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Dramatic Works

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## The Translation into English of Japanese Drama: *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*

Translation in the context of late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century dramatic trends and the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works

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### Abstract

This paper looks at the translation from Japanese to English of a play by Iwasaki Masahiro, *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*, which was commissioned by the Japan Foundation in 2003. The aim is to briefly put this commission into the context of trends in Japanese theatre since the early 1980s and of international exchange through theatre. Problems of translation, specifically of acculturation and naturalisation, reverence and playability are addressed with specific examples.

本稿は、2003年に日本国際交流基金に依頼された、岩崎正裕作『ここからは遠い国』の翻訳に関するものである。1980年代の日本演劇界の傾向と、演劇を通して行われた国際交流について概観する。また、翻訳上のさまざまな問題点として、特に比較文化的な視点と演劇特有の言語（表現）が探求される。

### Key words

acculturation, drama, flow, international exchange, naturalisation, playability, reverence, theatre, translation

### Introduction

In the summer of 2003 I was approached by the Japan Foundation with a request that I join a team of translators working on translations into English of Japanese plays written and produced in the 1990s and the early 2000s: The Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works. I subsequently joined a team of translators which has been working on a number of plays selected as being representative of the best of Japanese drama at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The selection was made at the behest of the Japan Foundation by a committee made up of playwrights and drama critics from all over Japan. Not initially intended for publication, these translations are to be sent directly to theatres in English-speaking countries with a view to their being staged there, either as full productions or as readings.

Since the summer of 2003, I have completed a translation of Iwasaki Masahiro's<sup>1)</sup> *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni* and am currently working on a translation of Matsuo Suzuki's play *Machine Nikki*. I have also completed a literal translation of Suzue Toshio's *Ureshii Asa Wo Ki No Shita De*.

The literal translation of Suzue's work (a 'literal translation' is a translation that includes as much of the nuance of the original as possible, together with detailed notes on alternative meanings, background cultural and other information) was made at the request of the Traverse Theatre in Edinburgh, Scotland, where, in 2004, Suzue Toshio was Writer in Residence. The Traverse Theatre, known for its productions and readings of works by non-English speaking playwrights, linked Suzue with the Scottish playwright, David Harrower. In a project supported by both the Japan Foundation and the British Council in Tokyo, plays by Harrower and a fellow British playwright, Nicola McCartney, were translated into Japanese and read at Ai Hall, Itami (Osaka) and at the Setagaya Public Theatre in Tokyo. Using my translation, and following detailed discussions with Suzue in Japan in March 2004, Harrower reworked Suzue's play into a Scottish context. A reading of the resulting work in progress, *A Happy Morning Under a Tree*, took place at the Traverse Theatre on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2004, followed by a question and answer session with Suzue and the Edinburgh audience.

I plan to look at the challenges posed by the production of this literal translation, and its reworking into English, in detail in a future paper. This paper will put the Japan Foundation translation project into the context of current trends in Japanese theatre and international exchange through theatre, but will deal mainly with the challenges of translating drama from Japanese to English for this purpose. I intend to deal specifically with my translation of Iwasaki Masahiro's *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*. I am indebted to Inaba Mariko of the Japan Foundation who initially approached me with the request for my help and who has so kindly assisted me both in translation and with the collection of background information.

### A Brief Survey of Japanese Theatre at the Turn of the Twenty First Century and Japanese Theatre Abroad

In the last two decades of the twentieth century, and the first four years of the twenty first, the Japanese theatre scene has undergone many changes, reflecting in various ways the shifts in the economic, social and political fortunes of Japan.

In the boom years of the 1980s, there was a great deal of theatrical activity, particularly in the urban centres of Tokyo and Osaka. During the decade, the number of small theatre troupes in Tokyo alone grew to over 300. Many new plays were written and audiences were treated to a wide range of theatre, sometimes comic and lightweight, sometimes dealing with a bleaker view of the present, and of a future of sci-fi, war and destruction. In the continuing tradition of *Angora*, the Underground Theatre movement which had emerged in

the 1960s, works were characteristically performance-based, rather than text based. They were most often fast-paced and designed to entertain. Unfortunately, many performances were also criticised for amateurism and it has been said that the 1980s were “a time of mass production of immature performances [when] any congenial group of friends could put on a show.”<sup>2)</sup>

The 1980s “Bubble Years” also saw the rise of larger scale theatre activity paid for by wealthy corporations and local governments. Cities all over Japan saw the construction of enormous complexes which combined shopping, office and leisure facilities. Many of these included large and well-equipped theatres. Major examples in Tokyo included the Spiral Hall, which was opened in 1985, and the Ginza Saison Theatre, opened in 1987. The Kintetsu Theatre was a similar project in Osaka, opening in 1985.

The 1990s brought a great change in both the economic and social conditions of Japan and also of the theatre scene. The decade was marked by the bursting of the bubble economy and the beginning of the Gulf War. At the beginning of 1995, the Great Hanshin Earthquake killed 6,430 and destroyed a quarter of a million homes. In March of the same year, Tokyo suffered a coordinated terrorist attack on the subway system carried out by members of the religious sect, Oum Shinrikyō. Members of the sect had electioneered in the House of Representatives election of 1990, gaining no seats but signifying a new and worrying phenomenon in the nation’s politics. In 1993, thirty eight years of political monopoly by the Liberal Democratic Party ended with the coalition government of Prime Minister Hosokawa.

