

Japanese-English Translation and the Stream of Consciousness

Naomi Matsuoka

Translating Japanese novels into English is often accomplished by a dramatic change in writing style. Long sentences which have their own rhythmic flow are broken up into short sentences and consequently lose their fluidity. Nominal and pronominal subjects which do not appear in the original writing are added in practically every English sentence, and as a result, the implied general subject, human beings, is often disappointingly narrowed. Moreover, the flexible, shifting point of view which is characteristic of Japanese fiction and which has existed since classic times is often not even attempted in English. These characteristic problems of translating Japanese novels into English arise mainly from the difference of narrative styles between the two literary traditions. In particular, Japanese novels commonly have complex or multiple points of view in which an author, a narrator and a character merge and separate repeatedly as the narration continues.

However, such a floating narrative, as it has been called, is not essentially alien to the English and American literary tradition. It may, in fact, be found in the stream of consciousness novels of such authors as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and William Faulkner. These authors restructured traditional English sentence patterns in order to free their works from the confines of rational, expository realism and create a poetic idiom. I would like to suggest that a number of the techniques of the stream of consciousness novel in English may well be used in translating the floating narrative style of the Japanese novel into English. In this presentation, I will analyze two passages from Japanese literature, one from the short story, "*Ōtsugomori*" (「大つごもり」, On the Last Day of the Year, 1894) by Higuchi Ichiyō (樋口一葉, 1872-1896), and the other from the novel, *Yukiguni* (「雪國」, Snow Country, 1937) by Kawabata Yasunari (川端康成, 1899-1972),

focusing on those aspects which correspond with the techniques of the stream of consciousness novels in English.

Higuchi Ichiyō is a female writer of the Meiji period (1868-1912) who is known for her fluid and rhythmical style, often referred to as *Genroku* (元祿) style, exemplified by popular writers such as Ihara Saikaku (井原西鶴, 1688-1704). In fact, the influence of Saikaku on Ichiyō is discussed in Robert L. Danly's translation of some of Ichiyō's works, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves*. He explains that Saikaku's novels are a development of *renga* (連歌, linked verse) which have been called in fact "haikai short stories." In such writings, Danly notes "the smooth quicksilver flow of ideas by association, through punning, allusions or a kind of mental quantum leap."¹ Saikaku certainly had an import influence on the later writings of Ichiyō, but it is also a well-known fact that she was an expert on *Heian* (平安朝) literature and was influenced by its narrative style, especially that of *Genji monogatari* (「源氏物語」). Chieko Mulhern describes this narrative style as resembling that of the stream of consciousness novel.² And Ichiyō's translator, Danly, describes her writings as "unself-conscious, intuitive and subjective," points out the "harmony and rhythm in the narrative," and concludes that her writings are closer to those of Proust or Joyce than to those of other modern writers.³ Mulhern and Danly, approaching the writings of Ichiyō from different perspectives, that is through its relation to *Heian* and *Genroku* literature respectively, thus agree on this point.

Accordingly, I would now like to examine Ichiyō's narrative style in relation to that of the stream of conscious novel. Vivid, crisp dialogues and internal monologues merge into the narration. In fact, narrative, dialogue and internal monologues are sometimes difficult to distinguish. Two main characteristics of Ichiyō's style are fluidity through dialogues and monologues and a floating narrative point of view which appears, merges with the thoughts and words of the characters, and then disappears. When we translate her novels in a clear, easy to understand manner, we sacrifice her writing style, which is her main achievement. The long sentences which flow across the pages are broken up into easily digestible morsels. And when all the nominal and pronominal subjects are added to the text, the narrative point of view becomes distant and detached. The result is that the flow of inner thoughts is interrupted, dammed up by the markers and fences of grammar and explanation.

Certainly part of the problem lies in the writing conventions of the period which differ even from those of contemporary Japanese literature. The use of such punctuation marks as periods and quotation marks was not common, so long paragraphs would flow on without a break. Although such conventions are no longer observed, modern editions of Ichiyō's works preserve them — long paragraphs are printed as one sentence with just a single period at the end. For Japanese readers, however, there are a number of signs and marks which distinguish dialogue from internal monologue and both of these from the narration. First of all, the different speech styles in Japanese such as male or female, honorific or humble, etc. often make the situation clear to the reader. Then, the use of the particle *to* (と) after dialogues and monologues has the same function as the use of quotation marks and tags such as "he said/she said" or the use of the word, that, in English without quotation marks following it to indicate direct or indirect quotations, although in Japanese the particle *to* comes only after the whole quotation, in contrast to English, so that it takes some time to grasp the exact context of the beginning of the sentence. But this time of uncertainty is not necessarily distracting or confusing. We might call it, modifying Coleridge's words, a willing suspension of specificity.

