

Communications

Editor, *Journal of Asian Studies*:

In his review of my book, *Hōgen Monogatari: Tale of the Rebellion in Hōgen*, (XXXI/2, pp. 408–409), H. Paul Varley, without reference to the importance of the Hōgen Rebellion historically and to the content of this traditional account of it, condemns my translation on stylistic grounds and leaves the impression that there is little more to the book. This letter is intended to remedy the omissions in the review in some measure, as well as to make some rebuttal to his criticisms. The latter becomes a defense of a method of translation, and translation is fundamental to all studies where basic materials are in a foreign language.

The Hōgen Rebellion was a critical juncture in Japanese history. It was not only an armed struggle for control of the Imperial Institution, the first ever to occur in the Capital of Peace and Tranquility, but also the first major event in the historical process which culminated in 1221 with military control of Japanese society. The drama of great events is revealed in their impact on the lives of individuals caught up in them. The Hōgen Incident is not only tragic history (or historic tragedy); it struck the Japanese as monstrous in terms of the human relationships involved. In a number of accounts it is summarized in terms such as these:

It was in the Hōgen Disorder there was a child who cut off his father's head, there was a nephew who cut off his uncle's head, there was a younger brother who exiled his older brother, there was a woman who drowned herself in grief. These things are unnatural events in the annals of Japan.

Hōgen monogatari is historical literature, belonging to the genre of *gunḱimono*—war chronicles—which came into being with the rise of the warrior class. The Essay identifies the *Hōgen* in its relation to other *gunḱimono* and historical writing of the time; then identifies the *rufubon* version, here presented, in its relation to other variant versions of the work. It discusses the nature of Tametomo, well known to the Japanese as folk hero. Finally, all the *gunḱimono* are solemn, but it supplies a rationale for the distinctive tone of the *Rufubon Hōgen*, which is moralistic or “ethical,” in contrast to the Buddhist overtone of the *Heike*, or the “literary” emotional flavor of the *Kotohirabon* version of the *Hōgen*. This moralistic tone is manifested in the sententious judgments on the conduct of chief characters, but also might be construed as ensuing from the tale as a whole: a review of the disastrous consequences of unnatural conflicts in human relationships.

In putting the *Hōgen* into English, we have stipulated that it is worth translating. We know it has its own rhetoric in the original. How much of this is worth bringing over? How much *can* we bring over? Shall we abandon the attempt, and use the work only as another historical source, pulling out facts from it to collate with other sources? Or shall we take the content and reconstitute it, deciding for ourselves where the dramatic or emotional emphases should be, cutting a bit here, adding a “touch of poetry” there? The answers to these questions are matters of scholarly integrity, feasibility, or taste.

How much of the *Hōgen* is worth bringing into English? This refers to the *whole* work as it stands in the original—the events as a narrative structure; the manner or technique of relating them, which includes rhetorical devices; the language, with its distinctive tone; and the *effect* of the entire work. The answer is, as much as we can. To what end? Why? Because it is an integrated whole which had appeal to generations of Japanese and

may even appeal to us. If we see it as less than whole, to that measure we miss seeing the nature of what appealed to them, we miss the nuances of their outlook on life.

How much *can* we bring over? The answer is, quite a lot, if our audience is willing to sit still while we try. If we reword the question to how much *should* we bring over, the problem is then *feasibility versus reader-interest, or language and rhetorical devices versus taste*. There are those who say, the languages are vastly different, “we find your translation unattractive.” It is always possible to transfer everything into a grammatical equivalent, even rhetorical devices, if only at the cost of “extravagant detail in—footnotes.” But, says Mr. Morris, as both I and Mr. Varley have quoted him, an “accurate” translation will obscure the nature and character of an original in “a far more damaging way—by making it unreadable.” The unreadability associated here with accuracy is the alternative to the “style of his own” chosen by the translator as appropriate.

We have entered here into the Never-Never Land between translation on one side and paraphrase, at best, or re-creation on the other. The re-creator, taking the advertiser’s stance, or the entertainer’s stance, has kept only the “structure” of the original work, he has put it in an appropriate “style of his own,” and he has found a new “effect.” The paraphraser keeps a bit more of the original: the rhetorical devices, perhaps, and even his reconstruction in English of “effect.” But even he thinks that too much “accuracy” is fatal. Keep the sentences short. Don’t use “odd” words. The translator, however, has the most difficult task, and for some texts, it may be impossible to perform. To even approximate success, he must render the original-structure, technique, character of language, and effect—as closely as he can. He adds only explanation and he subtracts nothing. To what end? To introduce to readers a work valued in another society for reasons valid in *that* society, not necessarily our own. If he has done his job well, these reasons will be apparent to his readers, not obscured by accretions, excisions, change in style dictated by what someone considers should be the taste of a general readership, a personal judgment of literary taste. Mr. Varley has lifted two sentences out of context and presented them as examples of poor English style. They are evidently not poor style in the original; they follow its structure. I noted in my preface that the *gunkimono* appealed for reasons “other than aesthetic or ‘literary’ in its current connotation, and their language reflects this bent.” I then announced my intention to try to preserve the flavor of the original, to keep the translations as direct as possible. Without laboring my reasons further, let us look at the first sentence chosen by Mr. Varley. It is long, but the subordinations are clear. Why cast thought in this particular way? We may have to read it slowly, even moving our lips as we do so, but it does have unity. It is the second sentence of a soliloquy by Sutoku-In, his reaction to his deep disappointment over the crushing of his ambitions for his son. It is an important expression of feeling—from this thought springs the rebellion. We must remember the *gunkimono* were originally chanted, and this wording in the original may well have survived from a chanted version. To *read* something rapidly, we may need to have larger thoughts chopped into smaller segments, to force pauses in order to emphasize subordinations. But when the same larger thought is chanted, the chanter can roll it out as a single sentence to maintain the unity of thought. His pauses to emphasize subordinations become commas in a written text; the larger thought unfolds in a crescendo. The sentence is periodic; it gathers emphasis to a climax. In other words, it is an intentional syntactic structure, with its own rhythm. The grammars of two languages may be vastly disparate, but syntactic patterns—the use of the logic of grammar to achieve a feeling—can be transferred from one to another.