As Eisuke Shichiji points out in his introduction to Half a Century of Japanese Theatre II 1990s Part 2<sup>3)</sup>, it is an illusion to think that theatrical trends change simply in response to a change in decade. However, there is no doubt that trends in the theatre did change radically in response to the sombre economic, social and political changes that took place in Japan the 1990s. Hasabe Hiroshi explains it thus: “... words uttered on stage had lost their efficacy. Indeed the little theatre, which had been the vanguard of the Tokyo theatre scene from the 1960s to the 1980s, receded into the background. The underground theatre..., whose performance style included the shouting of lines and unusual use of the actor’s body had already become an object of ridicule. ... The subgenre of futuristic plays that had depicted war and destruction lost its socio-political rationale.

“What arose in their stead in the 1990s was the desire to give theatrical expression to what it feels and means to be alive. This does not mean that the realistic theatre has regained its voice, but that the theatre of the 1990s is focused on raising the question, ‘What is (the nature of) the real?’”<sup>4)</sup> This new style, sometimes known as *shizuka na geki* or “theatre of the quiet” in many ways revived the aspects of *Shingeki*, or New Theatre, which first appeared in the early twentieth century. With significance to the translator, the 1990s also saw “a revival of the old hierarchy of playwright, director and performer in that order.”<sup>5)</sup>

The decade saw an increase in theatre based in the provinces and many of the playwrights chosen for the Japanese Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works are based outside Tokyo. Both Iwasaki Masahiro and Suzue Toshiro came

to prominence after winning the OMS (Ogimachi Museum Square) Drama Award which was set up in 1994. Although the Ogimachi Museum Square which served as a base for theatre in Osaka, closed in 2003, the award played an important role in encouraging local playwrights, many of whom, including Iwasaki and Suzue, went on to win major national acclaim. Both of these playwrights have produced plays which reflect the style of the 1990s and it is these which are presently being translated as part of the project run by the Japan Foundation.

Returning to the 1980s and the international arena, there had been an increasing number of Japanese theatre productions abroad, continuing a small-scale trend, but now more often on a larger scale and often, indeed, surrounded by a great deal of hype. However, Nishidō Kōjin, in his essay Radicalism in the Theatre of the 1980s, comments that these “were showcasing Japan’s economic success. These overseas productions were after all unrelated to culture. Instead of a genuine interest in Japanese theatre, foreign audiences were curious of the phenomenon of ‘Japan Today’”<sup>6)</sup> (With this in mind, it is interesting to note comments made by Nakamura Kankurō who, on returning from a successful showing of Kabuki in New York in July 2004, complimented New York audiences on their interest in Kabuki as drama rather than the exotic spectacle of such things as men playing women’s roles and so on).

The 1990s saw a more concerted effort to introduce scripts of Japanese plays, translated into English, for production abroad by local companies as well as the dispatch of both small and large-scale Japanese productions. In contrast to the projects of the 1980s, many of the projects undergone in the 1990s were small scale, often relying on the increased participation of public theatres in international exchange programmes, in particular the Saitama Arts Theatre, the Setagaya Public Theatre and the Aichi Arts Centre.

In 1989 and 1993, the Japan Foundation published English-language introductions to drama artists in Theatre Japan, following this with a more comprehensive review of contemporary theatre as part of Performing Arts Now in Japan, a survey published in 1995. This has recently been updated in Performing Arts in Japan 2003. The Japan Foundation also provided part of the funding for the Japan Playwrights Association in their production of Half a Century of Japanese Theatre a series of translated Japanese plays that aims to present the best of Japanese theatre from the 1950s to the 1990s. The series has begun with the 1990s (published 1999 to 2002) and will work backwards in time with the aim “to offer performable English translations of modern Japanese plays, to encourage the production of such plays by foreign theatrical troupes and to extend possibilities for further international exchange in theatre.”<sup>7)</sup> The project in which I am involved continues this work.

### Iwasaki Masahiro and *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*

Born in 1963, Iwasaki is representative of the young playwright/directors active in small theatre circles in the Kansai region. In 1982 he entered the Theatrical Arts Department of the Osaka University of Arts and began performing in the same year, having formed his own theatre troupe, the Gekidan Osaka Taiyozoku (which changed its name to 199Q Taiyozoku

in 1990). He began writing plays in 1985. Iwasaki was winner of the first OMS prize in 1994, winning the prize again in 1997 with *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*, which was first performed at the Ai Hall, Itami, Osaka in 1996. Iwasaki teaches part time at Kinki University and is the Vice President of Osaka Contemporary Performing Arts Association.

*Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni* is set in Osaka around the time of the 1995 terrorist attack on the Tokyo metro. The attack was the work of the cult group Oum Shinrikyō, which Iwasaki uses as motif for the play. The play deals with the frustrations felt by young people in Japan in the late 1990s as they search for an identity and for room to be themselves. The play also paints a portrait of a family struggling to redefine relationships after the death of the mother and the involvement of the son in cult activity. The play quotes widely from Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Chekhov's *The Three Sisters*. Typically of Iwasaki, there is a blurring of the edges between reality and fantasy, time and space.

