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# Translating Matsuo Suzuki : Acoustic Masks and Tone in Mashin Nikki

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## 松尾スズキの翻訳より：マシン日記に見られる トーンとアコースティックマスクについて

Translating Matsuo Suzuki:  
Acoustic Masks and Tone in *Mashin Nikki*

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### Abstract

This paper deals with the translation of Matsuo Suzuki's play Mashin Nikki, which was commissioned by the Japan Foundation as part of the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works. Following some background information about the play and the playwright, the paper goes on to look at specific problems encountered in the translation process. One of these is the creation of acoustic masks, or replications in English of the style and speech patterns of each character. The second is the challenge of maintaining the tone of the original play in an English translation.

### Key Words

acoustic mask, characterisation, drama, international exchange, regional language, sexual language, tone, translation

### Introduction

This paper examines a translation commissioned by the Japan Foundation as part of the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works<sup>1)</sup>. Translation of the play Mashin Nikki commenced in the summer of 2004 and the final version was made available to theatres and presenters abroad through the Japan Foundation website Performing Arts Network Japan<sup>2)</sup> in May 2005.

It is recognised that no translation of a play (as Sirkku Aaltonen<sup>3)</sup> so eloquently points out) can be any more than the starting point for a version that is finally produced only when it has become the property of, and has inevitably been altered in some way by, stage directors, dress and set designers, sound and light technicians and so on - even before the contributions of the actors themselves. However, to honour the intentions of the Japan Foundation "to create a repertoire of contemporary Japanese plays that can transcend

national borders and be appreciated by foreign audiences”<sup>4)</sup> the translation was approached in a manner that avoided any hint of adaptation and that sought to convey, as accurately as possible, the original script as written by Matsuo Suzuki. This posed particular challenges for translation, some of which are examined in detail here.

### Matsuo Suzuki and *Mashin Nikki*

The image projected by Matsuo, who is active not only as a playwright, but also as a novelist, columnist, actor, director, illustrator and television personality, is one that is specifically designed to confound, sometimes to shock, and often to amuse. Even his adopted name is an example of this. Having chosen a first name that is also a common surname in Japan, Japanese speakers hearing the name for the first time have difficulty working out which name is which. His website<sup>5)</sup> is filled with cartoon caricatures of himself and other members of his theatrical company Otona Keikaku, literally translated “adult plans”. His latest book project is *Hakai*, a *manga* cartoon written with Yamamoto Naoki<sup>6)</sup> and his latest film project, a starring role as Irabu Ichiro in the comedy film *In The Pool*, released in 2005. He is often to be seen as guest on popular Japanese television shows.

None of this however, means that Matsuo Suzuki is in any way a lightweight. Born in Fukuoka Prefecture in 1962, Matsuo studied at Kyushu Sangyo University and worked in an office for several years before devoting himself solely to the theatre from 1988 with the formation of Otona Keikaku. Through the 1990s, the troupe became increasingly popular in the “Small Theatre” scene with the production of plays that particularly appealed to young audiences, through their portrayal of tragic-comic situations facing ordinary people in modern Japan, and using exaggerated styles and quirky characters. In 1997 Matsuo was awarded the Kishida Kunio Drama Award for *Funky! Uchu wa Mieru Tokoro Made Shika Nai* and his play *Kirei* won the 38<sup>th</sup> Golden Arrow Drama Award in the same year.

In an interview given to Amazon Japan to publicise his book *Girigiri Days* Matsuo describes the work of an actor as follows: “You can’t put on a play unless you go about it seriously; the curtain won’t go up unless you’re at the theatre on time. As a performer, this is where the crunch lies. It’s make or break within a specific set time. You need to have both the seriousness of a salary man and the anarchy of a performer. You need to be both serious and able to take the piss at the same time.”<sup>7)</sup>

This balance of seriousness and irreverence also applies to Matsuo’s work as a playwright, and specifically to *Mashin Nikki*. It is a balance that is open to misunderstanding. His grotesque and often bizarre style of expression has sometimes been taken to be unconnected

with the reality of everyday life. In fact, Mastuo often uses this kind of style to make stern criticisms of the realities of contemporary Japanese society. The four freakish characters of Mashin Nikki, two brothers in their 20s, a young woman and an older woman, play out a drama which is full of comedy, violence, bad language and sexual explicitness. The play is designed to both shock and entertain, but also as a comment on problems such as alienation in Japanese society, and the problems surrounding sexual relationships and marriage.

The action takes place around the brothers' electrical workshop, both in the workshop itself (indicated by a metal wall drawn when needed across the stage) and in a prefabricated hut where the younger of the Tsujiyoshi brothers, Michio, has been imprisoned by his elder brother, Akitoshi, for raping a young woman, Sachiko. Akitoshi, with his illogical sense of responsibility for his brother's rape, has married Sachiko and the three live together at the workshop as an awkward family unit. They are joined at the beginning of the play by an older woman, Keiko, who comes to work part time at the workshop. It turns out that Keiko was once a sports teacher at junior high school and taught Sachiko, saving her from being bullied by training her as a long distance runner.

Michio, who also didn't fit in at school, has begun to eavesdrop on those neighbours whom he believes are preventing his return to ordinary society because of their prejudice against his lack of success, by fitting listening devices into electrical goods that they bring to the workshop to have fixed. Keiko is attracted by Michio, whose actions make him "scum" in her eyes and therefore just the kind of man that she is looking for. They begin a passionate sexual relationship as she becomes his "machine number three". Eventually she becomes pregnant with Michio's baby.

Meanwhile, Akitoshi, always somewhat unstable, begins to become increasingly so and starts regularly to beat Sachiko. Eventually Sachiko has had enough of him and asks Michio to run away with her, preferring him of the two brothers even though he raped her. Michio can't – for one thing, he is chained to the floor of the prefab. Akitoshi comes into the prefab while Sachiko and Michio are making their vague plans to escape and, afraid of his violence, Sachiko batters him (she thinks to death) with a hammer.

Keiko returns to the scene with practical plans to cut up Akitoshi's body and feed it to his pet crocodile which is kept in a pool behind the workshop. As they are about to start this, however, Akitoshi regains consciousness. Apparently not realising what has happened, he is pleased to see Keiko, Michio and Sachiko and goes off to find a camera in order to take a "family photograph" of them all together. Meanwhile, Sachiko remembers how she hated Keiko at school and they begin fighting over Michio.

