

The Agony and the Joy of Translating from Japanese to Hebrew

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“Reading a poem in translation,” wrote Bialek¹⁾ “is like kissing a woman through a veil”; and reading Greek poems, with a mixture of Katharevousa and the Demotic²⁾ is like kissing two women. Translation is a kind of transubstantiation; one poem becomes another. You can choose your philosophy of translation just as you choose how to live: the free adaptation that sacrifices detail to meaning, the strict crib that sacrifices meaning to exactitude. The poet moves from life to language, the translator moves from language to life; both, like the immigrant, try to identify the invisible, what’s between the lines, the mysterious implications.

Anne Michaelis, *Fugitive Pieces*

The book *Onnamen (Women’s Masks)* by Fumiko Enchi (1958), which I translated into Hebrew (2010), is built around the unsettling asymmetrical repetition of triangular relationships that are reverberated in the book with visual and symbolic play with triangles and the number three. This symbolic play is also expressed in some of the names (see Barga 1991). The heroine, for example, is called “Mieko” (三重子), meaning literally “three children” or even “burdened with three children,” symbolically representing the two children Mieko lost before the beginning of the book and the third she will have lost by the end of the book. Another protagonist in *Onnamen* is “Mikame” (三瓶), meaning literally “three bottles”, hinting at his fondness for alcohol. Probably not all Japanese readers notice this symbolism immediately, but at least it remains accessible to them throughout their reading of the novel. For readers of a translated version of the novel, this symbolism is completely lost. The names become mere phonetic representations. It is at such moments that call for a strategic decision, that the translator feels an overwhelming guilt for betraying the original text. As the Italian pun goes, “traduttore, traditore”, or “a translator, a traitor”.

The act of translating literature requires devising a strategy that incorporates several perspectives: **a linguistic perspective** that includes a deliberation on the grammar and semantics of both the source language and the target language; **a cultural-semiotic perspective** that takes into

consideration paralinguistic and extralinguistic codes that, together with the linguistic code, create a message with a meaning that might be quite different from the overt linguistic message; a **cultural-historical perspective** that takes into account the cultural and historical settings of the original literary text; and, in translating older literary oeuvres, a **philological perspective** that takes into consideration the production of the text, the traditions of its transmission, and the history of its interpretation. Moreover, translating literature and poetry also demands imagination and aesthetic sensibilities. Finally, and to further complicate things, in a commissioned translation there are also the complexities inherent to working within and for a creative industry in which the business and the creative aspects of production have to be constantly negotiated. In other words, whether she is aware of it or not, in tackling these multiple challenges every translator is engaged in devising her own philosophical, strategic and tactical approaches to translation.

In this paper, I would like to delineate some of the dilemmas which often occur when translating from Japanese to Hebrew, two languages that are distanced from each other linguistically and culturally. For the purpose of illustrating these dilemmas, I will draw on my own experience as a translator of a collection of short stories and two novels: Haruki Murakami's *Kami no Kodomotachi ha Mina Odoru* (*Rikud Haadma*, 2008), Murakami's *Afutā Dāku* (*Acharei Hachashecha*, 2009) and Fumiko Enchi's *Onnamen* (*Masehot Nashim*, 2010), as well as the experiences of my fellow Israeli translators of Japanese literary texts, as they have been conveyed to me. In so doing, my major inquiry will be the on-going debate (in translation theory and in practice), on the ideal extent of the naturalization of a foreign text. In this debate one approach suggests that a good translation is actually the rewriting of the source text in the target language so that the readers get a fully naturalized text; that is, bringing the text to the reader. Another approach suggests that a translated text should keep (at least to some extent) its foreignness, providing the readers with the flavor of a cross-cultural experience; that is, bringing the readers to the text.