The protagonist, Yoshimasa, son of the Osanami family, was a member of a cult-like religious group. He has run away from the group and is living in a van in the garage of the family house. In the house live his father, Hitoshi, and his three sisters. His mother, Tomoko, has recently died of cancer. Hitoshi wants Yoshimasa to take over the family business, a small building firm, but finds himself quite unable to question Yoshimasa about the cult, the facts surrounding his running away, or about the future.

Yoshimasa's elder sister, Nobuko, tries to cope with helping her father run the family firm and with the sudden return of her brother, together with the implications this has had for the reputation of the family and its business amongst local people. The older of his younger sisters, Reiko, has left her job and is doing her best to look after her older brother. His third sister, Mari, is a university student. She is in the Drama Club and is about to put on *Hamlet* or *The Three Sisters* as the next production. She begs Yoshimasa to let her use the garage for rehearsals and lends him a copy of *Hamlet*.

Tomoko, who isn't aware that she is dead, is also in the garage. She is anxious about her husband and Yoshimasa and periodically attempts to give them guidance. Only Yoshimasa, his sister Mari and (at times) his father Hitoshi are aware of her presence.

These characters are joined by Komatsu, a man from the Bureau of Public Security who is undertaking an investigation into believers who have escaped their cult. He is accompanied by Kanemitsu who ran away with Yoshimasa. Komatsu asks Yoshimasa and Kanemitsu to return to the cult and report back to him on its internal affairs. Kanemitsu is almost ready to return, but not alone.

Yoshimasa resists Kanemitsu's return, but becomes unable to remain in the house and decides that the cult, even though it was a prison of sorts, was a prison that accepted him as he is. At this point his father collapses. Kanemitsu announces that he is going to a place far away. Later, we see him thrust an umbrella into a parcel wrapped in newspaper, in a recreation of the way in which the poisonous gas, sarin, was released to cause such havoc on the metro.

As the time-line of the play becomes more blurred, the audience are unsure as to

whether or not Yoshimasa has returned to the cult. However, it is clear by the end of the play that whether or not he returned, or indeed, he ever left, he has found a role for himself and hope for the future in standing as an independent candidate in the next election.

During the play, Yoshimasa has been reading and quoting from Hamlet. Meanwhile, his sister Mari, together with her friends Yuki and Kaori, have been rehearsing The Three Sisters. As the play draws to an end, the characters' lines become overlapped with those of the characters in Chekhov's play allowing a muted note of optimism to appear as the family move towards a new beginning.

### Translation of *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*

#### (1) "Acculturation" and "Naturalisation"

There are two major problems that face the translator of theatre. One is common to all translators of literary texts: how to deal with that which is common and understood in the original, source culture and language, but completely unfamiliar in the target culture and language. This problem is particularly relevant to the translation of theatre however, where the medium is immediate and where it is important that the audience's ability to follow the action and dialogue on stage is not unnecessarily impeded by the jarring of unfamiliar and confusing language and concepts (this is assuming that the translation is made for performance rather than literary study, a point to which I shall return).

Sirkku Aaltonen, in Time Sharing on Stage, identifies two main ways that the translator can deal with this problem: through acculturation or naturalisation, or through a combination of both. She defines acculturation as "the process which is employed to tone down the Foreign by appropriating the unfamiliar 'reality', and making the integration possible by blurring the borderline between the familiar and the unfamiliar." "Acculturation," she adds, "removes the cultural anchoring and eliminates or minimises the relationship to a specific culture." The process of naturalisation goes further, where "the Foreign becomes replaced by recognisable signs of the Self. Naturalisation denies the influence of the Foreign, and rewrites the play through some elements as if coming from the indigenous theatre and society."<sup>8)</sup>

A certain amount of acculturation will take place in the translation of any play from one language to another. In cases where the original language and culture are relatively far removed from those of the target language, such as between Japanese and English, the amount of acculturation may be relatively large.

Where not only differences in language and culture but also in the conventions of theatre themselves have been barriers to understanding, naturalisation is often used rather than acculturation, the play being taken wholly out of the original cultural context and put into another. This has been used by great effect, for example, by director Ninagawa Yukio in some of his settings of plays by Shakespeare. However, in the translation of Japanese drama

from the 1990s, the conventions of theatre themselves present relatively little barrier. In my translation of *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*, I have tried to avoid naturalisation into a British context. This has also in part been because the plays to be translated as part of the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works are not necessarily targeted for one specific country.

Although *Koko Kara Wa Yoi Kuni* is written in Osaka dialect, I have chosen to render it into standard English. There are arguments for the naturalisation of a dialect in the source play, but in this case I believe that the Japanese setting of this play is important and that there would be nothing to gain in naturalising the dialogue into British or American regional speech. While the themes of the alienation of youth and the struggle to reform family relationships are to some extent universal, the references to the Oum cult and its attack on the Tokyo metro are too important to marginalise or change.

