exotic, mysteriously Oriental quality, and because there can be confusion, as when there are two Second Princesses of some importance. It will do, perhaps, for lesser characters, but enough of it is enough, and the sensible thing is to give the major characters names, strained and uncomfortable though the practice may sometimes seem.

Except for the two chapters, *Suma* and *Akashi*, that have well-known place names for their titles, all of the chapter titles in the new translation are translated. This is a significant departure from the Waley practice, to leave the chapter titles in the original when they can be interpreted as the names of characters. Waley thus makes it seem that several of the chapters derive their titles from the names, rather than the reverse, which is actually the case—or, more precisely, it is usually the case that the chapter derives its title and the character his or her name from the same incident or passage. The Waley practice has to recommend it that the strain caused by the assigning of names is significantly reduced, and perhaps it is, after all, the best solution, although the titles may seem less subtle than in the original.

It may be, of course, that the chapter titles were not a part of the original at all. We cannot be sure that Murasaki Shikibu herself thought them up, and the fact that there are alternative titles for some chapters suggests that the process may have been a gradual and cumulative one. It is a fact, however, that none of the chapter titles are taken from the names of characters (scarcely to be wondered at, since there are so few genuine names). To suggest that some do is to distort the original, or at least the text as it has come down to us.

The matter of how to render the chapter titles was very troublesome. Probably word for word the chapter titles took more time than any other part of the text. Despite the time and the trouble taken, several of them do not even now seem quite right. The very first is an example, because it contains the name of a not very familiar tree. The translation of flora is a chronic problem all through the tale, particularly so when plant names are given especial prominence as

chapter titles or parts of them. It seems especially perverse that there should be an unwieldy plant name at the very beginning of the tale. "Paulownia" sounds like a word made up especially for creating an aura of the exotic, and of course *kiri* is a perfectly simple and ordinary word.

I thought of changing it to something more familiar. A draft somewhere along the way carried as its first chapter title "The Persimmon Court," but helpful readers of the manuscript thought that this would be inviting trouble. Another possibility was to leave the name in the original. If "shittim" has been acceptable all these centuries to readers of the King James Bible, then *kiri* ought to bother people very little. However, the thought of having ugly italics in the very first chapter title was very distasteful to me, and so it finally became the literal thing, "The Paulownia Court."

The second chapter title is the only one among the fifty-three that may seem to be in imitation of Waley. I am not sure whether it is or not—whether, in the absence of the Waley example, it would have become what it did become. The title is the name of a mythical plant, and so the name of another mythical plant might have served best to translate it. It seems there are plants in Western folklore with similar proclivities, and so the decision to translate directly, as Waley did, and call a *hahakigi* a "broom tree" is open to disparagement as a lazy one. The search for Western equivalents was not pursued far enough. Besides not being mythical, "broom" has the disadvantage of referring to an actual tree or bush. Flower fanciers will translate back into Japanese, and observe that there is no mention of *enishida* all through the great length of the *Genji*.

"Beneath the Oak," for *Shiigamoto*, is another botanical title that seems less than satisfactory. The trouble is that the *shii* is not an oak, but it is related to the chestnuts. The most recent *Kenkyusha* calls it a chinquapin, and its predecessor has "pasania." Neither of these seemed exactly the sort of thing one would wish to have in one's table of contents. "Beneath the Chestnut" might do, although it calls to mind rather too vividly the famous parlor poem. What was called for in the context, having to do with the death of the Eighth Prince and the loss of the comfort and protection he provided, was a great, strong, sheltering tree, and the mighty oak seemed the thing. This solution no longer seems a very happy one, however. A *shii* is not an oak, and the fact that the *kashiwagi*, which is an oak, appears in another chapter title makes the English table of contents seem less resourceful and diversified in its natural imagery than the Japanese.

