

ARNTZEN, SONJA, translator. *The Kagero Diary: A Woman's Autobiographical Text from Tenth-Century Japan*. Michigan Monographs in Japanese Studies Number 19. Ann Arbor: Center for Japanese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1997. xv + 413 pages. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$56.95; ISBN 0-939512-80-7. Paper US\$19.95; ISBN 0-939512-81-5.

Kagero Nikki, the diary of a middle-rank noblewoman in Heian Japan whose marriage slowly disintegrated, is notoriously difficult to translate. Amazingly, Edward Seidensticker did it twice, with the second effort titled *The Gossamer Years* (1964). Sonja Arntzen has based her new translation on explicit principles about evoking a woman's voice in English.

She provides eighteen interesting photographs she took of things relevant to the Heian period, such as the Kamo Festival. But she really does not have anything new to say about Heian society, though she supplies the customary detailed notes on ceremonies, clothing, taboos, and other customs, as well as flora, fauna, and such. (Remarkably, these are placed on the left page, facing the text on the right page, thus making it more likely that readers will look at them. Many pages are not filled up, and publishers don't usually like to waste paper that way.) This has already been done so extensively that readers of *Asian Folklore Studies* know the material. The champion works in this regard are *A Tale of Flowering Fortunes* (1979) by Helen C. McCullough and William H. McCullough, with more than a thousand footnotes, and *The Pillow Book of Sei Shonagon* (1967) by Ivan Morris, which required an entire companion volume dedicated to notes. Therefore the value of the work for readers of this journal will not lie in that direction; instead it will be the same as for all other readers. It will consist in whether the translation based on Arntzen's explicit principles, rooted in the hope of finding more valid ways of expressing women's writing, make them view Heian society in a way they had not thought of before.

First, Arntzen brings out the poetry, with up-to-date theoretical reasons, but actually it looks like the old style. The Japanese poem is given in *romaji* on the left, and the English translation in five matching lines on the right. Seidensticker buried the poems in the text, virtually turning them into prose. There are hundreds of them (and probably somebody has counted how many) helping the narrative along in a familiar fashion.

Second, she takes account of the different conception of time in ancient Japan, which was not linear as in modern times. With a great deal of theoretical discussion, she advises that the Japanese past tense ending *keri* is not much of a past tense, but has a sense of continuation into the present. On the matter of "tenseless narrative," she cites H. Richard Okada, *Figures of Resistance: Language, Poetry, and Narrating in the Tale of Genji and Other Mid-Heian Texts* (1991): "What happened once has relevance not as an always already reified, abstractable past point in linear time, but as the narrating moment continually represents it in a deictically determinate now" (45). This leads her to mix up past and present in English, in the hope of conveying whatever it is that Okada said. It appears on the very first page of the translation, when her suitor sends an unexpected letter to her father:

An ordinary person *would have sent* a discreet letter using a serving maid or someone like that to make his feelings known, but this man *goes* right to my father, half-joking, half-serious, hinting at the idea, and even though I *told* my father that it did not suit me at all, just as if he *did not know*, one day he *sends* a retainer riding on a horse to pound on our gate. (57; italics added to verbs)

Unhappily, I think this passage does not convey a sense of indeterminacy between past and present. Instead it sounds like the speech of American teenagers, which they later correct if they have any common sense: "Like, this man *goes* right to my father!" My impression was not changed by similar mixtures of past and present in the rest of the book.

Third, she considers the weakness of the pronoun in Japanese narrative. You cannot tell who is speaking, or how many there are, except by context and use of polite language, and the narrator is not important. Arntzen says she considered using "i" instead of "I" for the first person in order to diminish its importance, but decided against it because "i" would actually draw undue attention to the first person. Decision on this matter does not bear much fruit in the text, and we cannot see where she has been parsimonious with "I," but we know she worked on it.

Fourth is the problem of long sentences, which occurs right away in the difficult opening passage and never stops. In classical Japanese they ran on and on, often changing topics in midstream. Nobody ever wants to say that the author was incoherent or incompetent, so literary theories are devised to explain this phenomenon. In English these sentences have to be broken up, but as part of her translation strategy, Arntzen declines to do so. She produces a run-on version of the second sentence of the book, consisting of 12 lines of print and 162 words. Unfortunately, the result is that at the end of the confusing second sentence of the translation, I did not know what had been said, and only professional duty made me read further.

Fifth, she chooses an astounding literalness, following Japanese word order, that results in unclear or awkward passages. We thought that had been cleared up long ago: you have to change Japanese word order to make sense in English. Here is an awkward one that cries out for correction:

Once I was installed in that place a little distant, since he came to visit every other day in splendid state, now in the midst of feelings of the ephemerality of it all, I might have thought myself lucky then. (171)

One supposes that most of these decisions are related to the translator's stated attempt to find a woman's voice for the text, a worthy project. But I wonder if she is satisfied with a woman's voice that is ungrammatical, unclear, wordy, and awkward.

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