Sachiko hits Keiko unconscious with an axe just as Akitoshi returns, not with a

camera, but with petrol and a lighter to set fire to the prefab. He warns Sachiko and Michio to escape, but of course Michio cannot as he is chained to the prefab floor. Just as the fire is about to be lit, Sachiko finally finds the courage to cut Michio's chains with her axe. She however cuts off his leg instead. At this point, having regained consciousness, Keiko returns and manhandles Akitoshi into the pond where it seems that he is eaten by the crocodile.

Akitoshi in fact escapes from the crocodile, although it has bitten off one of his testicles, and returns to the prefab. There is a brief "family reunion", but Keiko, irritated as always with Sachiko, casually breaks her neck. Taking the initiative in her usual practical way, she borrows Akitoshi's lighter and sets out to burn down the houses of the people that Michio feels are prejudiced against him, setting him free to leave the prefab and find a job.

### "Acoustic Masks"

One of the key points in translating this play, and indeed any play, is the successful transference of the idiosyncrasies of each of the characters through an English version of their speech patterns. Anthony Vivis talks about the importance of this, quoting Elias Canetti, the Bulgarian-born German novelist, essayist, sociologist, and playwright, who was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1981. "To distinguish between different characters' speech patterns," writes Vivis, "Canetti would speak of their 'acoustic mask'. He argued, and certainly demonstrated in his text, each character's choice of words, especially the recurring patterns, the rhythm and the idiom or dialect each character uses, marks out that particular character as vividly as any visible features. Unless a translation can recreate such acoustic masks, the language is likely to remain at worst cardboard, at best wooden." <sup>8)</sup>

Each of the characters in Mashin Nikki has a strongly idiosyncratic style of speech and action which demand the creation of acoustic masks which reflect this, but which also avoid turning them into mere caricatures. Michio, for example, is described as anarchic, acts violently and has deeply quirky characteristics. In the scene where he is first introduced we see him farting as a weapon against his brother who is trying to wake him, stuffing his mouth with dry cornflakes and spitting them out all over the stage, shaking up a can of coke and spraying it over the room where he is chained.

He argues sensibly with his brother, however, his scorn drawing attention to Akitoshi's ridiculous and pompous speech. Consider this exchange, which follows the antics described above:

- アキトシ 例えはおまえ、わかんないものでも受け入れるだろ。ビッグコミック・スペリオールの、スペリオールの部分を、分からないなりに受け入れるだろ、おまえ。そこが芸術だっていうの。俺、読めないもの、あれ。スペリオール？意味わかるまで気になって読めないもの。この事実が証明するようにいつも損する側だよ。当たり前人間というものは
- ミチオ 朝っぱらからよく、わけわかんないこと失継ぎ早に言えるな（床のコーラをふきなはら）
- アキトシ ……おい。けっ、てなんだ？
- ミチオ ……け、なんて言ってねえよ。
- アキトシ 俺が駅で髪長い外人から買った美しい風景画を玄関に飾ったら、おまえ「けっ」つったな
- ミチオ それは何年前の話？あ、ポリスが「ゼニヤッタ・モンダッタ」歌っていたよな<sup>9)</sup>

- AKITOSHI You sit there reading "Top Lad", you get to a bit you don't understand and it doesn't bother you in the least. That's what an artist does. *I can't read something I don't understand. So I lose out. Because I'm a normal person.*
- MICHIO You don't half talk rubbish first thing in the morning! *Wiping the coke up from the floor.*
- AKITOSHI … Oi! Crap?! What do you mean, "crap"?
- MICHIO … I didn't say "crap!"
- AKITOSHI When I bought that beautiful picture off the long-haired foreigner at the station and hung it up in the entrance, you said "crap"!
- MICHIO How long ago was that? When The Police were still popular.

The key in translation here is to capture both Akitoshi's ridiculousness and Michio's scorn. The first has been attempted through the use of short, not quite connected sentences, for example, "That's what an artist does. *I can't read something I don't understand. So I lose out. Because I'm a normal person.*" This echoes the rhythms of the original and creates a similar sense of the ridiculous, rigid pretension of Akitoshi. This use of short, not quite connected sentences is used in many parts of the play in the acoustic mask that is created for Akitoshi (see also below).

In contrast to this, Michio's answers are rather dismissive and scornful. This is conveyed in the Japanese partly by the rough, masculine speech patterns used (「言えるな」, 「言っ

てねえよ」). Although there is no easy equivalent in English I have attempted to convey the same feeling through the use of sarcastic, slang expressions that might well be used by a young man in a similar situation ( “You don’t half talk rubbish” ( ‘rubbish’ as appose to ‘crap’ to convey Michio’s sense of superiority and because ‘crap’ comes up in the next few lines) and “How long ago was that?” ).

Much of Michio’s speech is rough and violent and is therefore translated using the full force of rough violent language that might be used in English: 「(狂暴) 勝手に開けるなって言ったじゃねえか! 何度も何度もおめえはよう!」<sup>10)</sup> “*Violently*. I fucking told you not to open the fucking window! How many times do I have to fucking tell you!”

However, it mustn’t be forgotten that there is more to Michio’s character than his anarchy and violence. In common with other characters in the play he is adrift from the mainstream of Japanese society, but would like to rejoin it if only he could. In his rough, man’s way of speaking, there are flashes of an almost boyish enthusiasm. He admits to Keiko that he understands Sachiko because he himself was bullied. But if only he could manage to change, away from all the people who know him, he could maybe make something of himself:

一度できあがったイジメられるキャラクターってのはさ、なかなか拭えないものなんだよな。でも、こう見えても俺は前向きだからよ。な、背広もってるし。いつか、キャラクター変えてやろうと思ってるわけ。そ、そのためには、俺のそれまでのキャラクターを知っている奴が、いない場所に行かなきゃならねえと<sup>11)</sup>

The speech patterns that reflect his earnestness and his enthusiasm 「な、背広もってるし」, 「そ、そのためには」 and these are conveyed in English using expressions that also have an almost childish enthusiasm to them:

Once you’re the type of person that gets bullied it’s hard to change. Look at me though. I might not look it, but I’m really going to go for it. I’ve got a suit and everything. I’m going to change one of these days. I’ll have to go somewhere where nobody knows me.