Let us look at the first paragraph of Ichiyō's "*Ōtsugomori*," a short story about a young housemaid, Omine, who endures the hardships of being the servant of a rich family and who is admired for being diligent and faithful in spite of all the troubles she suffers at the hands of her stingy and mean mistress.⁴ However, on the last day of the year, in order to save her uncle who is in debt, she steals two one yen notes from a bundle in her mistress's desk. Fortunately, however, the eldest son of the family steals the rest of the bundle, and her theft is not detected. The story shows how Omine is driven into such circumstances in spite of her innocence and conscientiousness, reaching its climax as Omine faces the imminent disclosure of her theft. Thus the story concerns itself primarily with the inner life of Omine, with her consciousness and conscience.

The passage begins with objective description, but soon afterwards it becomes increasingly subjective with the use of the word of perception, "coldness." Afterwards, the narrator enters into the mind of Omine. From the exclamation, "Oh, unbearable!" to the concluding remark, "Alas! it's hard to be a maid," is Omine's internal exclamation. Then Omine remembers the words of the old woman who introduced her to the Yamamura family —

they are quoted just as Omine heard them, and so they form a part of her inner thoughts, which then shift to her criticism of the old woman in the words, "What a terrible thing . . . why they dislike me."

At the close of this part of the first paragraph, the narrator reappears with the comment, "this was how she came to serve such fiendish masters." Although the narrator repeatedly disappears behind the dialogues and Omine's interior monologues, here the narrator presents her viewpoint clearly and directly. That is, in contrast to Omine's naive resolution to work diligently in order to be liked by the master and his family, the narrator is critical of the situation, calling the masters "fiendish," and she is deeply sympathetic with Omine.

Up to this point, Omine's situation and thoughts are expressed directly, as if the reader were inside of Omine's consciousness. This style continues through the following episode about making a bath early in the morning. The narrator begins the episode, but the mistress's words are quoted directly, as they are heard by Omine. Here again, the narrator has entered into the consciousness of Omine, and the narrator describes Omine's feelings subjectively from inside, so the banging noise and the mistress's calling voice sound "more cruel than the alarm clock," but when Omine is described as "being diligent," the narrator has already left Omine's consciousness, describing her from outside. Thus even in one short clause, the point of view shifts back and forth between Omine and the narrator. Then the narrator describes Omine's carrying water from the well objectively until she comes to the point when Omine falls and hurts herself. Here again, the narrator sympathizes with Omine, saying, "how pitiful, her skin, so white it put the snow to shame, turned purple." As the narrator becomes emotional, she gradually identifies herself with Omine, and at the same time separates herself from Omine.

Here begins Omine's internal monologue about her mistress's rage. Although in the Japanese original, the subject is omitted and it could be either "I" or "she," the point of view is that of Omine, since the honorific form of "to say" is used for the mistress and since the words addressed to Omine are quoted directly. It is Omine who is horrified by the pale vein on the forehead of the mistress, who is glared at, and who is embarrassed in front of visitors. But this long sentence, including Omine's monologue and the mistress's dialogue with her, ends with the word "she," who "came to make no mistakes at all," obviously the narrator's observation. Immediate-

ly after this comes an anonymous piece of dialogue in which someone comments about the Yamamura's cruel treatment of their maids and praises Omine in contrast to them. Here, for the first time, the name, Omine, is introduced. Then there follows a comment made by some men in general praising Omine's beauty.

Thus at the end of the first paragraph, the image of Omine is completed, giving enough information to the readers about her situation, ideas, way of thinking, and appearance. All these facts and details emerge from Omine's internal monologue which nonetheless includes words addressed to her and words which are not necessarily heard by her, words and comments which exist outside of her consciousness. There is a narrator who is sympathetic with her, but she reveals that she knows more than Omine about life, for example, when she calls the Yamamura's "fiendish masters," distancing herself from Omine's naive hope of being liked by them if she works diligently. The narrator is emotional and subjective, so her words merge with those of her characters. Ichiyō's narrator is not an independent observer; rather, she is very closely sympathetic with her main character, going so far as to identify with her. Another important function of narration in Ichiyō's writing is to link monologues and dialogues smoothly, without a break, introducing them one after another.