I. Translation as a Quest

As described by my friend and colleague Dr. Doron Cohen, despite significant growth in the past decades the number of translations from Japanese to Hebrew remains very small. I think it safe to say that there is today a niche market for translated Japanese literature in Israel. But even a significant niche market in Israel is small in absolute terms; a book that sells over 10,000 copies is considered in Israel a best seller (Shivuk 2009). In other words, it is not easy to turn a profit in the Israeli publishing industry. Among the big publishers, most translated titles are selected by editors.

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Considering the size of the market, it is only commonsensical that publishers are reluctant to jump into adventurous risky projects. Editors, therefore, select mostly proven best sellers. There is a great bias towards the translation of canonical Japanese writers, almost all of them men. As to the status of the translators, they are regarded as technicians of some sort, albeit possessed of rare skills. Translators of “exotic languages” (such as Japanese) are treated with respect and are sought after, but although translation is labor intensive and time consuming and although the required skills for translating Japanese to Hebrew are not common, translators are usually poorly paid and the hard work of the translator is not sufficiently acknowledged. I find that the situation is somewhat better with the smaller, more experimental publishers, who rely upon a small, though loyal readership that is seeking less mainstream titles. But we, translators, usually work with the bigger publishers. So, with limited control over what we translate, and with a very modest paycheck at the end of our hard labor, why do it?

I personally know five Israeli translators of Japanese literature. Only one of us, Ms. Einat Cooper, earns her primary livelihood in this way; and indeed she is the most prolific among us. The other four translators, Prof. Jacob Raz, Dr. Shunit Shahal-Porat, Dr. Doron B. Cohen, and myself, are first and foremost scholars who do not earn their livelihood from translations. Having spoken with all of these five colleagues at some point, I feel comfortable in saying that translating from Japanese to Hebrew is an intellectual challenge for all of us, and that we are all passionate about it. However, it is my impression that for those of us who do not translate for their livelihood, translation from Japanese is a very personal quest, probably because it is performed on the seam line between a professional assignment and a hobby. It is also my impression that our subjective and emotional approach to translation enhances our agony and frustrations as well as our joy and sense of creativity while working on our translations.

One fellow scholar-translator once told me how frantic he gets when translating a text, driving those around him crazy and assuring them that the present translation lies beyond his abilities. Another described how he had a near schizophrenic experience when he felt he had to think like a woman in order to translate poems written by a Japanese woman. I must confess that I too become completely driven when translating. There is an intellectually meditative quality that I find to be unique to the activity of translating. I experienced it particularly strongly when I translated the previously mentioned book *Onnamen*, a tale that bewitches the reader into believing in the power of living ghosts to possess the weak, and into believing in commanding female mediums. And there I was, rewriting and polishing the story I was translating, feeling myself becoming possessed by Enchi's storytelling powers. The next time I travelled to Japan, I went to visit Enchi's grave in

Yanaka cemetery in Tokyo.

Why are we so passionate about our translations? At least for the scholars among us, it has to do with the enormous burden of responsibility that we feel and with our intellectual engagement with Japanese culture, history and language. If you read Doron Cohen's translation of Murakami's *Noruei no Mori* (*Norwegian Wood; Yaar Norvegi*) (Murakami [1987] 2000a), you can smell the corridors of the students' dormitories in an early 1970s Japanese University. If you read Shunit Shahal Porat's translation of Kawabata's *Nemureru Bijo* (*The House of the Sleeping Beauties; Beit Hayefeifiyot Hanamot*) (Kawabata [1961] 1999), you get the flair of the original, elegant linguistic register. If you read Jacob Raz' translation of Tawara's *Sarada no Kinenbi* (*Salad Anniversary; Yom Hashana Lasalat*) (Tawara [1987] 1994), you come close to becoming a young bubble era Japanese woman.

II. Traduttore, traditore

There are so many moments of doubt and indecision while translating; all of which require choices; such as whether priority should be given to the source language or to the target language; or, to what extent it would be permissible to betray the original text. Let me give you a few examples:

II-1. Oh blasphemy! Did I get the author right?