In several chapter titles there arises the problem that is so persis-

tent in *Kokinshū* and *Genji* poetry, what to do with decorated language. Several titles contain puns: *Aoi*, *Miotsukushi*, *Miyuki*, and (a half-hearted sort of pun) *Yadorigi*. The only one which it seemed important to preserve in some measure, or at least to hint at the existence of, was the first. The other three are not common puns, nor do they introduce themes or chains of incidents important in the later narrative. *Aoi* seemed different for several reasons: the pun is extremely common in poetry, and it recurs frequently in the *Genji* itself; the *Genji* is fundamentally a love story, and this is the pun among them all with amorous significance; and of course there is its traditional function as a name for Genji's first wife, and also as one of the names for the great Kamo Festival, at each recurrence of which poetic exchanges seek to refresh the old pun.

So what was needed, it seemed, was a plant with amorous implications, and, if possible, one that resembled the *aoi* of the festival, not the hollyhock, with its stiff lines and beanpole heights, but a vine with the heart-shaped leaf best known these days in the Tokugawa family crest. Of actual plants, heartsease seemed fairly appropriate, suggesting emotional balm, as also does *aoi*, and though not a vine having leaves of vaguely the right shape. As has been suggested above, it could have been put to use towards livening up the nomenclature a bit; but "heartsease" is a tiring sort of word if it must appear as often as *aoi* does. Presently "heartvine" emerged as the least inadequate solution to the problem. There is a vague and indirect reference to the emotions, there is the category of plants to which the Heian *aoi* belongs, and it might be hoped that the shape of the *aoi* leaf is also suggested. The chief difficulty is that it is an invented word, not to be found in the most comprehensive of dictionaries, and the solution is therefore by no means perfect, though I must confess to being rather proud of it.

Aside from "Beneath the Oak," which substitutes one tree for another, and "Heartvine," which substitutes a neologism for a most venerable word, "The Orange Blossoms" is probably the chapter title in my translation that departs farthest from the original. *Hanachirusato* is a strange little chapter, the shortest of the fifty-four, and of scarcely any significance except that it introduces the lady who is presently to occupy the northeast quarter at Rokujō and become Yūgiri's foster mother. It does not seem to have figured in the long and complex debate over the order in which the chapters were written, and so the assumption seems to be that it was all along right there where we have it, between the departure of the Rokujō lady for Ise and Genji's departure for Suma. It has a strangely

tacked-on look all the same, as if it might have occurred to Murasaki Shikibu, somewhere along the way, that she was not going to have enough ladies, despite all of Genji's amorous encounters, to keep his household going.

The chapter title would be of little importance save for the fact that it becomes a sort of name for the lady. Two things seemed necessary, given this fact: that it not be too mannered to serve as a sobriquet, the lady being one of the lesser ones in whose cases it was early decided that there would be no proper name at all; and that it not seem to single an insignificant chapter out for special attention. To assign the pertinent words from the *hanachirusato* poem was a possibility, but that quickly came to seem too "poetic." The same objection can be made to the Waley device of translating the title literally and then using it to designate the lady.

Additional objection might be made that the Waley version gives a misleading notion of the circumstances in which the lady is initially found. She is not a village dweller at all in the ordinary sense of the term, and the images which the word "village" suggests are not a part of her life or surroundings. We do not know how far Genji must journey to visit her, though we do know that he makes a rather pointless stop at a lady's house beyond the Nakagawa. (Pointlessness is characteristic of the chapter, save for the introduction of the lady.) *Sato* could refer to any part of the city except the palace grounds, and it was used even for an emperor's abode when he was living away from the palace. "Village" will do to translate the *hanachirusato* poem, but it becomes misleading when it must be used repeatedly to describe the lady's early life and to designate the lady herself.

The name of the *tachibana* blossom came to seem the most practical device, being fairly short and not too poetic a designation of a rather ordinary lady and a less than ordinary chapter. The symbolic aspects of the orange blossom are not the same in the two languages, but the fact that it carries fairly rich connotations in both languages seemed an advantage. Thus the title for a chapter that would scarcely have been missed if it had disappeared caused more trouble than the title for the great *Wakana* sequence, which is about a tenth of the whole story. So it is, indeed, that problems which readers of the original are not likely to think of at all can cause the most trouble.