The characteristics of Ichiyō's writing mentioned above may all be observed in the writings of Virginia Woolf, for example. As Erich Auerbach shows in *Mimesis*, in *To the Lighthouse*, there is a shifting point of view which is created through long sentences with internal monologues and dialogues in one flow.⁵ In the passage, which Auerbach entitles "The Brown Stocking," Woolf offers several observations of Mrs. Ramsay from different points of view, including those of William Bankes and other anonymous people, by inserting internal monologues and dialogues. Mrs. Ramsay's consciousness is expressed through her own thoughts and internal monologues, the observations by the characters around her and by other anonymous people. One conspicuous element in the passages from Ichiyō and Woolf is that comments and remarks do not lead to conversation but rather to the main character's thoughts or to the narrative. This is one of the reasons why readers are impressed by the fluidity of the narrative.

As Takenishi Hiroko points out, the literature of Kawabata Yasunari is that of monologue in style and that of senses and intuitions in quality, and in this sense, Kawabata is in the main stream of traditional Japanese

literature.⁶ In translating his novels we might also consider applying the techniques of the stream of consciousness novels since his writings are all about the consciousness of the main character. It is difficult, however, to convey the flow of the consciousness in English translation without making the stories seem more symbolic than they really are. This resembles the problem of translating Japanese poetry into English. Haiku and waka, for example, are very often over-interpreted in English because of their simplicity. I would like to examine the closing passage from Kawabata's *Yukiguni* in order to trace the consciousness of the main character.⁷

Yukiguni is a third person narrative, but it actually reads like a monologue of Shimamura, the main character. As in the case of Winterbourne in *Daisy Miller* (1878) by Henry James, the narration in *Yukiguni* is limited to Shimamura's consciousness. In other words, this novel could actually be considered a variation of the Japanese *shishosetsu*, the "I" novel, in which the author is identical to the narrator and the main character. The whole story is composed of Shimamura's observations, memories, senses, and intuitions, and is confined to his consciousness. Thus the whole novel could be called an "indirect internal monologue" as Robert Humphrey classifies one of the techniques of the stream of consciousness novels.⁸ Throughout the indirect internal monologue of the passage, for example, the narration combines observations, thoughts, sense perceptions, and intuitions. It would be interesting if we could convey this flow and the different levels of internal monologue in a manner closer to the Japanese original.

I would like to examine now the distinctive features of a monologue in a passage from *Yukiguni*. In this short passage, verbs of perception such as "gaze," "realize," "look at," and "feel" are repeatedly used. From the beginning of the passage, Shimamura is oblivious to everything except for Komako's scream and the gasp of the crowd when Yōko falls. Then his feelings are described by the verb "seem," which is also frequently used for his observations. He senses or perceives things, but he is not aware at a rational level that at the same moment the crowd gasps, Komako screams and Yōko's leg has a spasm. Then comes the expression of intuitions: Komako's scream pierces him, a chill passes through him, and sadness and anguish take hold of him.

Similarly, the narration returns to Shimamura's observation of Yōko again, her face, her kimono and her leg, and then it describes his intuitive

perception of Yōko's inner life. The flickers of fire on Yōko's face, a sense perception, draws out the memory of his first encounter with her in the train on his trip to visit Komako. So the novel returns to the opening scene, a passage which is famous for its beautiful mirror image. By the association of the flickers of fire, Shimamura delves into his memories, losing the sense of present time until he is brought back to the present by a sudden move of Komako. This association of thoughts continues like a chain reaction through his consciousness. The flickers of fire on Yōko's face remind him of the mountain lights reflected on her face, which itself is seen in reflection on the train window. And then, this same fire lights up his whole love with Komako. Thus his thoughts float from the present to the past and then back to the present until finally he faces the anguish and sadness at the bottom of his consciousness. He is awakened to the present moment by Komako's sudden dash toward Yōko. He now sees Komako holding Yōko, and he sees images of the soul's flight, sacrifice, and punishment, which are not explained. Rather, they are intuitional associations. He is brought back to the real world by Komako's scream and makes a move, but the narration quickly returns to the occurrences within him, the image of the flow of the Milky Way into himself.