One memorable anecdotal story that I heard from Jacob Raz before I even began translating and which left a huge impression on me, concerned his 2006 translation of Basho's *Oku no Hosono Michi* (often translated as *Narrow Road to the Interior*, although Raz chose to translate the title—as had Donald Keene before him—as *The Narrow Road to Oku; Haderech Hatsara LeOku*).

The first chapter in the book begins thus:

月日は百代の過客にして行きかふ年も又旅人也。

This sentence was translated into English by Hiroaki Sato (1996) as follows:

The months and days are wayfarers of a hundred generations, and the years that come and go are also travelers.

The sentence opens with the word “tsukihi”, which can be translated either as “months and days” or as “moon and sun”, a pun that attests to the way people in olden days measured time by the movements of the celestial bodies. And so, Raz' first hesitation arose from the question of how to translate “tsukihi”: following Sato as “months and days”, or as “moon and sun”; put differently,

he hesitated on how to render most poetically this linguistic link in Japanese between celestial bodies and time. Unlike many translations of the text into English, Raz decided to translate the first half of the sentence as follows:

הירח והשמש הם נוסעים של מאה דורות, והשנים שבאות והולפות גם הן נוסעות

The moon and sun are travelers of a hundred generations, and the years that come and go are also travelers

As he explains it, in the latter part of the sentence, comes the invocation of time through the word “years”, and so, by using “moon and sun” and later “years” in one sentence, we get the multi-dimensionality of the original text.

Puns are often untranslatable, but this revealing anecdotal story illustrates also one of the particularly problematic aspects of translating from Japanese: the recurring doubts as to whether a Syno-Japanese character that has multiple meanings has been rendered correctly or poetically enough. To this, we may add the inherent ambiguity of the Japanese language in terms of singular/plural, and the frequently unspecified subject of the sentence. In a famous article Umberto Eco suggested that such difficulties (inherent in different guises to all translations) can be solved by consulting the author of the original text (Eco 1994). But what if the author is long dead and not even his famous interpreters are sure of her or his intentions?

II-2. An invitation to a different world

Beyond puns that are often untranslatable and the inherent ambiguity of the Japanese language, there are also always those culturally or historically specific settings, habits, idioms, artifacts etc., which one needs to work with or work around when translating a text from Japanese. One solution is using footnotes. A prize laureate translator from Russian to Hebrew, Nilli Mirski, reportedly said that she tries to use as few footnotes as possible in translating prose because she dislikes creating a didactic ambience (Karp 2008). This is an interesting comment, but admittedly, sometimes, there is no other way but to insert a footnote, as even she does on occasion.

Footnotes in prose are not a phenomenon characteristic only of translated texts. Contemporary Japanese editions of early twentieth-century Japanese novels, not to mention contemporary editions of even earlier Japanese prose, also have footnotes. In fact, they sometimes have so many footnotes that it would be more accurate to say that they are annotated editions. See, for example, the 1951 Japanese edition of Tanizaki's *Tade Kuu Mushi (Some Prefer Nettles)*, which has hundreds of footnotes. The need for so many footnotes is the result of the dramatic transformations that were part of the rapid modernization of Japanese culture and language in the twentieth century, creating

huge gaps between traditional and contemporary Japanese culture. It is also a reflection of the target readership of canonical literature in Japan, which tends to be scholastic and thus hungry for the hermeneutics of the text.

The Hebrew translation of *Tade Kuu Mushi* by Einat Cooper, *Yesh Hamaadifim Sirpadim* (Tanizaki [1928] 2009), has a mere 35 footnotes, which are often very different from those found in the Japanese edition. Unlike the reader of the Hebrew translation, a Japanese reader would need no explanation when encountering nouns like Edo period, Kansai region, *kotatsu* (a charcoal foot warmer), or, *hanamichi* (an extra stage section used in Japanese kabuki theater). On the other hand, the reader of the Hebrew translation is unlikely to be interested in learning about the etymology of a specific Syno-Japanese character, or about some subtle reference to an older Japanese text. However, both a Japanese reader and the reader of the Hebrew translation may benefit from a footnote on the seventeenth century Neo-Confucian philosopher *Kaibara Ekken* (貝原 益軒), whom Tanizaki mentions in the novel with more than a tad of irony. In other words, a lot of careful thought must be put into the footnotes of a translated text. I always write dozens of footnotes to complement my translations. They are part of my research of the text. Most of them, however, I eventually leave out. And yet, Mirski might be interested to hear that I often receive from my readers much praise for my footnotes. It seems that many of my readers appreciate them greatly, and are even sorry there aren't more of them.