Akitoshi also has depths that go beyond his pomposity as mentioned above. He is insecure and is deeply aware of his lack of education and low position in society. He wants to be part of a happy family but yearns to be a rebel at the same time. Consider this speech:

(奥に) カゲヤマさーん! 大卒のカゲヤマさーん! 着替えたらこっちのコンベヤに来て

ください！うちのワイフが手順教えますから。（サチコに耳打ち）今は敬語だけどな。徐々に高卒サイドにとりこんでく。（自分に指差し）俺、策士だもの<sup>12)</sup>

*Calling out in the direction of the back of the stage.* Oh, Miss Kageyama! Miss Kageyama who went to university! When you've got changed, please come to the conveyer belt. My wife will show you the procedure. *Whispering into SACHIKO's ear.* I'm being polite to her now but she'll soon see the only-went-to-high-school side of me. *Points to himself.* Ha! I am such a schemer!

In translating this, Akitoshi's awareness of Keiko's status as a university graduate is conveyed in two ways. Firstly, in the translation of「大卒のカゲヤマさん」, "Miss Kageyama who went to university!" but also of the phrase「うちのワイフが手順教えますから」. The phrase「うちのワイフ」is common but in Akitoshi's case, it may reveal a certain need to impress through the choice of「ワイフ」as a word borrowed from English (often used to express the fact that the speaker is aware of the potentially discriminatory sense of other Japanese expressions), rather than one of the many other words for wife in Japanese. Akitoshi is trying to convey his education and status, while feeling unsure of both. This is expressed in English by the use of the phrase 'my wife', which is somewhat formal but falls short of the Japanese, strengthened with the formal sounding 'procedure' (similar in tone to the Japanese「手順」). Using these two expressions in the translation, the sentence in English sounds, as in the Japanese, that Akitoshi is awkwardly trying to impress.

This contrasts with the slightly ridiculous phrase「高卒サイド」conveyed in English with an equally awkward 'only-went-to-high-school side of me' and the following self-satisfied sounding「俺、策士だもの」, the「だもの」being translated in English, as "Ha! I am such a schemer!"

Akitoshi's references to the four characters as a happy family come often in the play. His wistfulness though comes through perhaps most strongly in the first scene as he remembers with Michio a visit that the family made to the "jungle pool" when the two of them were children (before he himself was locked up by their father, and when their troubles had yet to begin).

…家族で行ったジャングル風呂。おまえ、泣いとったなあ。ライオンの口からお湯が出るーちゅーて。あれ、家族だなあ。ライオンの口から湯が出るーちゅて、弟が泣くのは、あれ、家族だったなあ<sup>13)</sup>



…You cried, remember! The whole family goes to the jungle pool and you burst into tears. [*Mimics Michio crying*] “The water’s coming out the lion’s mouth!” We were a family. And my little brother goes [*Mimicking Michio again*] “The water’s coming out the lion’s mouth!” And *my* little brother was crying and we were a family, right?”

Here Akitoshi forgets his pomposity and anger at Michio and we feel his longing through his mimicking of his little brother (「湯がでるーちゅーて」), his reference to 「弟」 and the drawn out and wistful 「なあ」. This is conveyed in English through the repeated reference to “my little brother … *my* little brother” and the tag question, “right?” begging confirmation and reassurance.

There’s a similar feeling to Akitoshi’s assertion that he’s a Hell’s Angel (「暴走族」) even though he doesn’t break the speed limit:

ミチオ だって。制限速度守ってたじゃん

アキトシ うん

間。

ミチオ 暴走してないじゃん

間。

アキトシ メーターは50キロでも、120キロ出してる気分にな……なるっていうのは、暴走だろ？<sup>14)</sup>

MICHIO But you never even break the speed limit!

AKITOSHI No.

*Pause.*

MICHIO So how can you be a Hell’s Angel?

*Pause.*

AKITOSHI Well, it *feels* like 120, even when I’m only doing 50. … So I’m a Hell’s Angel, right?

Here, a tag question, “right?” is used again to express the sense in the pause 「気分にな……なるっていうのは」 and the assertive, but not *quite* sure 「だろ？」, that Akitoshi is looking for reassurance when his brother is making fun of him (although it doesn’t take long for him to lose his temper with Michio and return to his bullying).

Another strong character, Keiko, also has moments when she betrays a softer side to her nature. Keiko is proud of her “scientific nature” : 「根っから理科系だから。……ダメ？」

“I was always more science than arts. … Problem?” She prefers the job of factory worker to teacher because she knows exactly what she is being paid for, loves Michio because she knows exactly what he’s worth (nothing) and is continually frustrated with Sachiko’s vagueness.

Keiko’s speech is generally characterised by its to-the-point brevity. In one of her first lines, she reacts to Sachiko’s excitedly remembering her from junior high school with the comment, 「だろうね。私、自慢じゃないけど、人に忘れられたことないから」<sup>15)</sup>. Keiko’s matter-of-fact way of talking, in direct contrast to Sachiko’s excitable and emotional speech is contained in this line in phrases such as 「だろうね。」, 「自慢じゃないけど」 and 「ことないから」。 In English, this translates, “I’m not surprised. Nobody ever forgets me. Not that I’m particularly proud of the fact.” which echoes the rhythm of the original while making use of the nonchalant and matter of fact phrase “Not that I’m particularly proud of the fact” (which may or may not be spoken in truth).

Short sentences continue to be used by Keiko even during a long, self-revelatory speech that she makes when she realised that she is pregnant with Michio’s baby:

やっぱりね。月の美しさがわかるよ。…前、妊婦したとき、なんか、わかった、そういう、水気のある感覚が。今もそうだよ。すぐまた、なくなるんだけど。<sup>16)</sup>

The moon *is* beautiful. [I could never get my head round visual beauty, but] when I was pregnant before, I thought I could. A kind of floaty feeling … Like now. Soon wear off though. …

Again, the English must echo the rhythm of the original, but it is important to express something of “womanly” qualities that Keiko is expressing. One way that this is done is to indicate an enjoyment of her sudden understanding of the beauty of the moon contained in the Japanese 「やっぱりね」 This is expressed in English using the emphasis of “is”, giving the same feeling of sudden realisation and enjoyment. A second device used is the choice of the word “floaty” to translate 「水気」 Although the use of an expression such as “moist” may be closer to the meaning of the original, “floaty” has more of a sense of unreality (“… soon wear off though”) and femininity that is necessary here.

