

One of the first Japanese translators of *The Flowers of Evil* was Fumio Yano (1901-1995). In his early twenties, attracted by Catholicism, he began to attend a catholic church, where he met a French priest named Mathon, who taught him French and helped him discover Baudelaire and *The Flowers of Evil*. My objective here is not only to shed new light on our understanding of Baudelaire by demonstrating that of this translator, who is almost forgotten today, but also to examine the poetic translation into Japanese and some problems that it may pose.

First, I shall briefly compare the main differences between the Japanese language with French and English. To offer a brief metaphor, it has been said that an English soccer player cannot play well when moved to the Spanish league. This is because, traditionally, England has a "long ball strategy," which consists of sending a long ball from beyond midfield toward the goal. On the other hand, Spanish players tend to work the ball through various channels by making short passes. Essentially, this is a question of differing style. The same might be said of language; each language has a distinct style and grammatical structure. Certain characteristics of the French language cannot be translated into Japanese such as word order, because in Japanese, as in English, the adjective comes before the noun. Sentence order is more complicated, which in Japanese, in general, is subject-object-verb. Further, the Japanese language does not employ the relative pronouns such as who, which, or whom, so that the relative clause comes before the antecedent. For example, if you translate "The white house where I live" in Japanese, the word order must be entirely reversed. Some Japanese translators of western poetry claim that they try to respect the word order of the original text, but this is not possible. What the late Umberto Eco called the "linear manifestation" of the poetic text becomes entirely disordered when translated into Japanese.

Even before Fumio Yano's 1934 translation, there were scattered translations of Baudelaire in Japanese, but his was the first complete translation of the 1868 edition of *The Flowers of Evil*. Yano's pioneer work occupies a unique place in the history of Baudelaire's reception in Japan because Yano translated *The Flowers of Evil* in prose rather than in verse. He explains this in the postscript of his translation:

Some people may have some doubts concerning the form I chose. I eliminated entirely the conventional form of poetic translation because I find it absolutely pointless to apply causeless line breaks like raindrops to the Japanese free verse, which does not use rhymes in particular; and to make matters worse, it might only make it hard to understand the poem by breaking the coherence between lines. Thus I just tried to separate stanzas; moreover, by rejecting flowery and esoteric language, I tried to translate as simply as possible and even went so far as to risk nursery rhyme in certain cases.

In his later essay entitled "My Memories of the Whole Translation of *The Flowers of Evil*" (1967), he added: "As a bohemian poet, I wished to give artistic, poetic and transparent effects to my translation, which is different than those of the academics in French literature. Of course, there may be some errors. But they will be corrected by lots of translators of *The Flowers of Evil* in the future." There are three points here that should be stressed. The first is that Yano is not an academician; after dropping out of college and after two years of journalism, he became a poet and painter. His first poetic work, published in 1928, is entitled *The Night of Opium*, which is reminiscent of Baudelaire. Yano's work stands in contrast to most translators who were more or less the academic elite. Though his predecessors did not necessarily strive for fidelity to the original, the non-academic position Yano occupied may have allowed him to invent his prose translation.

Second, Yano uses spoken language in his translation, which was not usual at the time and stands in contrast to Bin Ueda's 1905 epochal anthology of Western poets entitled *The Sound of the Tide* (Kaichoon). French poetry has often been translated in more elegant language. Before the Meiji period (starting in 1868) the Japanese had a written language and a spoken language, which are quite distinct from each other. Here, "spoken" does not mean the language spoken, but the language that is easier to understand and more similar to the way we speak than a "written" language. In the Meiji period and beyond, when Japanese writers started to apply a colloquial style to their works, it took a long time to switch from literary language to spoken language in written works. In 1913, Kafu Nagai, known as the

author of *American Story*, written about his travels in the United States, published an anthology of French modern poets entitled *The Coral Anthology*. (Sangoshù). Nagai translated poems of Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Verlaine in a very beautiful written language. In his preface he notes:

In those days in Nagasaki port, Dutch trading vessels have amazed the Japanese people with the beauty of Italian coral jewelry and the marvels of Indian calicos. There were so many people who scrambled to get it that the Shogunate [government], afraid of the outflow of gold and silver, imposed a sea traffic ban: it was a good measure of the seclusion policy. Since the country reopened the door, the Japanese people, eager for foreign goods again, cannot stop admiring the newest and most extraordinary arts from abroad.