One could argue that some of the items, idioms, etc. specific to Japanese language/culture could and should be replaced altogether by subordinate clauses, by loan translations, or by close-enough approximation in the target language, in our case Hebrew. Why use *sararīman* if one can simply say “white collar businessman”; why say *tokonoma* if one can simply say “alcove”; why say *hanami* if one can simply say “cherry flowers viewing”, and so forth. But wouldn't you agree that the Hebrew speaking reader can sustain, at least to some extent, the usage of Japanese-specific idioms and nouns that have specific connotations, and thereby gain a more authentic reading experience? I think so; but not all my colleagues concur.

Sometimes, in order to avoid a loan translation (e.g. *black belt*, a loan translation of 黒帯; or *cherry blossom-viewing*, a loan translation based on 花見 [Warren 2008]), I use transliterations and insert an explanation into the text. It is thus that I chose to keep some of the many Nō theater terms in my translation of *Onnamen*. The titles of the chapters are the original Japanese names of Nō masks to which I added in parentheses a loan translation as well as a footnote on the specific functionality of the mask because it is crucial for the storytelling. For example:

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ריו-נו-אוננה (אשת רפאים)¹

¹ ריו-נו-אוננה, "אשת הרפאים", הוא כינויה של מסכה בתיאטרון הנו היפני המייצגת רוח נקמנית של אישה מבוגרת שיופיה הושחת בעקבות הסבל הרב שעברה....

Ryō no onna (spirit of a dead woman)¹

¹ *Ryō no onna*, "the ghost woman", is the nickname of a Nō theater mask that represents the vengeful spirit of an elderly woman whose beauty has been corrupted by the great suffering she has experienced....

In describing different kinds of kimonos I usually went for a subordinate clause adjacent to the transcribed original term in Japanese:

頼方は小袖を手からぬいて、ゆっくり三重子の膝もとへ置き、次の唐織をひろげた。

This sentence should be literally translated as follows:

Yorikata withdrew his hands from the kosode and put it gently on Mieko's knees, he then spread the next karaori.

I translated this jargon-packed sentence as following:

יוריקאטה הוציא את ידיו מתוך שרוולי הבגד, הניח אותו בזהירות על ברכיה של מיאקו, ופרש את הבגד הבא, קאראורי בעל רקמה עשירה.

Yorikata withdrew his hands from the sleeves of the garment [I had already mentioned and explained short sleeves kosode a few lines earlier], he put it gently on Mieko's knees, and spread out the next item, a rich brocade karaori.

II-3. Imagery is also a matter of geography

One of the most challenging moments in translation is when metaphors or images do not work in the target language. For example, in Murakami's short story *Hachimitsu Pai (Honey Pie)* (see the collection of short stories, *Kami no Kodomotachi ha Mina Odoru* [Murakami 2000b]), the protagonist, Junpei, is devastated because his best friend in college was the first to make a move on the woman they both love. Realizing that he had missed his opportunity, the text describes how Junpei passed the following days feeling confused and lost:

それからの何日かを、順平は雲の上を歩いているような気持ちで過ごした。

Literally meaning:

Junpei passed the next few days feeling that he was walking on clouds

This imagery absolutely cannot work in Hebrew because we "walk on clouds" only when we are

exhilarated and overjoyed; nor can it work in English and for the same reasons. What translator Jay Rubin (Murakami [2000] 2002a) did was to use a different metaphor altogether:

For the next few days, Junpei felt as if he was trying to walk in deep sand.