Some obvious examples of acculturation run throughout my translation of *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*. One is the avoidance of translating the Japanese name-suffixes 「さん」 and 「ちゃん」. In most cases, I have simply left proper names stand alone, if they are first names and used familiarly. For example, in Komatsu's first scene with Nobuko<sup>9</sup> he reminds himself of the name and situation of her sisters. Referring to the youngest, Mari, he says:

ああ、真理ちゃんでしたっけ。…確かにまだ大学生でしたよね。

The use of the name suffix 「ちゃん」 indicates that Mari is probably considerably younger than Komatsu, possibly almost still a child, but rather than choosing to translate this with some phrase such as “little Mari” which would wrongly indicate that Komatsu were either familiar with Mari, or that he was being in some way patronising, I have simply translated this line, “Ah, yes. Mari, isn't it? Still a student, isn't she?” The fact that Mari is described as “still a student” is indication enough that she is the youngest sister (and worthy of the suffix 「ちゃん」). Also, in the preceding line, Nobuko specifically refers to her as 「一番下」. Literally, “the youngest”, I have translated this as “my little sister”, again reinforcing Mari's position in the family as described indirectly by both Komatsu and Nobuko. This is important, as it is the first time in the play that the family structure is explained to the audience.

Where the name suffix comes after a surname, I have tended to translate it into an English title, either for clarification or because a surname standing with no title in English would indicate a level of disrespect, which may not be present in the original. No title may alternatively indicate that the speaker is unacquainted with the person being referred to (which may or may not be the case in the original Japanese). For example, when Nobuko asks her father, who is confused, whether or not Komatsu has left, she uses the suffix thus:

あれ、小松さん帰ったん？<sup>10</sup>



This is translated, “Has Mr. Komatsu gone?” reflecting Nobuko’s level of respect for the policeman’s position. I have not added a title in Hitoshi’s bewildered reply:

小松？だれやそれ…                      ああ、わしは知らんで。

“Komatsu? Who’s that?” “I don’t know any Komatsu!”

There is one point in the translation, however, where I have retained the suffix 「さん」, simply rendering it “-san”. When Yoshimasa is first meeting Mari’s friends Yuki and Kaori, the following exchange takes place:

真理	お兄ちゃん、ユキちゃんとカオリちゃん。
ヨシマサ	名字は？
園部	あ、園部カオリです。すいまえん留守中勝手に。
別所	ごめんなさい。別所ユキです。真理ちゃんと大学で演劇サークルやっている。
ヨシマサ	あ、ハムレットの人？
別所	いえ、それはこの人です。カオリちゃん。
ヨシマサ	<u>あ、今返すわ、別所さん。</u>
別所	<u>いえ別所は私です。</u>
ヨシマサ	<u>ああ、園部さんか。</u> <sup>11)</sup>

Part of the point of this exchange is to establish which of the girls has which surname. Although it has not been necessary to use the assumption in any other part of the translation, I have assumed that the audience are aware that the suffix “-san” is sometimes used with Japanese names (although they may not be aware exactly when it is used and with what kind of nuance). I have relied on this assumption and, in an attempt to maintain some clarity, have translated the exchange thus:

MARI	Yoshimasa. Yuki and Kaori.
YOSHIMASA	Surnames?
SONOBE	Ah. I’m Kaori Sonobe. Sorry. We came in while you were out ...
BESSHO	Sorry. I’m Yuki Bessho. We’re in the drama club with Mari.
YOSHIMASA	Ah, so you’re the Hamlet person.
BESSHO	No. She’s the Hamlet person. Kaori.
YOSHIMASA	<u>Ah. You can have your book back, then, Bessho-san.</u>
BESSHO	<u>No, I’m Bessho.</u>
YOSHIMASA	<u>Sonobe-san, then.</u>

It should be remembered, of course, that on stage the audience can see who is talking during this exchange. I have not attempted to render any nuances of meaning that may be present

in the use of 「さん」 as oppose to 「ちゃん」 and so on, as they are not of importance here.

Another example where acculturation has often been necessary, is in dealing with the fact that the characters refer to each other using words that refer to their family relationships rather than their names. Yoshimasa's sisters most often refer to him as 「お兄ちゃん」, literally “older brother”, rather than using his name, both when referring to him directly and indirectly. As this would seem strange in English I have tended to revert to the use of Yoshimasa. I have retained the use of expressions describing a family relationship only when they are necessary for clarity.

As in any language there are several phrases in Japanese (for example, 「おじゃまします」, 「おくつろぎのところ、おじゃまします」, 「がんばってください」, 「ご苦労様」 and 「お帰りなさい、ただいま」) that, because of the non-existence of a similar cultural convention in English have to be dealt with in a particular way. Susan Bassnett describes the process thus (using the letters “SL” to refer to the source language and “TL” to refer to the target language):

- (1) Accept the untranslatability of the SL phrase in the TL on the linguistic level.
- (2) Accept the lack of a similar cultural convention in the TL.
- (3) Consider the range of TL phrases available, having regard to the presentation of class, status, age, sex of the speaker, his relationship to the listeners and the context of their meeting in the SL.
- (4) Consider the significance of the phrase in its particular context ...<sup>12)</sup>

The result of this process is a form of acculturation.