Another conspicuous aspect of the passage which makes us think that this is Shimamura's monologue is the repeated references to the simultaneity of several separate actions. Shimamura perceives at one moment that the crowd gasps, Komako screams, Yōko's leg has a spasm, and Komako rushes out from beside him. But the narration covers them one by one. Such film techniques as montage and flashback might come to mind as Robert Humphrey points out in his study of the stream of consciousness novels — that is, time is treated differently from its common and realistic sense; sometimes it is stretched, and other times it is cut into pieces which are placed back in the narrative in separate locations.⁹ And in such a short time, Shimamura remembers the past and is struck by several intuitions. Here we can observe the use of the psychological time of thought and consciousness in contrast to real time. And we can find similar use of psychological time in the works of William Faulkner, for example, in his novels, *Light in August* (1932) and *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), especially in the passages on Joe Christmas in the former novel and Quentin Compson in the latter.

Kawabata's *Yukiguni* is difficult to translate in the same way as is

Japanese poetry, especially haiku and waka. When it is put into English prose, differences of levels and stages of consciousness are lost, so that every statement appears evenly with the same degree of emphasis. I would say that Yōko's metamorphosis and the flow of the Milky Way, for example, are intuitional expressions, so they should appear as a part of flowing consciousness rather than as intentional symbols. But when these expressions are written down in clear, expository English, they are raised to the stage of reason, far away from that of the unconscious level, and this is one cause of over-interpretation by readers of the novel in translation.

I have examined two representative examples of Japanese narrative styles. The narrative style in Higuchi Ichiyō's "*Ōtsugomori*," consists of several different points of view: the narrator, the main character, and anonymous people. Although they exist independently, they are woven into one thread. The long monologues of the main character and the dialogues of the other characters merge into the narration, or the commentaries of a narrator, the author, begin from the monologue of the main character. Thus, in spite of the multiple points of view, they appear continuously and sometimes coexist in the same sentence one after another. As the reader follows the multiple points of view, they compose the entire figure of the main character and the plot. In English, the stream of consciousness novels developed corresponding techniques as we can see in Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*, which, I believe, we can borrow in order to translate some Japanese novels like Higuchi Ichiyō's into English.

The narrative style in Kawabata Yasunari's *Yukiguni* is a variation of the *shishosetsu*, the "I" novel, since it is written in the third person, a new tradition of modern Japanese literature. Here the author, the narrator and the main character are identical, but as for the form, as the name Shimamura is often repeated, they are divided by the use of the third person narrative. In spite of the objective form, the novel is an exploration of the inner world of Shimamura. This tension between the form and the content makes English translation difficult. Kawabata's style is natural in Japanese, but it may seem unclear and even mysterious in English, and therefore his intuitional associations cannot help but giving the impressions of being abrupt. But the techniques of the stream of consciousness novel, which are now established in Europe and America for well over fifty years, may help us to find corresponding if not equivalent means of expression.

Notes

1. Robert Lyons Danly, *In the Shade of Spring Leaves* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), p. 114.
2. Chieko Mulhern, "Japanese Women Writers Past and Present," forthcoming in *Review of National Literatures*.
3. Danly, p. 132.
4. Higuchi Ichiyō, "Ōtsugomori," (樋口一葉, 「大つごもり」) in *Nigorie, Takekura-be* (「にごりえ・たけくらべ」) (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1986), pp. 106-7. Translated as "On the Last Day of the Year" in Danly, pp. 205-6.
5. Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1974).
6. Takenishi, Hiroko, "Kawabata Yasunari: Hito to Sakuhin" [Kawabata Yasunari: Life and Work] in Kawabata Yasunari, *Yukiguni* (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1985), p. 159.
7. Kawabata Yasunari, *Yukiguni* (川端康成「雪國」) (Tokyo: Shinchō-sha, 1985), pp. 151-2. Translated as *Snow Country* by Edward G. Seidensticker (New York: Berkeley, 1960), pp. 141-2).
8. Robert Humphrey, *Stream of Consciousness in the Modern Novel* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1954), pp. 28-9.
9. Humphrey, p. 49.