I chose the following option (Murakami [2000] 2008):

ג'ונפיי העביר את הימים הבאים בהרגשה שהוא צף בין עננים, אבוד.

Junpei passed the next few days feeling that he was floating among clouds, lost.

II- 4. Am I overdoing it?

I am sure that readers differentiate between a good translation and a poor one. Nevertheless, I often wonder if some of my efforts to produce the most authentic translation are not exaggerated; in other words, I often wonder whether I am agonizing over issues with minimal impact on the final translation.

For example, in *Onnamen* the author inserted a few *tanka* poems. As *tanka* poems, they have no rhymes. Instead they are structured in 31 syllables arranged in groups of 5, 7, 5, 7 and 7, syllables, rendered graphically as one continuous line. This form of poetry is extremely foreign to the Hebrew reader; she cannot recognize it and it can hardly appeal to her aesthetic sensibility. What to do? See for example:

月宿す 津軽の峡の 夜の潮 青き憂ひや 君を浸さむ

My solution was to not use rhymes, as this seems to me very artificial. Instead, I decided to break the poem into its basic building blocks, which I rendered graphically as lines. This graphic rendition is a good hint to the Hebrew reader that this is actually a poem. I also kept the number of the required syllables correct (5, 7, 5, 7, 7), although that was strictly a game I played with myself. While I spent hours thinking about this rendition, I am quite convinced that not a single reader of the Hebrew text noticed it:

עצב בכחול (5)

של הגאות הלילית (7)

יולד ירה (5)

במיצרי צוגארו. (7)

המציף הוא גם אותך? (7)

II-5. It is all about stylistic distinction

Technically, Murakami is much easier to translate than Enchi. Enchi's *Onnamen* was written in 1958, so that from today's point of view, its style and use of Syno-Japanese Kanji is quite old-

fashioned. Enchi's language is sophisticatedly layered, reflecting the strict socio-cultural stratification in Japan at the time the book was written, and which stands in dramatic contradiction with the essence of Modern Hebrew. Her sentences are often ambiguous, long, and with an unspecified subject. Parts of the book are invented old Japanese texts (a technique that characterizes Enchi's writing), so that some mastering of ancient Japanese is necessary when translating the text. By contrast, Murakami's grammar and use of linguistic registers is very contemporary; that is, it is much simpler. Interestingly, Murakami's prose poses other challenges.

In *Afutā Dāku* (*After Dark*) (Murakami 2005), for example, Murakami uses time and space liminality to recreate the strong feelings of alienation in late capitalist Japanese society. To recreate these overwhelming feelings of alienation and loneliness, Murakami uses many loanwords. The very title of the book is a loan word アフター・ダーク (*afutā dāku*; after dark) written in katakana. Of course, Murakami could have used a title with similar representational meaning in Japanese, maybe something like 黒くなった後 (After it Became Dark), or, 日没後 (After Sunset), or 暗闇がやってきた後 (After Nightfall). But he deliberately used the katakana title. The use of katakana in the title becomes, in the Barthesian sense (see, Barthes [1964] 1967), a sign in the second order. That is, the title carries representational as well as cultural meanings: it signals something foreign, liminal, and potentially scary; a hint that this book may be a thriller.

When I translated *After Dark* I spent many hours thinking about how to translate the title while keeping these connotations. In contrast to English, in Hebrew we use (as in Japanese) many loanwords from English. In other words, we have the linguistic tools to do a perfect job here in terms of recreating the foreignness and liminality of the title.

Let me explain what I mean by using a different example. Compare the translation of the title アフター・ダーク (*After Dark*) with the translation of another title of Murakami's book アンダー・グラウンド (*Underground*) (Murakami 1999). The latter was translated into English as *Underground* (Murakami [1999] 2000c). The connotation of the Japanese title that derived from using the rare loanword *underground* was lost in the English translation. However, the Hebrew translation (from English) of the title was the transliteration of "underground" (Murakami [1999] 2002b): אנדרגראונד. The result is a title composed of a loanword not used in colloquial Hebrew, though everyone understands its meaning. A perfect translation.