The scene where Kanemitsu is discovered hiding in the family garage by the ghost of Tomoko ends with his pushing Yoshimasa to the floor in a struggle. He is disguised as a woman and is afraid that this has blown his cover. He explains and then tries to smooth the situation with a set polite phrase:

あ、本当はこんな乱暴な女じゃないんです。ただ、ちょっとセツパつまってるもので。  
 …今度は手土産もっておじゃまします。<sup>13)</sup>

“Er, I’m not really such a rough girl. It’s just ... I’m in a bit of a fix. I will come again and I’ll, er, bring you some chocolates or something next time.” A literal translation of the last phrase would be something along the lines of “I will bring a small gift and be so rude as to bother you again with a visit”. I chose to translate 「今度は…おじゃまします」 with the simple phrase “I will come again”, with “I will” rather than “I’ll” to reflect some of the formality of the Japanese. I at first translated 「手土産をもって」 as “I must bring you a gift next time” which maintains the sense of formality. However, as this sounds rather too stilted I opted for the phrase “I’ll, er, bring you some chocolates or something next time,” chocolates being a standard gift in western cultures, which do not have such a strong tradition of gift

giving as Japan. I could have chosen to render this “flowers”, but rejected this because of the connection that the giving of flowers has with funerals. As Tomoko is a ghost, this might add a nuance of meaning that isn’t present in the original Japanese. The “er” was added to heighten the sense of Kanemitsu’s confusion.

Compare this with another use of「おじゃまします」. On her first visit to Mari’s house, Sonobe encounters Mari’s father and uses the standard polite greeting,

すいません、おくつろぎのところ、おじゃましまして。<sup>14)</sup>

Literally something along the lines of “sorry to bother you with a visit when you are resting” or “... when you are making yourself comfortable”. This is a standard polite phrase, but it also conveys something of Sonobe’s surprise that, even though it is still daytime, Mari’s father is wearing his pyjamas. I originally translated this “Sorry to disturb you when you are resting” but decided that this sounds somewhat awkward in English and although it conveys Sonobe’s politeness, it does not convey anything of her surprise at Hitoshi’s mode of dress. In my final translation I rendered this simply “Sorry to disturb you ...” This is an appropriate level of politeness but left unfinished (as it is in Japanese) also conveys Sonobe’s surprise as the sentence trails off with a hint of embarrassment or confusion.

One particular difficulty in translating this sort of standard polite expression from the Japanese, is that in Japanese the use is so common that the meaning is often almost lost to a Japanese listener. This is probably the case in the following exchange between Komatsu and Hitoshi’s employee Hinata:

小松	がんばってください。 <sup>15)</sup>
日向	ご苦労様です。

Komatsu’s phrase is a standard expression of encouragement for someone to put their best efforts into something and can have a range of meanings from “Work hard” to “I recognise that the situation in which you find yourself is not a particularly easy one.” The expression used by Hinata is a standard polite one indicating that the speaker recognises the efforts that are being made on the part of the person he is addressing.

With the above in mind, I originally chose to translate this short exchange:

KOMATSU	Work hard.
HINATA	Thank you, sir, and you.

The effect of this in English however, is to put too much emphasis on the fact that Komatsu is encouraging Hinata to work when this is not the case in the original Japanese. The two don’t know each other well and the phrase “work hard” is not commonly used between acquaintances in English, except perhaps with sarcasm. My final translation reads:

KOMATSU           Have a good day.  
HINATA             Thank you, sir, and you.

Although this translation takes the emphasis from “work” (which may or may not be present in the Japanese) it retains the feeling of what is, after all, a fairly normal, banal exchange. A “good” day was chosen rather than a “nice” day to avoid the particularly American sound of the latter, and Hinata’s reply was kept deliberately polite in keeping with his character and with the fact that this is a standard polite exchange.

Finally on the subject of phrases linked with a certain cultural convention, there is a further problem in translation when they are used for a particular dramatic effect by the characters on stage. At the beginning of the play, when Yoshimasa is lost in the fog, his mother’s ghost appears to him and repeats the phrase 「お帰り」 or 「お帰りなさい」. This is a standard expression used by those at home when a family member returns. It has no equivalent in English except, perhaps, “Welcome home”, which is used much less frequently. There is a common response, 「ただいま」, which Tomoko appears to be expecting from her son when she says:

お帰り…。何か言うことはないの。

Yoshimasa doesn’t give the expected response, but replies rudely:

うるさい。ほおっといてくれ。俺は今晚中に戻らなあかんのや。

To this, in a typical motherly fashion, Tomoko once again tries to prompt Yoshimasa to say the polite expression 「ただいま」:

ただいまやろ。帰ってきた人が言うのは。<sup>16)</sup>

This is an important exchange for two reasons. Firstly, the audience does not yet know for sure that the woman who has appeared in the fog is the (ghost of) Yoshimasa’s mother. Her welcoming him home, gently chiding him that he isn’t using the standard polite expression used when someone returns to the family house, helps the audience to make this inference. Secondly, it is not clear whether this scene is taking place on the road in the mountains or in the garage at Yoshimasa’s family home and the emphasis on “*returning home*” adds to this sense of mystery. This important exchange, therefore, must be translated carefully, with the English incorporating the sense of both of these.

A fairly direct translation which could be used may be as follows:

WOMAN           Welcome home! ... Well?  
BELIEVER B

- (YOSHIMASA) Oh shut up and leave me alone! I've got to get back tonight!
- WOMAN "It's good to be back." That's what you say when you get home, isn't it?

The problem with this translation is that, although there is an emphasis on "returning home" and something of the mother's chiding in the woman's (Tomoko's) words, "It's good to be back" is not what is generally said when someone returns home. The exchange may take place, but it sounds somewhat unnatural in English.