Sachiko’s character is in direct contrast to that of Keiko. She herself refers to this as their being 「真逆」<sup>17)</sup>, an unusual expression in Japanese that requires an unusual English equivalent – in my translation “polar opposites” was chosen, partly because Keiko talks later in the play about the two opposites meeting as though they have both travelled round

the world to reach the same spot again.

For much of the play, Sachiko's speech is characterised by a kind of squealing excitement. For example, as Keiko somehow manages to put together the electrical parts on her first day at the job, Sachiko responds excitedly, 「すごいすごい！やっぱり先生は先生です。私、それ作るのに2日かかったのに」<sup>18)</sup>. “Cool! That's so cool! Mind you, I'm not surprised Miss! It took me at least two days!”. The enthusiasm is expressed in the “Cool! That's so cool!” together with the sense of Sachiko's youth (also seen in the expression 「すごいすごい」). The rather problematic phrase 「やっぱり先生は先生です」 is translated “Mind you, I'm not surprised Miss” giving the same weight to the relationship Sachiko has with her former teacher as is conveyed in the original Japanese.

Another example is when Sachiko is at her most relaxed, dressed in a swimsuit and playfully shooting the other characters with a water pistol in a scene of relative calm before things begin to fall apart. Keiko having asked her if the swimsuit she is wearing is really the same one as she wore in junior high school, she replies playfully and excitedly:

許してくださいーい。ね、あなた、あたし溺れて先生にマウス・トゥー・マウスしてもらったのよ。間接キス！間接キス！（プールの水をアキトシにかける）キャッキャッ<sup>19)</sup>

*In a sing-song voice.* Sorry! Darling, you know what? I once nearly drowned and Miss gave me mouth to mouth! I got tongue where he gets tongue! *Squealing excitedly, she splashes AKITOSHI with water from the pool.*

In this case, some of the effect is conveyed using stage directions: “*In a sing-song voice*” and “*Squealing excitedly*”, “squealing” being perfect to convey the excited sound of 「キャッキャッ」. The main problem here lies in Sachiko's excited repetition of 「間接キス」 – the idea of second-hand or shared kissing. The slightly lewd, very slang expression “give tongue” has been used here to convey Sachiko's excitement at sharing a sexual experience of Keiko with Michio, leading straight into Sachiko's squeal and adding to her sense of excitement.

As in the case of the other characters however, there is more to Sachiko than meets the eye. Although she spends most of the play squealing excitedly, making silly embarrassed jokes or apologising, there are flashes of a deeper strength. Having had enough of Akitoshi's cruelty, she asks Michio to run away with her, only to hear Michio use the excuse of his chains to explain why he can't. At this point her speech patterns change, working up to the abrupt and strong 「気持ち悪いのよ、あんたら兄弟は」

サチコ あんたの兄さん、一生それはずす気ないよ

ミチオ ……

サチコ ほら、驚かない。なんなのそれ。気持ち悪いのよ、あんたら兄弟は<sup>20)</sup>

SACHIKO He's never going to take them off, your brother.

MICHIO ...

SACHIKO See?! You're not even surprised. God! You two make me sick!

The English here reflects the Japanese (「ほら」, “See?!”) while strength is added to the final part of the line through the use of “God!” and the angry and disgusted “You two make me sick!” The resulting translation is as unlike Sachiko's ordinary speech as the abrupt and strong Japanese.

## Tone

In his extremely practical guide to literary translation, Clifford Landers enshrines the appreciation of tone when translating a work in his “Twelve Commandments of Literary Translation” : “Thou shalt perceive and honor register and tone, that thy days as translator may be long.”<sup>21)</sup> Tone, he explains as “the overall feeling conveyed by an utterance, a passage, or an entire work, including both conscious and unconscious resonance.”<sup>22)</sup>

The tone throughout Mashin Nikki is generally fast-paced, earthy, with aspects of black humour, the ridiculous and the grotesque. This poses particular challenges to the translator.

The peculiarities of the tone of Mashin Nikki are very soon clearly seen in the opening scene, where Akitoshi is trying to wake his younger brother Michio. First of all, this hurried, rather ridiculous speech of Akitoshi:

当たり前っていうのは、ただそれだけでほとんど疲れるんだってことがな。だけど、すでに電気をつけてしまった以上、おい、寝てろ、とは兄さん言えない言えない。それじゃ、電気をなぜつけた、そういう話になるじゃないか。起きてもらう。だが、起きろとは言わない。その気持ちを兄さん、この言葉に託してみようと思う。そしておまえは、目覚めるんだ。<sup>23)</sup>

This calls for something rather less than a literal translation, but one that reflects the absurdity of Akitoshi as he addresses his sleeping brother:

…To death of telling you. Once I've put the light on I'm not telling you to stay asleep, you know. Oh no, oh no. But I'm not saying get up. Oh no. So, why've I put the light on? So you'll get up. But I'm not telling you get up as well. Listen to this though. This'll wake you up. …

In this translation, I have attempted to retain the rhythm of the original while emphasising the slightly pompous but ineffectual aspect of Akitoshi's speech by translating the repetition of 「言えない」 with a repeated “Oh no, oh no.” As Michio mumbles, ignores his brother and turns off the light, Akitoshi becomes increasingly frustrated.

We are given this unusual stage direction:

ミチオ、動かないまま、屁を放つ。  
アナキーなまでに寝起きが悪い彼だった。

*Michio doesn't move, but farts loudly. Michio takes his unwillingness to get up to the point of anarchy.*

Akitoshi reacts with the following speech.

屁で返事をするな！ ……兄さんな…… 臭い！臭いな、おい。おまえ、これ、なんだ？ デストロイだな、これ。屁の臭さじゃねーよ。獣臭。獣の匂いだよ。一日中部屋にいるくせによくこんなワイルドな屁がこけるな。おまえ、わざとじゃないだろうなこの臭さ。なんか、殺意こもってるぞ、これ<sup>24)</sup>

Don't fart! I … God that stinks! Fucking hell you stink. What the … Are you trying to kill me? This is worse than a fart. It's fucking animalistic! How can you stand it here all day farting like this?! God, you did that one on purpose didn't you! You're trying to fucking kill me!