Going back to the translation of the title *After Dark*, I suggested to the publisher two highly unorthodox options: to use the transliteration of "After Dark" (אפטר דארק), or to write the title in English "After Dark". But the final decision of the editor in charge was to translate the title into Hebrew: *Acharei Hachashecha* (אחרי החשיכה). Stylistically, she may have been right. From a

cultural point of view, however, I believe something was lost.

In contrast to my failure to maintain the authenticity of the title, inside the book we decided to properly render the idiosyncratic language of one of the protagonists, Takahashi, who often uses English words such as “yes” and “no”. In my translation, Takahashi speaks in Hebrew while occasionally inserting a “yes” or a “no” written in English characters. Takahashi’s idiolect is a little weird in Japanese. It is also a little weird in Hebrew. I feel that I managed an authentic translation.

II-6. Poetic License

From my own experience and from the experience of my colleagues, translations from Japanese to Hebrew are often closer and more faithful to the original text than American translations from Japanese to English. This is not to say that the translations to English do not work — on the contrary, many work well enough or even very well. What I am saying is that the generally accepted norms of translation in the USA seem to allow greater license in the naturalization process of the text than those we embrace in Israel.

At times we are talking about almost inconsequential deviations from the original text; for instance, in the opening sequence of the short story by Murakami *Airon no aru Fūkei (Landscape with Flatiron)* from the collection of short stories *Kami no Kodomotachi ha Mina Odoru (Murakami 2000b) (After the Quake)*, the boyfriend of the girl protagonist is described as follows:

慶介は部屋の隅で耳にヘッドフォンをあてて、半ば目を閉じ、左右に首を振りながら電気ギターを弾いていた。

This was translated by Jay Rubin as follows (Murakami [2000] 2002a):

Keisuke sat in the corner of the room wearing headphones, eyes half closed, head swinging back and forth as his long fingers flew the strings of his electric guitar.

In the original sentence, nowhere is it specified that Keisuke was sitting. In fact, when you think about it, people rarely play an electric guitar while sitting.... But admittedly, this is not a very critical deviation from the original text.

But what about Rubin’s translation of the title of the most popular story in this collection: *かえるくん、東京を救う* as *Super Frog Saves Tokyo*? For those of you who do not know the story, it is an astute, uncanny tale about a giant frog who approaches a lowly yet very decent *sararīman*, Katagiri-san, and asks him to help him save Tokyo from a devastating earthquake that a giant worm

(*mimizu-kun*) is about to cause.

The title “Super Frog”, works extremely well for Americans as they immediately imagine Super Man, or rather a parody of Super Man. But isn’t this ingenious pun wrought at great cost? First, the Japanese do not have super-heroes. As we all know, the greatest Japanese heroes are flawed and eventually die—like frog who dies at the end of this story. Moreover, before one begins reading the story and before one gets to meet the giant frog, the title “kaeru-kun” evokes anything but a super heroic frog. Rather, as the suffix -kun is used affectionately towards young men and boys, the invoked image is of a sweet boyish frog. The fact that kaeru-kun calls himself thus is part of the parodic, comical ambience of the story. Throughout the story, though a giant in size, in strength and in intellectual prowess, kaeru-kun insists that Mr. Katagiri refer to him as “kaeru-kun”, which is ridiculously charming.

For example:

「ねえ、かえるさん」と片桐は言った。

「かえるくん」とかえるくんはまた指を一本立てて訂正^{ていせい}した。

As Rubin avoided using the Kaeru-kun pun, he translated this exchange as follows:

“To tell you the truth, Mr. Frog—”

“Please,” Frog said, raising one finger again. “Call me ‘Frog’.”