A better translation would be:

- WOMAN Welcome home! ... Well...?
- BELIEVER B
- (YOSHIMASA) Oh shut up and leave me alone! I've got to get back tonight!
- WOMAN Aren't you glad to be home?

This version avoids the awkward feeling that a Japanese cultural convention has been directly translated into English. The Woman (Tomoko)'s response, "Aren't you glad to be home?" retains the feeling of intimacy between the Woman and Believer B (Tomoko and Yoshimasa) while establishing the fact that she believes the action to be taking place at the family home.

While differing cultural conventions pose a difficulty to the translator and must be dealt with in a particular way, differing religious conventions pose a similar problem. Here however there is less need for acculturation due to the fact that the audience are more likely to be aware of, and therefore accept, religious differences in a Japanese play. Cultural conventions are difficult to render as they are very often unspoken. Although this is sometimes the case with religious conventions, these are generally easier to render, as to a certain extent the translator can rely on an expectation on the part of the audience that unfamiliar or difficult language may be used when matters of religion are being discussed.

One example of this in *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni* is the frequent mention of Tomoko's 「納骨」. The only common religious rite for the dead in the West is the funeral, but as these are generally held very soon after death, use of "funeral" in this translation would give a misleading sense of timing. As memorial services are not completely unknown, and assuming that the audience will have a certain tolerance for slightly unfamiliar expressions referring to religion, I have used the expression "memorial service", but have felt obliged to add a footnote explaining that this is a "Buddhist memorial service held 49 days after someone has died."

Similar, but slightly easier to deal with, is language relating to the cult with which Yoshimasa and Kanemitsu have been connected. This is somewhat simpler as there are cult religions in the West also which make use of a certain form of vocabulary. However, for extra

clarification, there are examples where I have chosen words in English that have a religious connotation and are familiar from, although not specific to, Christianity, even though the words in Japanese did not necessarily have the same religious connotations to them. For example, when speaking to Yoshimasa Komatsu refers to the cult attracting members through the use of

君らの誘惑マニュアル<sup>17)</sup>

While this could be accurately, but clumsily, translated “your manual for allurements”, I have chosen the term: “your ‘Instructions for Evangelism’”. On another occasion, Komatsu asks the two young men:

君ら無職か。それとも職業欄に宗教家って書く人？<sup>18)</sup>

“... you two haven’t got jobs, have you. Or are you the sort to write ‘believer’ under ‘profession?’” The problem here is how to translate the work 「宗教家」, possibilities being “man of religion” or the clumsy “religionist”. The choice of “believer” puts this firmly into a religious context, but also expresses some of the naïve certainty that Komatsu is suggesting that Yoshimasa and Kanemitsu have.

When Kanemitsu is unsure of Yoshimasa’s faith at an early point in the play, he accuses him of being 「揺れているやつ」<sup>19)</sup>. I initially rendered this phrase (literally “one who swings” or “one who wavers”), “waverer”, then “doubter”. Neither of these words, however, are clear enough in the English to be certain that the audience understand that it is Yoshimasa’s religious belief that is being referred to. In my final translation I once again chose a word that has specifically religious connotations and rendered this “someone who’s lost his faith”.

Examples of vocabulary that referred to the cult which I have *not* chosen to translate with religious vocabulary include the word that Kanemitsu uses for the headquarters of the cult nearest the Osanamis’ house, from whom he proposes to get help:

こっちの支部に行けば何とかしてくれるかもしれん。<sup>20)</sup>

The Japanese word, 「支部」 could be translated “group” or “branch”, or even “church”. I rejected the last of these because of its overtly Christian connotations. The translation “local branch” is possible, but as “branch” is generally used for banks, shops etc., potentially misleading. I at first translated this, “But if I go to the local group, they’ll probably do something for me.” The problem with this translation, however, is that there is likely to be some uncertainty in the minds of the audience as to what kind of group Kanemitsu is referring. To solve this problem, I finally settled on the translation, “But there’s a group of us near here – they’ll help if I ask.”

Finally on the subject of acculturation, an example where some of the flavour of

the Japanese is inevitably lost, but where understanding on the part of the audience is guaranteed. When Yoshimasa wakes from his sleep at the end of the play, it seems that he has dreamed of his own future. He says that he's seen himself standing near the station, 「タスキがけに白手袋」, “wearing a sash and white gloves”.

To a Japanese audience it is immediately clear that in the dream Yoshimasa was appearing as a candidate in an election. A direct translation of this however would be extremely confusing to a Western audience for which reason I changed the sash and white gloves into a poster and manifesto. Although this necessitated some changes later in the translation when Mari and her friends were helping to write Yoshimasa's name on his sash, this translation made it immediately clear that Yoshimasa was talking about an election. Thus a realisation on the part of the audience that is vital at this point in the play is maintained.

## (2) “Reverence” and “Playability”

In a thorough discussion of translation for the theatre, Sirkku Aaltonen<sup>21)</sup> identifies several different approaches that the translator might take when translating a given work depending on the intended purpose of the translation, the translator's view of the original or the reason why the translation has been commissioned. These include what may be termed “free” and “faithful” translations.