In this speech that three particular challenges in establishing the tone of Mashin Nikki become clearly apparent. First of all, is the matter of establishing the strength of language used. Secondly, and closely related to the first, is whether to adopt overtly British, American, or neutral language patterns (bearing in mind the objectives of the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works). Third is the challenge of translating the peculiarities of the Japanese used by Matsuo in this play.

At this point, let us look at these three points in more detail. First of all, the strength of language, by which I mean the use of taboo expressions, sexual expressions and expletives.

It is commonly held that Japanese contains no “swear words” and certainly there is a lack of blasphemous expressions as well as a much less rich vocabulary of scatological and sexual expressions than in English. However, in a consideration of tone, the translator must aim for an effect that is both natural and as close to the original as possible. In much of the play, the original is particularly strong, violent, earthy and even shocking to a Japanese audience.

The expression in the speech quoted above, 「臭い！臭いな、おい。お前、これ、なんだ？」 could be perfectly accurately translated “It smells bad! It does smell bad. Oi! You... what is this?” However, to use this translation would be to ignore three vital things: the characters who are speaking (their age, sex, social class and so on), the relationship between the characters involved in this exchange, and the effect which the line is designed to have within the specific exchange, the scene in which it appears and the play as a whole.

In this case the characters are young, male and working class. It is soon clear (and is indeed an important aspect of their characters) that they are not particularly well educated and have led rough and at times violent lives. In punishment for raping the woman who has become his wife, Akitoshi has confined his younger brother to the stifling prefab, chaining him to the floor. The speech comes as Akitoshi’s frustration at his brother increases, and following the stage direction, “*Michio doesn’t move, but farts loudly. Michio takes his unwillingness to get up to the point of anarchy.*”

Clearly, we are in a situation where a restrained but literal translation would be very far indeed from accurately expressing the intention of the original Japanese. The language used by young, working class men in the situation described would be very likely to make liberal use of blasphemous words and expletives, which I have adopted, even though there is no direct equivalent in the original. In translating the phrase, 「臭い！臭いな、おい。お前、これ、なんだ？」, as “God that stinks! Fucking hell you stink. What the...” the tone is maintained, and the speech of remains natural to the characters and true to the intention of the author.

“Thou shalt fear no four-letter word where appropriate”, is Lander’s twelfth commandment.<sup>25)</sup> As the action unfolds, the sometimes violent, sometimes shocking form of Japanese used in the dialogue calls for a similar level of English, naturally achieved through the use of “four-letter” words, even though there is no equivalent in Japanese. Here is another example where the language used is coarse, of the type used mainly by men, and which is being spoken by an excitable Michio, (again following a rather strange

stage direction):

(なぜか、ケログをほおぼりながら)ばけもんじゃねえか。畜生。おい、勘違いするなよ。  
おまえのことなんか、何とも思っちゃいねえからな。<sup>26)</sup>

This could be translated literally thus:

*For some reason, he has begun throwing cornflakes around. You are a monster, aren't you. Beast. Hey, don't misunderstand [me]. I don't think anything of you.*

That the language is rough and of the type usually used by men is seen in the constructions 「... じゃねえか」, 「... するなよ」 and 「... 思っちゃいねえからな」, coupled with the word 「畜生」 (beloved of first-year students of Japanese as the language's 'only swear word', literally meaning 'beast'). The following translation is much more accurate in maintaining the tone of this:

*For some reason, he's begun throwing cornflakes around. You fucking witch! Don't get the wrong idea. I don't give a toss about you!*

The coarse and masculine tone of the language has been maintained by expressions such as “fucking witch” (a translation designed to cover both the meaning of 「ばけもん」 and the strength of 「畜生」) and “I don't give a toss about you!” for 「おまえのことなんか、何とも思っちゃいねえからな」. I have also, however, used phrases that are peculiarly British. A point to which I will return.

Translating strong language used by the young men in the play poses less of a problem than translating other forms of strong or sexual language. Consider this exchange:

サチコの声    ね、あなた、やっぱりやばいですよ  
アキトシの声    女が汚い言葉使うんじゃないよ<sup>27)</sup>

This is challenging in that Akitoshi is, somewhat unreasonably, telling Sachiko not to use “dirty language” even though her line contains only the word 「やばい」, a somewhat vulgar but not offensive expression meaning “dangerous”, or “dubious”. Although Akitoshi tells her that the language is “dirty” “for a woman”, the language that she has used is otherwise of feminine speech patterns (「ね、あなた、」) and ends in the polite form 「ですよ」.

In order to convey a certain vulgarity but not of a level that is either out of character for Sachiko in this exchange, nor too strong for “feminine use” in general, I have translated the exchange as follows:

SACHIKO'S VOICE But darling, that poor bugger ...

AKITOSHI'S VOICE Hey! A bit more lady-like if you please!

This is not a literal translation of Sachiko's line, but maintains the emphasis on her sympathetic feelings towards Michio which are part of the point of this exchange (her next line is 「ミチオさん、もう1年もつながれてんですよ。もう、限界近いです。」 “Poor Michio's been chained up for a year now. I think it's probably enough, darling.”). The word “bugger” in British English is no longer considered overly vulgar, but there are some who might still consider it inappropriate for a “lady” to use.

Finally on the subject of strong language, is the challenge of dealing with sexual phrases where the choice of English expression can make a great deal of difference to the tone. At times, a relatively neutral expression is used in Japanese and can be used also in English. Just before Keiko tells Michio about her four centimetre clitoris (which, bizarrely, Sachiko goes on to sing about “*To the tune of 'Over the Rainbow'*”), she uses the expression 「セックスした」<sup>28)</sup> This can be adequately, and easily translated as “had sex”.

Posing more of a problem is the Japanese expression 「エッチ」. This is a common, slang expression that has the connotations of lewdness, as oppose to the much more neutral expression used above. Sachiko uses the expression when she interrupts Michio and Keiko having sex in the prefab. 「ごめんね、エッチの最中」<sup>29)</sup>. In addition to the fact that, for some reason, Sachiko enters “*a bloodied bandage tied round her head and ... holding a dish piled with marshmallows*”, there is something comical as well as slightly vulgar in this expression. It is rendered, “Sorry to come in when you were having it off” maintaining the vulgarity and ordinariness of the phrase together with the slight comic lewdness that accompanies both the phrase 「エッチする」 and the British idiom “have it off.”