As to Mr. Varley’s suggestion that, at what he takes to be dramatic moments, it would be well to introduce a touch of poetry, the authors of the tale have their own rhetoric: they have been sententious where they thought it appropriate, and emotional in their own way when they felt it fitting. For example, the comment after the death of the wife of Tameyoshi:

Because this morning at Funaoka masters and followers, ten men, faded away as the morning dew, tonight by the Katsura River two ladies rise away as the smoke of evening. These were events in which the universal truth of the impermanence of life and death was revealed in all its poignancy.

As to the distracting retention of titles and designations of individuals found in the original, the authors found them relevant. We should not object to being made aware of a social attitude.

Contemporary readers need not be stuck with currently conventional ideas of literary theme or literary language. What they should be concerned with is what expands their own universe, or more accurately, what helps them chart that which existed already in themselves. This will exist in works popular in another society, in a literature foreign to our own. And to bring it over, a real translation has to at least try to bring it over intact, with all its distinctive rhetoric.

W. R. Wilson

To the Editor of the *Journal of Asian Studies*:

I am happy that Mr. Wilson has been given the opportunity to express his opinions about my review of *Hōgen Monogatari: Tale of the Rebellion in Hōgen*, and I sincerely hope that his comments will inspire additional readers to study his book and to judge its merits for themselves.

Mr. Wilson has raised a number of interesting points, and I could not agree more about the multifarious problems that any translator faces in deciding upon such matters as style, fidelity to original syntax, and potential reader appeal. Indeed, I thought I had been very careful in the review to indicate that I was expressing my own opinions about Mr. Wilson's approach to translation and not those that I imagined to be shared by everyone.

Nevertheless, I must reiterate my personal feeling that the translations would have been better if Mr. Wilson had attempted to render them into more palatable English. Once he had decided that it was not necessary to be so literal as, for example, to leave verbs at the ends of sentences or to retain all clauses before the nouns they modify, he might at least have tried to break up some of his truly gargantuan sentences. Here is one that is half again as long as any I quoted in my review:

At the same time [Shirakawa-in] had taken the daughter of Kinzane as adoptive child, intending to take the Hosshōji Dono (Tadamichi) as husband for her, and as the arrangements for this were already under way, it had gone as far as selecting a date and the like, but while things were thus, many hitches coming up one after another, and it had not yet come off, when Chisoku-In Dono said, 'I cannot send my daughter,' [Shirakawa-In] was angered in vain, he changed his intention about Taikemmon-In (Kinzane's daughter) for the Hosshōji Dono and forthwith brought her into the Palace [as lady-in-waiting]. (p. 132)

I realize that it is somewhat unfair to take illustrations out of context. But this sentence (cited from one of the Appendix A extracts from the *Gukanshō*, which is not a *gunkimono* and was not written to be chanted) contains more than one hundred words and I, for one, cannot see how anything would have been lost if it had been divided into shorter, more easily comprehensible segments. Here is still another sentence from the *Gukanshō* that breaks the 100-word mark:

Since, generally speaking, the fate of men both high and low, and the tides of destiny of past, present, and future, are things which are shifted by the operation of Nature, though it is awe-inspiring to think of these things like this, and although there must be men to think there is no sense to it, since it firmly decrees that which is called the Reason of cause-and-effect of past, present, and future, it puts things together precisely from the primal sources of the Reason and the tides of Nature, and water flows down, fire burns upward, things happen as they must. (p. 143)

In the case of this sentence in particular, I submit that either Jien (the author of the *Gukanshō*) or Mr. Wilson is guilty of having produced a syntactical monstrosity. If Jien is the culprit, I wish that Mr. Wilson had informed us in a note how awkwardly his thirteenth century author sometimes expressed himself. I might mention in passing that, in a recently published rendering of the *Gukanshō* into modern Japanese, Professor Ōsumi Kazuo chose to divide this particular passage into three sentences (see Nagahara Keiji, ed., *Jien to Kitabatake Chikafusa* in Chūō Kōron Sha, *Nihon no Meicho*, vol. 9, p. 255).

It is true, then, that I have criticized *Hōgen Monogatari* almost entirely on matters of style or method of translation. Perhaps (even though I was asked by the editors of the *Journal* to limit the review to 700 words) I should also have commented on the historical significance of the writings presented and on the bibliographical Essay. Mr. Wilson has now done this himself and has, in addition, forcefully defended his approach to translation.

H. Paul Varley

ANNOUNCEMENT

The History Department of the University of Pennsylvania announces the establishment of the Stephen Allan Kaplan Memorial Prizes. For the year 1973 a first prize of \$700 and a second prize of \$250 will be offered for the best manuscripts on any aspect of the history of the family. There is no restriction as to field or period. There are plans to publish the essays in a collection on the family. Manuscripts should be no longer than 20,000 words and should be submitted by September 15, 1973, to Professor Alfred J. Rieber, Chairman of Kaplan Committee, 208 College Hall, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19104.