The problem of translating titles is by no means limited to the *Genji*. The lameness of titles is one of the major defects of translation from Japanese, and indeed perhaps of translation in general.

Though it may not be exactly lame, *Swann's Way* does seem a misleading translation of Proust's original. Some titles quite pass lameness. *Master Darling* is a famous example. Without going to such an extreme, one has little trouble offering examples of titles that simply are not good.

Sometimes inadequacies later become apparent in what initially seemed a good idea, and something less vulnerable but also less interesting must be settled upon. *Afternoon Drag* seems lovely for Mishima's *Gogo no Eikō* until one remembers the slang connotations, and so it becomes *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea*. *The Makioka Sisters* is certainly more pedestrian than *Sasameyuki*, but no single English word would do, obviously, by way of literal translation, and something seemed wrong with every adjective that could be associated with snow. The title finally chosen is at least recommended by the fact that it resembles one of the titles, *Three Sisters*, considered by Tanizaki himself. Indeed it is an improvement, since there are four sisters, even if one of them is not very important.

Kawabata's *The Sound of the Mountain* provides in its chapter titles a problem that in the end came to seem insoluble. They uniformly follow the pattern set by the first chapter, which gives the novel its title. Each consists of two nouns separated by the genitive particle *no*. The effect seemed pleasant and ingenious in the original table of contents, and therefore seemed worth trying to duplicate. The introduction of the definite article into the first chapter title rather dimmed the prospects, however, since "Sound of Mountain" did not seem very successful except perhaps as an exercise in quaintness. It quickly became apparent that in some instances prepositions other than "of" would have to be used, or that the genitive form of the noun would obviate the need for any preposition at all. So the endeavor was abandoned, not with enormous reluctance.

It was a comfort, in discussing the problem with Kawabata himself, to learn that the uniform pattern of the original chapter titles was thought by many to be somewhat precious, and he doubted whether, if it were all his to do over again, he would attempt anything so cleverly tidy. If we may assume that the device is in bad taste, however, it introduces another interesting problem in the theory of translation. I would probably have been more satisfied if I had been able to imitate the bad taste along with the good, and would argue that it is the duty of the translator to do exactly that.

Critics and commentators of various sorts are always remarking that a translator has "improved" upon his original, and the tone and

context tell us that the remark is meant as praise. It is not difficult to improve upon an original. To cut an offending detail is very simple indeed, and there is probably no extended piece of fiction, even including the best of Jane Austen, that is quite without offending details. The endeavor to be faithful, imitating defects along with virtues, is actually far more arduous than the endeavor to “improve.”

Sometimes the translator cannot help himself. If the irregular nature of the English chapter titles for *The Sound of the Mountain* is an improvement over a too regular original, then it is an improvement that could not be helped. Translators of Dreiser into almost any language must feel that, in spite of themselves, they are improving. If he is put into plain, pedestrian, but still good language, then his style has been improved upon.

This, however, is a matter which an editor may hold to be within his province, but over which a translator should deny himself jurisdiction. Waley may have thought that he was improving when he cut the whole of the thirty-eighth chapter from his *Genji* translation, though whether or not it was his right to do so is another matter.

The view has been offered above that it is not especially difficult to convey a sense of *wabi* and *sabi*. What must be done is to translate the specifics, and leave the reader to surmise the aesthetic principle that emerges from them. This may be an excellent theory when the specifics are familiar, but difficulties arise from unfamiliar specifics.

It is its intentness upon very concrete details of nature, and not its more ineffable aspects, that is responsible for making so much Tokugawa poetry untranslatable. Sometimes this is because the details themselves are unfamiliar, and sometimes it is because no one on the east side of the Pacific has paid them sufficient attention to be able to give them seasonal connotations. The flow of the seasons is of course the very essence of haiku. A *saijiki* quite brims with natural details that are untranslatable for one or both of these reasons. “The first bonito” is not likely to inspire anything, except wonder that it should be worth noticing.