Before I go on to discuss the implications of using such a peculiarly British expression, there is the problem of translating a different form of sexual language, this time not overtly vulgar, in the slides that appear at points in the play, projected on to a screen and fundamental to the action as the “Machine Diaries”. As Michio and Keiko slake their lust (and as Sachiko is further abused by her husband), the following expressions are used to describe sexual positions used by Michio and Keiko and are projected as slides: 「正常位・後背位・座位」「騎乗位等、試す」「高屈曲位・松葉くずし」「伸脚正常位・背面騎乗位」「帆かけ



等」「逆伸張後背位」「背面前屈座位」「前屈対面騎乗位」「腰高逆骨伸首屈位」。Becoming more and more exotic, elaborate and down-right difficult-sounding, the slide that follows this list reads, 「ミチオ、首と腰を痛める」<sup>30)</sup>. These would probably not be easily understood by a Japanese audience, without the helpful Chinese characters which give some graphic clues. They have no easy equivalents in English and the translator can do worse than choosing to let his or her imagination run free while maintaining the exotic tone and working up to the punch line: “[We try] [The missionary position] [We do it sitting down] [We do it standing up] [We do it doggy style] … [We do it on the table] [We sixty nine] [We do it on the floor] [We do it lotus style] [We do it crab style] … [We do the wheelbarrow] [We do the hungry snake] [We do the crouching tiger] [We do the hanging monkey] [Michio’s hurt his back and his neck]” Most of these English versions are simply made up and do not necessarily bear any resemblance to the Japanese, but as Matsuo intends in the original, they lead effectively to the punch line, thus effectively maintaining the tone.

The difficulty with using strong, sexual or otherwise taboo language is that the effect that it has differs very much depending on the culture of the listeners. This is particularly the case amongst British and American speakers of English. For example, while British people recognise the term “motherfucker” as an expletive, much of the potency in the term is lost when a British person uses it in a British accent. The user can sound merely as though he or she is aping an American with an effect that could even be comical. A similar effect can be seen, for example, where an American speaker uses the term “bugger” (used, as quoted above, in a speech by Sachiko).

Translations made as part of the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works should appeal to speakers of all kinds of English. For that reason in my last translation, of Iwasaki Masahiro’s Koko Kara Wa Toi Kuni, I aimed for a neutral style which was neither overtly American nor British. This is not to say, however, that the adoption of a regional form of English (as oppose to a somehow “international” form) might be off-putting to an audience from other regions. Bill Findlay, in his essay, Translating Into Dialect writes that “Wonderful though the English language is, as a translation medium it can have a homogenising effect on foreign work translated, which can in turn disfigure the original work.”<sup>31)</sup> A “neutral”, “international” form of English would certainly have this effect on the tone of Mashin Nikki.

Not only did I feel that the use of strong language necessitated the choice of a regional (for example, British as oppose to American) form of English, but I also felt that this choice was also related to how much the language is class-related. The more language is class-related (in Mashin Nikki it is generally very working class) the more it tends to

contain regional idiosyncrasies. To preserve the tone of the play and richness of Matsuo's earthy, often rough language, I have chosen to use British English, in which I am most comfortable as a translator, to accurately convey the nuances of the original. This could also of course have been achieved in American English, or even (and possibly with great effect) in Scottish English such as that used by Findlay, in Welsh, or another form of regional English.

Having made the choice to use overtly British English, I found that it suited the translation extremely well. One particular example was the translation of 「先生」 as used by Sachiko when she is referring to Keiko. It is difficult to find an equivalent of this word when it is used in the place of a name, for example, in Sachiko's line:

先生がここに来てからいろんなこと、思い出します。… 知ってんの？先生、陸上で、オリンピックまで行った人だったのよ。<sup>32)</sup>

The word “Miss”, as used by (particularly working class) English school children suited this exactly.

I've been remembering a lot of things since Miss came. … did you know that Miss was an Olympic standard athlete?

There's a childish feel to this which suits the strange relationship that Sachiko has with Keiko, seeing her as a teacher even though she has graduated from junior high school some time ago. Most often, there is a note of deference in this, but not always by any means. Slightly mocking, she exclaims when she finds that Keiko is the owner of a mobile phone 「先生がコギャルに」<sup>33)</sup>. “Trendy Miss!”

Coupled with the use of “Miss”, there were other expressions used by Sachiko where a translation in British English was particularly suitable. Having just met Keiko, Sachiko is filled with excitement. She expresses this in such a way that her excitement seems rather over the top, childish and comical at the same time:

あ、あ、はい。ええ？でもどうして。う、うわあ、くらくらする。おもしろい。どうして？<sup>34)</sup>

Much of this speech is meaningless and is simply Sachiko expressing her excitement. In English it is rendered:

What? Oh. Right. But ... Oh this is amazing! Why here? ... Oh I'm all in a tizz. Why you? Why here?

The sense of Sachiko's excitement is maintained with the rhythm of the English, while the childishness is contained in the, here, comical British phrase "all in a tizz".

Many of Sachiko's appearances in the play are marked by a sense of comedy, where the audience are invited to laugh at her, rather than with her, at her skittish and rather silly actions and speech. Here is such an exchange:

ケイコ さっきから、あんた私のことを何だと思っているの？  
 サチコ (うつむく)  
 ケイコ 魔神？  
 サチコ ……ふふ (首をひねる)  
 ケイコ 私はね、新しい職場でお友達がほしただけなのよ  
 サチコ おお、お、お友達い？ (こける) ずでーん  
 間  
 サチコ (起きる) よいしょ<sup>35)</sup>

The key expression chosen to express the comedy in the situation here is the British expression, "ups a daisy" – both childish and silly and perfect for the character of Sachiko. Using this expression, the comic timing differs slightly to the original, but with the result that the tone of the exchange is maintained:

KEIKO Who do you think I am, all this time?  
 SACHIKO *Hangs her head.*  
 KEIKO Some kind of superhero?  
 SACHIKO ... Erm ... *She puts her head on one side, apparently thinking about it.*  
 KEIKO I just want to make new friends in my new job.  
 SACHIKO *Stammers. F fff friends? She falls over. Boing!*  
*Pause.*  
 SACHIKO *Grunting as she gets up* Ups-a-daisy.