It is not a bad translation. Rubin is by all means a wonderful translator. What bothers me is that this translated exchange is not funny, although it should be.

In translating this story, my tactic was entirely different (see, Murakami [2000] 2008). I think, as I suggested earlier, that the reader of a Hebrew translation can sustain, at least to some extent, transliterations in order to get a more authentic reading experience. Moreover, I think that giving my readers an opportunity to learn and recognize iconic Japanese key words and phrases, particularly at this point in history (i.e. when globalization has created great interest in Japanese culture among Israelis), enhances their pleasure. In considering my target readership I approach translation as part of a complex literary poly-system that is culture- and time-bound (see, Even-Zohar 1990). I thus translated the title as follows:

צפרדע-קון מציל את טוקיו

That is:

Frog-Kun saves Tokyo

I didn’t even need a footnote here explaining “kun, chan, san” because I already used this

transliteration earlier in the collection with a complementary footnote. In other words, when my readers read the title of this new story, they already knew what “kun” means and how it is used. This is how I was also able to save the subtle ironies in the story, translating, for example, the passage I just quoted as:

"אוהממ...צפרדע-סאן, אמר קטגירי.
"צפרדע-קון", תיקן צפרדע-קון ושוב זקף אצבע.

“Uhhmmm, Frog-San” said Katagiri.

“Frog-Kun”, corrected Frog-Kun, raising one finger.

II-7. Translations are not a One-man-show

All the intellectual and emotional investment by the translator notwithstanding, once a translation is completed it is passed on to the language editor and then to the editor in charge. The first time I had to work as a translator with a language editor, she told me that “translators have huge egos. I hope that you will not be like that”. Inexperienced as I was, I immediately replied “of course I will not be”. I was taken aback by the way she chose to begin our professional relationship.

I actually think that working with a good language editor is a privilege, but professional lines must be carefully drawn. The situation is particularly precarious because in our case (Japanese-Hebrew translation) the language editor cannot read the original text (using instead an English translation, if available), and has limited knowledge of the original cultural context. In fact, there is a contradiction at work here. On one side, publishers pride themselves on hiring the services of scholars who specialize in Japanese history and culture for executing Japanese translations, as testimony of the high quality of the translations. My colleagues and I often write epilogues or postscripts to our translations that the editors are happy to publish because they give the translations authority. Behind the scenes, however, we often do not have the last word. There are timetables and budgets to meet, and audiences to please... The publishing industry is to a great extent a creative industry in which the artistry of writers and the craftsmanship of translators must often be negotiated around business considerations.

The next time I worked with a language editor, I handed in my translation of Haruki Murakami's *After Dark*. My assigned language editor began our relationship by telling me “I have to make a living. I cannot work and rework a text forever. Translators often use a language that I call ‘translateese’. I have to make it work; you will have to trust me”. I was taken aback, but I knew what she meant. Sometimes, in an effort to be as accurate as possible, or simply because a translator is

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not always a writer by profession, the translation is very “stiff” and the Hebrew is simply bad: a “Japanized Hebrew”. But as trusting as I was trying to be, I was truly flabbergasted when, in a later conversation, she complained about Murakami’s prose, saying: “I really do not get at all what he is trying to say”. Admittedly, the text of *After Dark* often becomes incredibly enigmatic, but instead of standing up to the challenge and ensuring that we understand the meaning of the text, to my utter dismay she simply changed it at her own whim, “improving” and “simplifying” Murakami’s narrative.

For example, a deeply deranged protagonist in *After Dark*, Mr. Shirakawa, a software engineer who is losing his sense of reality, is working nightshifts in a big company. At one point of the story it is nearly dawn, and Mr. Shirakawa is about to finish a long nightshift during which he left work to call upon a Chinese prostitute, whom he had eventually beaten up violently. He is cleaning up in the office bathroom. He watches himself in the mirror trying to detect the undetectable in the reflection, as if a truer reality is in there. In order to do so he attempts the following:

すべての感覚を客体化し、意識をフラットにし、論理を一時的に凍結し、時間の進行を少しでもくい止める。

This sentence should be literary translated as follows:

To objectify all the senses, to flatten the consciousness, to put a temporary freeze on logic, to stop even for a little while the progress of time.