Nature may not be as important in the *Genji* as it is in haiku, but it is very important all the same, probably more important than in any long Western novel. The *Genji* is an indoor novel, or *monogatari*, in the sense that it is about ladies who almost never go out of doors. One important lady, Tamakazura, makes a difficult journey on foot, but that is not the usual way. *Genji* ladies stay indoors, as not even the ladies of Jane Austen do, and certainly

some of these are of very sedentary and secluded habits. Yet the *Genji* is an outdoor book as are none of Jane Austen's. There is no clear boundary between indoors and out. The outdoors is always coming in—or rather, it is always there, in the lives of the ladies.

It seems a great pity that there is no tea in the *Genji*, not so much because the “tea ceremony,” so very Japanese and so very marketable, would be an asset to any story, as because it is the supreme example of an Oriental plant that has traveled across the world and taken its Chinese name with it. Very few people can be aware when they ask for a cup of it that they are using a Chinese loan word.

Even when an Oriental plant is familiar enough, its name tends to derive from cumbersome Latin or Greek, or the name of the person who brought it from the Orient, or the name of someone whom that person wished to flatter. If rhythm is important, especially in translating poetry, then it does seem unfortunate that these made-up names should take so much longer than their originals, and seem so much grosser. Chrysanthemum, wistaria, paulownia—each of these renders two brisk, clipped syllables of Japanese, or Sino-Japanese. The chrysanthemum and the wistaria are familiar enough plants, however one may feel about the names. Some of the plants that are most frequently mentioned in the *Genji* and are among the most evocative natural symbols have not made their way across the water at all or are not widely known in Europe and America.

When these names appear, and some of them do appear very frequently, there are several devices to which the translator can resort. He can provide an approximation of the name or give that of a plant which in some of its aspects seems to duplicate certain important aspects of the original. The grass from which comes the traditional name of the most important lady in the *monogatari*, and from which is thought also to derive the appellation by which the author is known, is a member of the gromwell family. A purple dye of medium brilliance and low saturation is made from its roots. If the practice is followed of using the traditional appellations as the names of characters, then most instances of its appearance are no problem at all. The lady's name is the lady's name, and the attentive reader may remember its origins, and the inattentive reader may not, and that is that. Unfortunately the plant has important symbolic functions, signifying affinity or intimacy. Thus far “gromwell” might conceivably do, but, unfortunately again, it appears in a chapter title, where somehow that word would stand out as heavy to the point of grossness and almost ludicrous in its incongruity.

“Lavender” is in botanical terms completely inaccurate. The

two plants are unrelated. They do have in common, however, the fact that each suggests a color, and that each can be put to pleasant use after it has withered.

Another device is to use a name that has a certain scientific precision but also a certain mystery about it. This can be done with two plants that appear very frequently in the *Genji* but are unfamiliar in most parts of the West: the *yamabuki*, a radiant symbol of high spring, associated especially with an important lady, Tamakazura, and the *hagi*, most poignant symbol of autumn decline, as the maple is the symbol of autumn brightness. The *hagi* is central to the last exchange of poems between Genji and his great love, Murasaki, and is seen blooming outside in the loveliest scene from the *Genji* scrolls. Waley calls the *yamabuki* “kerria,” which is the generic half of its botanical name. The same might be done with *hagi*, making it “lespedeza.” This has the advantage of having some currency in English, and the several disadvantages that the plant going by the name is not, on the eastern side of the Pacific, admired for its beauty, that the image it calls up (if any) is more likely to be of a fallow summer field than an autumn garden, and that it is an ungainly word, badly out of place in the brief flight of elegance that is the *Genji* poem. “Kerria” has the great disadvantage that no one except a scattering of botanists and garden fanciers is likely to know the word, which does not appear in standard dictionaries.