The choice to make particular use of British English is useful in translating tone (and in creating acoustic masks for the characters) throughout the play. This has already been demonstrated in Michio's speech where he is losing his temper with Keiko, proving himself

to be “scum” in her eyes and thus causing her to fall in love with him. (“You fucking witch! Don’t get the wrong idea. I don’t give a toss about you!”).

Towards the end of the play, Sachiko has decided that, although he raped her, Michio is a better option than her husband, Akitoshi, who beats her. (“I hate you. But if I had to choose between you and Miss, and that bastard, you’re the one I hate the least. So I want to run away with you. You said yourself you wanted a new start.”) Michio shows an interest and fired up by this, she first attempts to murder Akitoshi with a hammer, and then, having realised that she hates Keiko, begins to fight with her over Michio. In the midst of this, Michio says, full of wonder,

ミチオ ……もめてる。……俺を取り合って、女がもめてる！……まるで、夢を見ているようだ<sup>36)</sup>

His wonder at this, and the comical effect that this produces, is conveyed with the use of the British “bloody”, thus:

MICHIO They’re fighting … Two women are bloody fighting over me! … It’s like a dream come true!

A similar expression is used at the very end of the play as Keiko sets out to burn down the town and kill or get rid of all the people who know Michio and whose prejudice against him, he thinks, prevents him from leaving the prefab and getting a job. He cannot believe that she would love him enough to go to such lengths and finds it hilariously funny as he watches the town begin to burn.

ミチオ やりやがった。本当にやりやがった！なんだよあの女。本当に本気だよ！俺のために。俺の就職のために。……町に火をつけやがった！

ミチオ、おかしくてたまらない。

ミチオ キチガイだあ！ (my underscore)<sup>37)</sup>

The use of the British expression “bloody” here is ideal to express both Michio’s amusement at the situation as well as his affectionate regard for Keiko as she goes to such extreme lengths to help him.

MICHIO She's fucking done it! She's fucking well gone and done it! What a woman! She fucking meant it! She's set fire to the town! For me! So I can get a job!

*MICHIO can't get over how hilarious it is.*

MICHIO Bloody mad woman!! (my underscore)

This particular translation also has the advantage of mirroring both the explosive consonants and the intonation of this, the last line of the play.

Finally, on the subject of using British English in this translation, is the use of money terms in the play. As foreign audiences are not likely to be conversant with the current exchange rate of a foreign currency (and may not even be aware of what the currency is in a particular country), it is often not advisable to leave a figure and a currency in the original. Audiences might have little idea of whether the amount is a large one or a small one. However, to translate the amount into a similar one in a domestic currency runs the risk of suddenly appearing to be writing out of context. Why should Japanese characters suddenly start talking about pounds and pence?

There are various ways of dealing with this. In this translation, I chose to use British pounds, in one instance with a footnote. Early in the play, Sachiko expresses to Keiko her contempt for Michio by explaining that not only does he live in a prefab. but he only earns ¥30,000 per month. The point here is that it's a small amount. The equivalent in pounds (roughly £150 at the time of writing) is also relatively a small amount to earn in a month and so I have translated the sum into pounds, but with a footnote.

Slightly later in the play, another money expression is used, again to emphasise Michio's lack of money, as Keiko offers him a small amount to demonstrate his strange way of drinking Coca-Cola.

ケイコ コーラ飲むとこみせてよ  
 ミチオ ……バカ言ってんじゃねえよ  
 ケイコ 1000円あげるから  
 ミチオ ……絶対だぞ  
 ……  
 ケイコ もう1000円、あげるから  
 ミチオ ……くそっ。1000円め<sup>38)</sup>

This time, a British slang expression (which also happens to be an equal amount at the time of writing) has been used. The reason for this is to maintain the rhythm of the exchange as well as, more importantly, its tone. The tone here is one of comedy, as Michio reacts with eagerness to the offer of such a small amount, together with a level of language that is vulgar (on Michio's part) and relaxed. For this reasons, the term "a fiver" has been chosen:

KEIKO        Drink coke. Show me how you drink coke.

MICHIO        ... Fuck off!

KEIKO        I'll give you a fiver.

MICHIO        ... You'd better.

...

KEIKO        I'll give you another fiver.

MICHIO        ... Oh shit. ... A fiver?

Returning to the challenges of maintaining the tone of the play as seen in the speech from the first scene quoted above, the third particular challenge that I have chosen to highlight is that of translating the peculiarities of Japanese used by Matsuo in various parts of the play. One example of this is that quoted above. Akitoshi says that Michio's farts are 「獣臭。獣の匂いだよ」<sup>39)</sup>. This was first translated as "brutal", which conveys the idea of the smell being that of an animal, as well as its cruel effect on Akitoshi. However, in deference to the fact that the Japanese itself is unusual and would be striking to the audience hearing it for the first time, the translation was changed to the more unusual "animalistic".

There are several other examples in the play where Matsuo "makes up" an expression in Japanese, providing a considerable challenge to the translator. The temptation is often to omit the expression in English or to translate it with one that it immediately understandable in English. To do this however, would be to lose the all important tone of the original which must be the translator's principle concern.

Akitoshi has six fingers. He refers to his sixth finger as his 「兄指」<sup>40)</sup> a made-up expression, literally meaning "older-brother finger" and contrasting with 「親指」 which is the ordinary word for "thumb", but which literally means "parent finger". Ideally, a translation would incorporate the idea of "older-brother" as well as the strangeness of the expression. However, I found that the former was impossible, without making the expression sound even stranger than the original Japanese and thus moving too far away

from maintenance of the tone. I finally settled for the term “thumblet” a made-up word that would strike the audience as being strange (to a similar extent as the Japanese 「兄指」 would sound strange to a Japanese audience), but the meaning of which would be recognisable to the audience, and which retains a relation to the word for thumb.

A similar challenge is posed by the strange Japanese used by Sachiko introducing Michio to Keiko in the following speech:

主人の弟が一人でやってるんです。屁みたいな男ですよ。ケログとコーラの食べ過ぎで、お尻がバカになっているんですかね。年から年中、ブーブーおならこきます。<sup>41)</sup>

A literal translation of the above would result in Sachiko referring to her brother-in-law as “a man who is like a fart” whose “bottom has become an idiot through eating too many cornflakes”. Although this is not too far from the right tone, the following, less literal translation was chosen:

My husband's little brother works there by himself. He's a right farty pants. All he eats and drinks is cornflakes and coke and it's made his bum go funny and he just farts and farts all the time.