Nagai's remarks illustrate the enthusiasm that the Japanese felt for western culture in the Meiji period when "modernization" was a synonym for "westernization." The "coral" in the title of Nagai's anthology means a "foreign marvel" that Japan had never seen before. In this context, welcoming French poets with a highly sophisticated language might also be taken as a sign of longing for modern western culture. While Bin Ueda and Kafu Nagai fashioned Baudelaire's poetry in decorative language, Yano, by contrast, aimed to make the French poet accessible to the public. I regret that I cannot show in English how his translation differs from that of Ueda, Nagai and the others, not only on the lexical level, but also in his use of a polite diction, ending a sentence with "desu/masu," which is the way contemporary Japanese speak. This polite diction is more likely to create an effect of "addressing" the reader, rather than being a monologue of the poet. It thus enables the reader to revive or embody the voice of the poet. Yano's Baudelaire speaks to his lovers, to his child, to his sister, to himself and to us, the readers, with such an intimacy that his language reminds us of these famous lines in "L'invitation au voyage:" "Tout y parlerait / À l'âme en secret / Sa douce langue natale" [...] [Notre] douce langue natale.

Perhaps the poem is a beautiful piece of jewelry, as suggested in Nagai's preface. No one can deny the aesthetic pleasure given by the elegance of classical language. It is as if when we see, in a museum, precious jewels in a glass display-case. This may explain why the first Japanese translators preferred Parnassian poets such as Leconte de Lisle and José-Maria de Heredia. But what good is the beauty of a poem if the beauty itself pushes the reader away? "The poem intends another, the poem bespeaks this other," observes Paul Celan in his famous speech. Elegant language may be likely to reveal the aesthetic interest in Baudelaire, or if you like, to polish his "dream of stone." But we know that *The Flowers of Evil* cannot be reduced to such a dream. Going against a traditional *écriture*, Yano proved there is something other than "order and beauty, luxury"—there is another beauty that only spoken language could translate, not only in Baudelaire's poems but also in what we speak, in what we listen to, in what we live with. In the late Meiji period, when Ogai Mori translated Goethe's *Faust* in modern Japanese, he was called "iconoclast" because the simplicity of his language dispelled the illusion of the Japanese public, who considered Goethe to be a more esoteric author than he was. Quite rightly, Ogai took the epithet as a compliment. Yano was also an iconoclast of *The Flowers of Evil*: to use the words of Michel Deguy, Yano managed the "deposition" of Baudelaire, whose crucifix had been raised above himself by translators during the age of westernization.

Finally, Yano preferred prose to verse. We know that translating verse into prose is not new in the history of western literature. The works of Homer, Shakespeare, Milton, and Goethe, for example, have been translated in prose, and, as we know, *The Flowers of Evil* is also translated in prose in English as in German. But Yano's translation needs to be separated from this context: the choice of prose is legitimate, he says, according to the properties of the Japanese language. In the Meiji period, writing in spoken language started with novels. The hierarchy between verse and prose could be transposed to between "literary" and "spoken." Prose would have been more likely for Yano's colloquial expression as characterized by the use of "desu/masu" form. Using polite diction (desu/masu), as opposed to informal diction (da/dearu), is still considered to be a bold approach in poetic translation.

One of the characteristics of prose translation is that it produces a narrative of storytelling so that sometimes we get quite a different impression of the original verse. As

Yano admitted, he took a nursery-rhyme tone; his prose thus reveals a certain affinity with "fairy-tales" inherent to some poems of Baudelaire as "Le châtement de l'orgueil" and "Le spleen (III):" "Je suis comme le roi d'un pays pluvieux [...]." It is important to note that in Japanese the *desu/masu* form is often used as a narrative of fairy-tales. The English language prose translator of *The Flowers of Evil*, Carol Clark, says modestly that her translation "must simply try to put the reader in touch with the magical original;"<sup>1</sup> prose translations could thus bring out in the original, as she does without knowing it, some of its characters of which the original itself may be unaware.

However, we are usually told that prose brings death to verse. If it is true, analyzing its cause-of-death may reveal what makes the verse alive. For example, compare this stanza of "Le Crépuscule du matin" with its prose version translated by Carol Clark:

Les maisons çà et là commençaient à fumer.  
Les femmes de plaisir, la paupière livide,  
Bouche ouverte, dormaient de leur sommeil stupide ;  
Les pauvresses, traînant leurs seins maigres et froids,  
Soufflaient sur leurs tisons et soufflaient sur leurs doigts.  
C'était l'heure où parmi le froid et la lésine  
S'aggravent les douleurs des femmes en gésine ;  
Comme un sanglot coupé par un sang écumeux  
Le chant du coq au loin déchirait l'air brumeux ;  
Une mer de brouillards baignait les édifices,  
Et les agonisants dans le fond des hospices  
Poussaient leur dernier râle en hoquets inégaux.  
Les débauchés rentraient, brisés par leurs travaux.