Approximation is also possible in these important cases, but the approximations that have most commonly been resorted to, while they have more scientific validity than does “lavender” for *murasaki*, are misleading. *Yamabuki* is often called “yellow rose,” but though related to the rose, it is very different, somehow, from the yellow rose of Texas. It blooms briefly at the height of spring, a sudden flood and a sudden withdrawal of the richest of yellows just after the cherry blossoms have fallen, and in its native and most admired state it is a small, single-petaled flower. The yellow rose of Texas is larger and showier, and slower in its way of blooming, both as to the season it chooses and as to the time it requires in going about the business. The use of “Bush clover” for *hagi* suggests summer and the utilitarian, and *hagi* is neither of these things.

Another possibility is to leave the names in the original, giving explanation upon first appearance. This is the solution that will be found in the new *Genji* translation. It did not at the time seem a happy one—only the least offensive of several possibilities—but it has venerable precedents. There are all those flowers and herbs and trees which are left in rich, sensuous Arabic, and which make trans-

lations from Arabic quite ooze sensuality; and then too there is "shittim." There are also numerous instances, "myrrh" and "tulip" among them, of Near Eastern botanical terms that have been taken into English. From the Far East there is "tea." Perhaps it is unreasonable to hope that *yamabuki* and *hagi* will one day join the company. To leave them in the original has come to seem a decent enough solution even so, but it is not ideal.

Another possibility is to make a word up. This is what was done with *aoi*, made into "heartvine," and it is a device that has been much favored by lexicographers, who have caused *kikyō* to become "balloonflower," and *hōzuki* "Japanese bladder cherry." The practice must be maddening to those who have a certain interest in plants and no resort to the original.

The only thing that can be said by way of summary is that each of these possibilities will in some cases seem the best and in some cases the worst. Perhaps the most that can be expected of the translator is that, having made his decision, he stick by it. Consistency is the only blanket rule that can be laid down, but not even that is easy of application. As every editor knows, it is astonishingly easy, even with the best intent in the world, to fall into inconsistency.

Colors are also very troublesome in most Heian fiction. The beauty of which Murasaki Shikibu's characters are so exquisitely aware is in large measure visual, and one quickly learns how inadequate words are for conveying that beauty. It is not possible to convey a sense of green to a blind person. Dictionary definitions offer such locutions as "the color of grass," but of course these are as incomprehensible to the blind person as is the abstraction. We are almost all of us blind when it comes to the colors and color combinations that were so much a part of Genji's life. Delicate pastels have a way of being reduced to primary colors by the inadequate vocabulary at the translator's disposal. A tableau that came across to the original audience as one of extraordinary loveliness, because the original audience caught the signs properly, may seem in translation merely gaudy.

"They had a delightful time. . . . Women and little girls clustered at all the doors. The girls in green robes and trains of purple gossamer seemed to be from Tamakazura's wing. . . . Her women too were in festive dress, trains blending from lavender at the waist down to deeper purple and formal jackets the color of carnation shoots.

"The lady of the orange blossoms had her little girls in very dignified dress, singlets of deep pink and trains of red lined with green."

This is a scene from the twenty-fifth chapter, "Fireflies." There are many such scenes, in which the putting together of a perfect ensemble is all-important. In translation they are likely to seem like a great deal of color flung indiscriminately about. The importance of the front and lining of the same robe is quite lost unless it is explained that the two merged, like water colors. We can guess how lovely the colors must have been from the work of modern craftsmen who use traditional materials, but the vocabulary at hand is altogether too gross to convey the loveliness.

There are ways, perhaps, in which it might be conveyed to the reader with a specialized knowledge of light waves and a willingness to put up with a great many words having to do with them. "A green of medium saturation and high brilliance, to be found a quarter of the way along the spectrum from pure green to yellow, with also a touch of red": doubtless there is not a single subtle color among them all for which this sort of thing could not be done. Of course even the well-initiated reader has to stop and think a moment, and the prospect of such wordiness every time a color, not primary, is mentioned becomes a heavy weight upon the spirit of both reader and translator. It will not do.