This was further adjusted however, bearing in mind Matsuo's allusion, through the repetition of the 「ブー」 sound, to the Japanese slang word for someone who is out of work or who has no direction in life, 「プータロー」. A similar allusion was made in English by changing “farty pants” to “arty-farty pants”, suggesting the pose of aimless messing around such as might be adopted by someone of artistic pretensions.

There are points in the play when Matsuo makes up a strange word or expression that can be placed directly into English. Two examples of this are found in the first scene when Akitoshi opens the curtains of the prefab so that sunlight streams in on to Michio.

Michio responds with the odd line, 「ぐわーー！シュシュシュシューー……。なんてな」<sup>42)</sup>. This is too deliberate an inclusion (particularly considering the comical 「なんてな」) to be translated (as I first translated it) “Aaaagh…”. I finally settled for a reproduction of the original sound of the Japanese, while keeping the comic touch: “Wow! ……… Shashashasha shashashashashashasha ……… and all that.”

Another example of this is Sachiko's making machine noises as she introduces the factory to Keiko. Embarrassed at being with her former teacher and slightly threatened by Keiko's laughing in a “vaguely sinister way” she chatters on: “What? … Oh, right, yeah! …

Funny aren't they, machines? ... *Mimicking the sound of a machine. Jigijigijigijigi!* 「……ああ、そう……ですよ、機械っておもしろいですよね。……ギイギイゆって」<sup>43)</sup>。

Finally on the subject of “strange” or “made up” Japanese is an example of where the strangeness is vital to the whole meaning of a exchange. Consider these lines in a conversation between Sachiko and Keiko:

サチコ ……始めるばよ  
 ケイコ ……ばよ？  
           二人、仕事を始める。  
 ケイコ ……聞いていい？  
 サチコ 何？  
 ケイコ ばよった？  
 サチコ (ヒステリック) どうでもいいでしょう？  
 ……  
 ケイコ (もごもご) ……ちゃんないわ  
 サチコ ちゃんないわ？なにそれ？中国の岩？  
 ケイコ (はっきり) 追い詰めちゃんないわ  
 サチコ ね！嫌でしょう？いちいち言われるの<sup>44)</sup>

A literal translation would be impossible here, but the tone must be maintained. The exchange is particularly important as it leads to Sachiko's hysteria over the cruel treatment of Akitoshi, and to revelations she makes that are important to the way in which the plot unfolds in this latter part of the play. After some consideration, the exchange was rendered into English as follows, “made-up” English words replacing “made-up” Japanese ones, and a similar misunderstanding created, this time through the confusion of “I'll scream” and “ice cream”:

SACHIKO Ko-kay, let's start.  
 KEIKO Ko-kay?  
           *The two of them start work.*  
 KEIKO … Can I ask you something?  
 SACHIKO What?  
 KEIKO Did you say ko-kay?  
 SACHIKO *Hysterical* What does it matter what I said!  
 ……



SACHIKO Please don't scream at me just because my pronunciation's a bit funny!

KEIKO *Muttering* ... I'm not screaming ...

SACHIKO Ice cream?! Ice cream?! What're you going on about ice cream for?!

KEIKO I'm not screaming at you for anything.

SACHIKO See! You don't like it either!

Here I have probably moved further away from a literal translation than in any other part of the translation of the play. However, I believe that in doing this, the tone has been successfully maintained.

### In Conclusion

In this paper, I have been able to give only a few examples of approaches that I have used in my translation to deal with the problems of the creation of acoustic masks and the maintaining of tone in Mashin Nikki. As always, the explanation of a translation falls short of properly explaining an action which is (at best) intuitive. When translating something most successfully, the translator simply "knows" that a translation is right. Explanation of this can often pose problems, and this is why translation is such an adventure.

David Edney writes of the "great adventure" of translating plays, that "Theatre is a collaborative endeavour that works only because people agree to listen to each other. By enabling us to hear voices from another culture,... plays translated from another language extend that theatrical process of breaking down barriers and making connections between people."<sup>45</sup> It is the breaking down of barriers and making connections between people that lies at the heart of the Japan Foundation Project for the Translation of Contemporary Dramatic Works. A translation on the page is only the start of this process. However, if I have been able in my translation to communicate the richness of Matsuo's language and to convey some of the humour, excitement and shock of Mashin Nikki then I hope that in some small way, the great adventure of translation will have contributed to this important aim.

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#### Footnotes

- 1) For details of this project see my previous paper (Kaetsu University Research Review Vol. 41, No. 1 (December 2004)) and the Performing Arts Network Japan website ([www.performingarts.jp](http://www.performingarts.jp))
- 2) [www.performingarts.jp](http://www.performingarts.jp)
- 3) Aaltonen, Sirkku Time Sharing on Stage: Drama Translation in Theatre and Society Multilingual Matters Ltd. Clevedon Buffalo, Toronto & Sydney, 2000, p. 32
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- 9) Matsuo, Suzuki Mashin Nikki Akurei, Hakusui-sha, Tokyo 2001 pp 11-12
- 10) Ibid. p. 21
- 11) Ibid. p. 52
- 12) Ibid. p. 16
- 13) Ibid. p. 10
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- 15) Ibid. p. 17
- 16) Ibid. p. 54
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- 18) Ibid. p. 18
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- 20) Ibid. p. 60
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- 22) Ibid. p. 68
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- 24) Ibid. pp. 9-10
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- 26) Mashin Nikki p. 46
- 27) Ibid. p. 48
- 28) Ibid. p. 37
- 29) Ibid. p.50
- 30) Ibid. pp. 53-54
- 31) Findlay, Bill. *Translating Into Dialect* in Stages of Translation, , p.204
- 32) Mashin Nikki, p. 37

33) Ibid. p. 25

34) Ibid. p. 17

35) Ibid. pp. 23-24

36) Ibid. p. p.68

37) Ibid. p. 74

38) Ibid. p. 32-33

39) Ibid. p. 9

40) Ibid. p. 11

41) Ibid. p. 19

42) Ibid. p. 13

43) Ibid. p. 17

44) Ibid. p. 57

45) Edney, David *Translating (and Not Translating) in a Canadian Context*, Stages of Translation  
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