The Hebrew language editor suggested something more “digestible”:

He will try to disconnect from his senses, to stop his awareness, to freeze logic for a moment, to stop even if only for a moment the progress of time.

Of course I couldn’t accept this.

Another instance of an enigmatic description of a supernatural mask that puzzled my editor is:

男は精緻な匿名の画面を顔にかぶせられ、

This description should be translated as follows:

the man was wearing a detailed anonymous mask

The editor suggested:

the man was wearing a mask made by a master craftsman

Her suggestions became particularly puzzling when for the description:

この髪の子はコムギっていうんだ。

Instead of the simple translation:

The girl with the red hair is called Komugi

The editor suggested:

The “jinjit” [a colloquialism in Hebrew for a red haired person: a ‘ginger’] is Komugi

Of course, there are no “jinjit” in Japan. There are only girls who dye their hair red. It is a completely misplaced colloquialism; she is not a jinjit, she is a punk.

I ended up considering withdrawing my translation altogether. After some harsh verbal exchange with the publisher, the editor was replaced by another language editor. My next translation was for a small publisher, where I had greater control over the end result.

III. By Way of Conclusion

This paper can be regarded as a small contribution to process-oriented research in translation studies. That is, I hope it has afforded a glimpse into the translator’s intellectual efforts to surmount linguistic and cultural differences when translating from Japanese into Hebrew, searching through problems of terminology in order to encompass questions of cross-cultural interactions. I tend to agree with those arguing that translation theory must adopt a descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach. I find myself greatly interested by investigation of the process, function and product of translation. For me, the purpose of translation theory is *to reach an understanding of the processes undertaken in the act of translation and not to provide a set of norms to accomplish the perfect translation* (Naudé 2002, 49–50). I do not believe that such a set of norms can be compiled. Call me a romantic, but I like to think of translation as a creative process that cannot be neatly formulized. To quote Mirski yet again: “Translation is not a technical matter, I write in my own language, I rewrite [the text] from within [myself]. To get closer to the character I experience some kind of total identification with her or him, I go along with the character. Sometimes there is a scary element to it” (Ben Simchon 2011[my translation]).

Translation should aim at reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language in terms of meaning and in terms of style. However, owing to linguistic and cultural differences between languages, translations inevitably fall short of the equivalence ideal. It is impossible to produce a translation that is the mirror image of its original. Inevitably, a certain amount of subjectivity and reformulation is involved (Naudé 2002, 47). In that sense, the translator

of a literary text is more than a skilled technician. The translator is at the very least a craftsman and sometimes, indeed, a performing artist (see Karp 2008). It is no wonder that the very best translations, that sometimes become cultural milestones in the receptor culture, are often produced by translators who are great writers in their own right.

As I said in the introduction, one approach to translation suggests that a good translation allows the reader to forget that she is reading a translated text, and that a good translator rewrites the original text in the receptor language. A completely different approach suggests that a translated text should maintain its “foreignness,” that it should not discard the characteristics of the source language even if they do not exist in the receptor language because the reader should be kept aware and reminded that she is reading a foreign text. As I see it, when translating I hope that I can deliver a text that feels natural while taking the reader to the land of far far away, as is only appropriate for a good literary adventure: read in Hebrew, imagine and feel that you are in Japan.

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PART IV : On Translation from Japanese to Hebrew

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Notes

- 1) Bialek (Hayim Nahman Bialik 1873–1934) was one of the pioneers of Modern Hebrew poetry.
- 2) *Katharevousa* is a conservative form of the Modern Greek language conceived in the early nineteenth century as a compromise between Ancient Greek and *Dimotiki*, the modern vernacular of Greek.