A free translation can cover a number of approaches from translations which change much of the content of the original, including the rearrangement of scenes and number of characters, to “adaptations” or plays “based on” the original. The faithful translation, on the other hand, is approached with what Aaltonen refers to as “reverence”. “Reverence,” she says, “is demonstrated through a high regard for the ‘original’, and an effort may be made to avoid omissions and additions, and to repeat the narrative and actantial structures of the source text. ... [The] discourse of the translation claims that nothing but language separates the source and its translation.”<sup>22)</sup>

In its efforts to introduce Japanese plays to Western audiences, this is the approach that the Japan Playwrights Association has required for its series of published translations. It is also what the Japan Foundation is expecting for the Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works. This is of course, a very common and useful approach to the translation of drama, especially when “the Foreign, as represented by texts chosen for translation, is held in esteem and respected.”<sup>23)</sup> (Although in this case it is the “Foreign” that is commissioning the translations).

This approach is the one that has been taken in most published translations of plays and the English-speaking world relies on this approach for its scholarly knowledge of theatre from other countries. However, there is a danger that a translation resulting from the approach of reverence may not be appropriate for staging as is. Words on the page behave differently to words spoken on stage and as Aaltonen goes on to point out, “Playwrights, translators, stage directors, dress and set designers, sound and light technicians, as well as

actors all contribute to the creation of theatre texts when they move into them and make them their own. A written foreign text accepted by a stage for production has to pass through several hands before it reaches the stage where the spoken element takes over.”<sup>24)</sup>

In order to make a translation of a play into a play suitable for performance, theatres may do several things: a “literal translation” may be commissioned to be reworked for the needs of the local theatre; translations may be partly re-written or “adaptations” made that have a varying degree of similarity to the original text.

The problem that I have encountered in translating plays for Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works has been balancing “reverence” with a desire to portray the plays as living works that, with even a small amount of adjustment, could be turned into interesting readings or productions. The key to this has been “playability” – the ability of the text to work spoken on stage as well as written on the printed page. For this to be possible, “the translator must hear the voice that speaks and take into account the ‘gesture’ of the language, the cadence rhythm and pauses that occur when the written text is spoken.”<sup>25)</sup> This was pointed out to me by the Literary Manager of the Traverse Theatre, Edinburgh, in an interview that took place in February 2004. She suggested that my translation be read aloud over and over again in order that the English be natural to the ear.

The need for playability was relevant to the “flow” of the language, but also to certain specific examples of speech in *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*. One of these was the expression of emotion between the dead Tomoko and her living family. In a touching scene between Hitoshi and his dead wife, Hitoshi talks to Tomoko even though he knows that she’s dead and cannot hear him. Suddenly he catches sight of her reflection in a mirror and although he’s still unsure as to whether or not she’s really there, he says:

わし、お前の分も長生きするからな。<sup>26)</sup>

There are three points to bear in mind when translating this. One is that the line must reflect some of Hitoshi’s wistfulness at glimpsing the face of his dead wife, while also reflecting his desire to somehow comfort her (seen in the reassuring 「からな」). The second is that this line causes Tomoko to realise: 「私、死んだんや…。」 “I’m dead...” The third is that the playability must be maintained and the scene not interrupted by an unnatural and clumsy line from Hitoshi when the original Japanese is neither of those things.

My translation of this line developed as I considered these three problems. I began with the translation “I’ll live out your time for you as well” but rejected this for being too clumsy. Similarly “I’ll live for you” expresses the meaning of the original but sounds out of place coming from Hitoshi and is not necessarily sufficiently clear enough to make Tomoko realise that she has died.

I finally decided on “I’ll have to learn to live without you.” changing this to “Don’t worry ... but I’m going to have to learn to live without you.” in an attempt to portray Hitoshi’s wistfulness as well as his attempt to reassure Tomoko. The line is clear enough to make



Tomoko realise the truth and, most importantly, sounds more natural than the other translations when read aloud.

Another example of how an awareness of the importance of playability affected my translation, can be seen in the scene between Komatsu, Yoshimasa and Kanemitsu. Take the following lines:

小松 君、破防法で知ってるか、破防法。新聞は読んでるやろ。  
 ヨシマサ 知らん知らん。  
 小松 今までのカゴの中から新しいカゴに移されるわけや、君らは。<sup>27)</sup>

My first translation of this exchange ran as follows:

KOMATSU You know the Subversion Prevention Law? The Subversion Prevention Law. You read the newspapers, don't you?  
 YOSHIMASA No, I don't know it.  
 KOMATSU Well, you two get moved from the cage you've been in up to now to a new cage.

This adequately translates the meaning, but lacks naturalness when read aloud. Firstly there is the problem of the unfamiliar term "Subversion Prevention Law" which is not only unfamiliar, but also unconnected in the minds of the audience to the newspapers. The repetition here is also a little clumsy and it needs to be emphasised that Komatsu is using repetition to reinforce what is in fact a threat. In my final version, I dealt with these problems thus:

KOMATSU Did you know there's a law to prevent subversion? [*Repeats.*]  
 Prevent subversion. You read the newspapers, don't you?

Other problems with my first translation are the slightly unnatural feeling to Yoshimasa's utterance "No, I don't know it" and the complicated last line. These are rendered more naturally:

YOSHIMASA Never heard of it.  
 KOMATSU Well, what happens is, you two get moved from the cage you've been in, to a new one.