Carol Clark turns Baudelaire's verse into prose:

The houses here and there were beginning to smoke. Women of pleasure, their eyelids bruised, their mouths open, were sleeping their stupid sleep; female paupers, dragging their thin, cold breasts, were blowing on their embers and blowing on their fingers. It was the hour when, amid cold and miserliness, the pains of women in childbed grow worse; like a sob cut off by foaming blood, the cry of the cock in the distance tore the misty air; a sea of fog washed against the buildings; and the dying in the depths of the poorhouses were giving their death-rattle in irregular gulps. The debauchees were heading home, broken by their labours.<sup>2</sup>

Walter Benjamin points out the "paradigm of the arcade in this poem He writes that "the reader walks in this poem as in a gallery bordered by windows. In each of them is exposed the very clear image of a naked misery."<sup>3</sup> Benjamin's analogy between text reading and window-shopping suggests that the poem is not only to be read, but also to be seen. The poem shows the world it sees, while at the same time showing how it sees the world. Here, rhymed couplet sequences provide the text with such a visibility. The poem is something visual; I do not mean what is termed "visual poetry," but the poem is essentially a visual and almost physical construction. This stanza seems to me a multistory apartment building in Paris, where all residents live on the same level of misery. But monotonous prose destroys this construction, removing visibility.

Let's look closely at another "visual" poem, "The Bamboo" by the Japanese poet, Sakutarō Hagiwara:

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Selected Poems*, translated by Carol Clark (London, Penguin Books, 1995), xxxii.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Paris, capitale du XIX<sup>e</sup> siècle*, translated by Jean Lacoste (Paris: Cerf, 1989), 398. English translation is mine.

In the shining ground the bamboo grows,  
the blue-green bamboo grows,  
underground the roots of bamboo grow,  
roots that gradually taper off  
with fine hairs sprouting from their tips,  
hazy fine hairs faintly growing,  
faintly trembling.

In the hard ground the bamboo grows,  
aboveground the sharp bamboo grows,  
perfectly straight bamboo grows,  
with its rigid joints going *rin, rin*,  
at the base of the blue sky bamboo grows,  
bamboo, bamboo, bamboo grows.<sup>4</sup>

This poem stresses the incredible, almost diseased vitality of bamboo. Each line imitates a bamboo shoot; the poem itself is like a bamboo forest. Meaning and form go together in the poem. This affinity gets lost when translated in prose; but also when translated in English, like this, because of the "horizontal" <sup>5</sup> of the western writing style: bamboo does not grow in English as it does in the ground.

As Yano's translation leads us toward the confluence of verse and prose, let us consider, in conclusion, a brief allusion to the influence of Edgar Poe on Baudelaire. Baudelaire, who was very conscious of the difficulty of translating poetry into another language, translated Poe's "Raven" into prose. Poe established his theory of metrics with perfect precision in "The Rationale of Verse" or "The Philosophy of Composition." Baudelaire's writing on Poe makes us sure that he knows, more than anyone else, how foolhardy it would be to try to translate the poem of his beloved poet into French verse. To avoid such a "rhymed aping"—*singerie rimée*, he writes—Baudelaire chose the prose form. His translation "Le Corbeau" was first published in 1853. Some time later, in 1855, he published "Le Crépuscule du soir" and "La Solitude," his first prose poems. As we know, the composition of these prose poems, written with distinct paragraphs, resembles that of a sonnet, of Aloysius Bertrand and also, his "Corbeau", which is in fact the first prose poem he published. From verse to prose, the poem loses rhythm and rhyme. From "The Raven" to "Le Corbeau," the bird loses his most melancholic cry of "Nevermore." This is certainly a despairing pass. However, it may be this despair—the lost of rhythm and rhyme—that gave birth to Baudelaire's prose poems, provided with "multitude of tones," that are rational, sarcastic or humorous, in exchange for the melancholic one:

(...) the author of a short story has at his disposal a multitude of tones, of nuances of language, the rational tone, the sarcastic, the humorous, which are repudiated by poetry and which are, as it were, dissonances, outrages to the idea of pure beauty. And that is also why the author who seeks in the short story the single goal of beauty works only at a great disadvantage, deprived as he is of the most useful instrument, rhythm. I know that in all literatures efforts have been made, often successful, to create purely poetic short stories: Edgar Poe himself has written some very beautiful ones. But they are struggles and efforts which serve only to prove the strength of the true means adapted to the corresponding goals, and I am inclined to believe that in the case of some authors, the greatest that can be chosen, these heroic attempts spring from despair.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> I used a translation found online as a base from which I built my own interpretation by modifying certain words:

<http://www.vianegativa.us/2008/12/bamboo-two-poems-by-hagiwara-sakutaro/>

<sup>5</sup> Of course, the original version of this poem is written "vertically".

<sup>6</sup> Lois Boe Hyslop and Francis E. Hyslop Jr., trans. *Baudelaire as a Literary Critic*, (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1964), 128.

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Baudelaire titled his brief presentation of "Le Corbeau": "The genesis of a poem." I am inclined to believe that, for him, "The genesis of a poem" was also "The genesis of a *prose* poem".