Examination of color charts in search of a near English equivalent will sometimes do, but English terminology seems inexact—or perhaps it is the printers who are inexact. There can be considerable variation from one chart to another for the same color. There is also the fact that many color designations do not travel well to a Japanese setting. "Sienna" may be the nearest word to the Japanese, but it does not seem right to have ancient Japanese persons wearing a color that takes its name from an Italian hill town.

One must settle for approximations, and be resigned to the fact that attentive readers may find the color schemes noisy and even mad. There is some comfort in the thought that readers do not pay much attention to clothes anyway (Waley seems to have been very impatient with them); but this of course is to admit that there is no good solution to the problem—and to hope that one of the things which most delighted the shining Genji will be of no interest at all to the modern reader in English.

Living arrangements—"life style," as they keep saying on term papers—present another set of difficult specifics. Apparently on the assumption that life in Japan was very remote and few of his readers would ever go and have a look at it, Waley sought to transform the setting into something more familiar. He put his characters into rooms furnished in a vaguely Western fashion. He lifted them from the floor, and put them upon legged objects. He seemed to change

his mind from time to time as to exactly what and where the new setting might be. It seems to shift back and forth between Hampden Court and Constantinople. Whichever the place, it is clear that his ladies and gentlemen are not on the floor, where, in the original, we find them most of the time, unless they are emperors holding court. Sometimes the westernized setting leads to inconvenience, as when a "couch" must be shoved across a floor that a lady may receive a visitor at a "window."

It is to be hoped, in any event, that this sort of device is no longer necessary. Japanese living arrangements, except for those who have moved into apartment houses, have been very conservative, remarkably unchanged in their essentials from a thousand years ago. People with a few days and a few hundred dollars to spare can go and have a look at them, and have done so in such numbers that Waley's devices seem ingenious but unnecessary. It was hoped that illustrations would help, but they did not prove entirely successful. Some reviewers professed to be more puzzled by the illustrations than by the text. Certainly the pudgy Genji of the illustrations does not by modern standards seem the ravingly handsome man Murasaki Shikibu keeps insisting he is, and so it may be that the illustrations raise more questions than they answer.

In one matter, having to do not with the living arrangements themselves but rather with the way people moved about in them, cheating seemed necessary. When they knew that they were being observed by men or by ladies of similar or higher rank, ladies did not walk. They pulled and slid themselves across the floor, half slithering and half crawling. There is a delightful scene at the end of the forty-sixth chapter, "Beneath the Oak," in which Kaoru peeps in upon the two Uji princesses. Much of the delicious sense of having a peep comes from the fact that, unaware that they are observed, they are upright.

Neither "crawling" nor "slithering" is a word that adds much to the air of elegance, and so it seems better to have them move much as a Western lady might move. It may be puzzling, in these circumstances, that a gentleman reaches out for a fleeing lady and catches the hem of her skirt, but here perhaps the illustrations do help, revealing the position of the gentleman and the remoteness of the hem from the lady.

The list of specifics that cause trouble could be greatly expanded. It could, for instance, be made to include fauna as well as flora. The rat does not appear in the *Genji* save in references to the day and hour of that name, and the creature commonly called badger does

not appear at all. It is worth noting that the chummy associations of *nezumi* sometimes make “mouse” seem a fitter translation, and that the *tanuki* is not a badger at all, but a kind of wild dog. There are badgers in Japan, but they are *anaguma*. The *Genji* is replete with insects, and they cause problems, because they have generally pleasant associations. The only insect admired even slightly in the West for its voice is the cricket, and so it may seem best to make all the pleasantly singing insects into crickets.

These, in any event, are the matters that cause difficulties, and *wabi* and *sabi* can be allowed to fall where they may.

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