Note the punctuation in Komatsu's line slowing his speech and making it slightly menacing as he makes this threat – a similar effect as achieved in the Japanese with the addition at the end of the line of「君ら」.

An awareness of the importance of natural-sounding English expressions as well as a

natural rhythm was very much part of my approach to the translation throughout the play. A final example of this can be seen in translations of this exchange between Hitoshi and Mari just before Hitoshi goes to hospital when Mari is showing him the poster that she and her friends have made for Yoshimasa:

仁	おう、よう出来てるやないか。それ、真理がこしらえたんか。
真理	うん。カオリちゃんとユキちゃんに手伝ってもらってん。
仁	そうか。お礼言うとかなあかな。
真理	また今度でええよ。二人連れてお見舞いに行くし、その時でええや ん。 <sup>28)</sup>

Initially, this was translated:

HITOSHI	Ah, well done! Have you done that, Mari?
MARI	Yes. Kaori and Yuki helped.
HITOSHI	Really, I must thank them.
MARI	Next time you see them will be fine. I'll bring them both to the hospital. You can thank them then.

Apart from Hitoshi's slightly clumsy "I must thank them", this is natural sounding English. However, read aloud the rhythm sounds completely wrong. In order to create a natural rhythm here I have deviated somewhat from the original and used the following translation.

HITOSHI	Ah, well done! Have you done that, Mari?
MARI	Yes. With Yuki and Kaori.
HITOSHI	Really. That's good of them.
MARI	I'll bring them both to the hospital. You'd like to see them, wouldn't you?

This works better for two reasons. Not only the rhythm, but the content of the exchange is more natural. In a Western context there is less of an emphasis on gratitude expressed on the part of a parent for a favour performed for a son or daughter. The concept of Bessho and Sonobe being brought to the hospital in order to be thanked by Hitoshi is strange in English and the exchange is more playable in this translation.

### Future Work

While the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works is an ongoing project, the same can be said for my efforts in translation. As I translate more, I find that the balances of acculturation and naturalisation, reverence and playability

change a great deal depending on the kind of play being translated, its subject matter and target audience. In future papers I intend to look at very different plays to *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni*, which require different approaches to translation. However, it must always be remembered that, in the words of Susan Bassnett, a play “is read as something incomplete, rather than as a fully rounded unit, since it is in performance that the full potential of the text is realised.”<sup>29)</sup> What must never be lost, is the knowledge that a play is meant to live in the words and actions of those who perform it. If this is lost in the translation of a play, then a dynamic and immediate form of cultural exchange can be lost with it.

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## (Footnotes)

- 1) Japanese names in this paper are given in Japanese style, with the family name first, followed by the given name.
- 2) Uchida Yōichi, *The 1980s in the Context of Japanese Theatre History* (translated by Mari Boyd) in Japan Playwrights Association ed. Half a Century of Japanese Theatre II 1980s Part 1 Kinokuniya Tokyo 2001 p.6.
- 3) Japan Playwrights Association, ed. Half a Century of Japanese Theatre II 1990s Part 2, Kinokuniya Tokyo 2000 p.2.
- 4) Hasabe Hiroshi (translated by Mari Boyd) *The Sense of Being Alive: Japanese Theatre in the 1990s* in Japan Playwrights Association ed. Half a Century of Japanese Theatre II 1980s Part 1, Kinokuniya Tokyo 2001, p.14.
- 5) Poulton, Cody, Introduction to his translation of *Tokyo Notes* by Hirata Oriza, Asian Theatre Journal, Vol. 19 / No.1, Spring 2002 p.2.
- 6) Nishidō Kōjin (translated by Mari Boyd) Radicalism in the Theatre of the 1980s in Japan Playwrights Association, ed. Half a Century of Japanese Theatre II 1980s Part 2, Kinokuniya Tokyo 2002 p.9.
- 7) From the cover introduction to Half a Century of Japanese Theatre II 1980s Part 1; Tokyo, 1999.
- 8) Aaltonen, Sirkku Time Sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society Multilingual Matters Ltd. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto & Sydney, 2000. p. 55.
- 9) *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni* p.18 line 11.

- 10) Ibid. p.43 lines 16 & 18.
- 11) Ibid. p.32, lines 24-32.
- 12) Bassnett, Susan Translation Studies Third edition Routledge, London 2002 pp.29-30.
- 13) *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni* p.26 line 44 to p.27 line 1.
- 14) Ibid. p.28, line 33.
- 15) p.17, lines 3-4.
- 16) Ibid. p.13, lines 13 to 16.
- 17) Ibid. p.38 line 6.
- 18) Ibid. p.41 line 26.
- 19) Ibid. p.24 line 13.
- 20) Ibid. p.24 line 6.
- 21) Aaltonen, Sirkku Time Sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society.
- 22) Aaltonen Time Sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society p.65.
- 23) Ibid. p.64.
- 24) Ibid. p.32.
- 25) Susan Bassnett after Robert Corrigan, Translation Studies p.121.
- 26) *Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni* p.27, line 39.
- 27) Ibid. p.37 lines 38-42.
- 28) Ibid. p.53 Lines 32-38.
- 29) Bassnett, Translation Studies pp.119-120.